

RUTH YOUNG WATT
November 9, 1979
Interview #5: The Turbulent 1960s



Ruth Watt (center) stands behind members of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, ca. mid-1960s. Left to right, Senators Carl T. Curtis, Karl Mundt, John McClellan, Chief Counsel Jerome Adlerman, Senators Edmund Muskie, Abraham Ribicoff, and Thomas McIntyre.
U.S. Senate Historical Office

RITCHIE: Looking over the 1960s, one thing that appeared to me was that there was a lot of interest in military activity on the committee: missile bases, missile procurements, TFX, military PX system, etc. Was there any particular reason why there was so much interest in military affairs?

WATT: I don't know. It just was one of those things. If they came along and we had reports or information from newspapermen, anonymous letters, letters of complaint, and from other senators, we pursued it. And some things were referred to the subcommittee from other committees. I don't know what the answer is. It was during Vietnam, of course, so there was more interest in military affairs. The TFX came about from the fact that that company in Washington State,

RITCHIE: Boeing.

WATT: Boeing bid on the contract and Senator Lyndon Johnson's state got it [General Dynamics of Texas]. That's where it all came about. The first we heard about it, Senator Jackson was in

Honolulu and he called Senator McClellan long-distance to ask him to start an investigation. That's where it started.

RITCHIE: I wondered if Jackson had a general influence on the military interests of the committee, since he was on the Armed Services Committee and had a lot of interest in aircraft and military policy.

WATT: He came to one hearing, the opening hearing of the TFX probe, and that's the only time he came to one of those hearings. He didn't take any part in it whatsoever. He did call to ask Senator McClellan to open the investigation, and then he was long gone. Then again, it was very political. President Kennedy was trying to stop it. He had Senator [Daniel] Brewster of Maryland, who was on the committee when it started, and they were sending questions to him from the White House, to ask at the hearings. Then Senator [Edmund] Muskie started, he was close to the White House. They had somebody up there sending down questions all the time. In fact, they tried to get Senator McClellan to stop the hearings.

RITCHIE: How?

WATT: They came up and asked him. Secretary [Robert] McNamara came up. Bob Kennedy who had been chief counsel came over from Justice. I remember the day they were over there, I'll never forget it because I met them at the elevator and Bob came along and gave me a kiss after asking them not to hold the hearings. I remember because here were all these VIPs and I thought, "My gosh, what's going on?" I said, "Bob, what are you doing here with Secretary McNamara and all these people?" But he was just himself.

RITCHIE: What did Senator McClellan think about all this pressure?

WATT: Senator McClellan never would bend to any kind of pressure. He just ignored it.

RITCHIE: Did it annoy him that they were trying to pressure him?

WATT: I don't know. He didn't show it. He never said anything. He might have and I didn't know it, but I wasn't on the inside track on that like the professional staff, the lawyers and so on. I wouldn't know unless I heard comments, which I did not.

RITCHIE: I've heard that McClellan had no use for McNamara, that he didn't care for him at all.

WATT: I never heard that. If he did, it didn't show.

RITCHIE: He certainly pursued that TFX investigation diligently for a long time.

WATT: Well, it was such a hard thing to get into, and there was so much controversy. Remember that secretary of the navy?

RITCHIE: Fred Korth?

WATT: No, it was another one, someone high up in the navy. Someone tied in with the navy end of the plane who said what he thought, that it was not workable. He got replaced and was given an ambassadorship to somewhere. He got transferred. Of course, the department of the army was all for it. The whole Defense Department was involved.

RITCHIE: But McNamara was the principle target. They thought that he had made the decision to give the contract to General Dynamics.

WATT: It could have been. I don't remember that. I remember all the witnesses we had, day after day after day. Korth I remember very well because he was romancing somebody, according to the papers!

RITCHIE: There were a lot of rumors about Lyndon Johnson's role in the TFX.

WATT: Well, I think that made sense. I don't know anything for a fact, but there were all those rumors that came out.

RITCHIE: That he had influenced the contract?

WATT: Well, wouldn't it make sense to you? At that point he certainly had more influence than Senator Jackson, because Jackson was not that well known and Johnson was a household word at that time, so it made a lot of difference.

RITCHIE: Did Bobby Baker get involved at all with the investigation?

WATT: Not that I know of. No, Bob was not involved because he was into politics and this was a committee hearing. I've read his book and I don't believe he mentions it.

RITCHIE: President Kennedy, when he was in Fort Worth, just before he was assassinated, made a speech about the TFX. What impact did his death have on the committee?

WATT: As I remember it, we had a hearing on Friday before and recessed for a week. He died on a Friday, and we had hearings scheduled for the following week, but they were just cut off completely until the late 1960s. Then they came up again.

RITCHIE: What happened?

WATT: I don't know. I never heard.

RITCHIE: They just dropped it?

WATT: Yes, for the time being, and then they came back to it. I can't remember what year we came back to it, but we wrote another report. It was the F-111 then instead of the TFX. That was four or five years later.

RITCHIE: It was in 1970. By that time, Johnson was out of the White House. So in effect they dropped the investigation during his presidency.

WATT: I don't know if it was by design, because I hadn't heard anything about it. I never thought much about it, to tell the truth. Of course, I didn't get into the politics of things too much anyway, or think about the reason why of things unless it was right out in the open.

RITCHIE: But as far as you know they didn't do anything on that investigation during that period? They just packaged everything up?

WATT: Charlie Cromwell worked on that and I don't know if he stayed around for the second series of hearings, because he went to the Armed Services Committee after he left us. He had a scientific mind and he could go into the science of the thing, because it was a very complex thing. There was so much discussion

of the model and the mechanics of how it worked, and overload and balance, and everything else. It was all in executive session, you see. The transcripts were sent over to the Defense Department for sanitizing before they were made public, they would take out material. Some of it needed to be taken out and some of it didn't. Our official reporter had an office on the third floor, and they never went out of the building, they just went to the department of the army for sanitizing. They transcribed and copied them on the third floor and then they went right to the army and then came back there, so there were no security breaks. They were carefully handled.

RITCHIE: During the 1960s the subcommittee ran up against a number of scoundrels, like Billy Sol Estes.

WATT: Oh, he's back in jail again. That was a political one, too, and it was very sad really because there was one of the witnesses who had been appointed by Senator Ervin, and Senator Ervin was very protective of his people. Up until then he and Senator McClellan had been very close, but then after that there was a politeness but nothing more.

RITCHIE: Because they investigated his appointee?

WATT: Well, they came to grips somehow, I don't remember now just how it was. They had confidential—you know me, I never make little mistakes, I make big ones—they had an executive session on this and a confidential Department of Agriculture report was put in, and they were very careful of the thing, there were only about three copies in existence. It was one that pertained to Billy Sol Estes, just spelled it all out. Well, we had the executive session and the next day nobody could find the report. They went everywhere and they accused everybody of taking it. They never found it. About four or five years later I was cleaning out my safe and there it was. It had been an executive exhibit and I had put it away and completely forgotten about it.

RITCHIE: Well, at least it didn't get out to the press.

WATT: There was a staff member that used to write poems that pertained to all the funny things that happened on the committee, and I remember that because he made a big thing out of the Billy Sol Estes report being hidden in my safe all those years.

RITCHIE: Estes never came to testify, did he?

WATT: I can't remember, it seems to me that he did.

RITCHIE: Or did he testify in executive session?

WATT: I can't remember. That doesn't ring a bell at all. Of course, I've read so much in the papers since about what a scoundrel he was.

RITCHIE: I know he didn't testify during the public sessions.

WATT: No, I don't think he did, and yet it seems to me I saw him. Maybe I saw him on television.

RITCHIE: That was another case where Lyndon Johnson's name came into the picture again, and I wondered if there was any pressure from the administration.

WATT: I don't think so, unless it came through Senator Ervin, and I don't know if it came through there. I say that because he had his people from North Carolina and he was being protective of them.

RITCHIE: What was the relationship between McClellan and Lyndon Johnson? Were they friendly?

WATT: I guess they got along all right. Senator McClellan went to the White House once in a while, and Mrs. McClellan and Lady Bird had been good friends when they were in the Senate Ladies Club together, and I think they had some other social contacts.

RITCHIE: I remember that those two investigations both seemed to affect Johnson and there was a lot of talk back in 1963 as to whether he would continue on the ticket the next year, in part because of his association with Bobby Baker and Billy Sol Estes and the TFX.

WATT: Of course, he was involved in anything to do with Texas. General Dynamics, Billy Sol Estes, and whatever else. I don't remember anything about that at all. At the time I might have, but it didn't stay with me very long, if it did. I remember there were so many papers and documents; there were more documents than we ever had put in the record than in any other hearing, during the Billy Sol Estes investigation. There were boxes of them, and I couldn't keep track of them. Ordinarily, I could remember the important ones so that if they asked for one I could hand it to them, but we got so many that I was completely overwhelmed with them. There were just too many, hundreds of them.

RITCHIE: It seems interesting to me that Senator McClellan, who had been so close to Robert Kennedy, and also to John Kennedy, wound up investigating members of Kennedy's administration, like Orville Freeman in the Agriculture Department, Robert McNamara in the Defense Department, and by implication Lyndon Johnson. I wondered if that didn't create some tensions with the White House.

WATT: I don't think so, necessarily, because from the beginning there was not that closeness between the Kennedys and Senator McClellan. He used to go up there, I know, for conferences, but he was chairman of a committee and they all did. But I know that earlier Senator McClellan and President Truman were not that close, they didn't see eye-to-eye, but that was probably from something that came up while they were both in the Senate.

RITCHIE: He was just an independent man.

WATT: Very. He was his own person, and I don't think anybody ever influenced him. He knew what he was doing all the time. I think he had a great deal of integrity. It was nice to work with somebody like that. Of course, the others are probably the same, but he was on the

committee for so many years that I got to know more about him. He was chairman for 18 years. And I knew his staff so well, and you can tell by a senator's staff, too.

RITCHIE: Another colorful character who testified before the committee in the 1960s was Joe Valachi.

WATT: Joe was something else! He was not a well man. He'd been in jail and we got him out of prison and kept him under police protection. But at noontime I got a cot from the superintendent over in the Capitol, and got blankets and a pillow, and Joe used to go down to one of our rooms, down by 159, and he used to have a nap every day between sessions. I don't know what his problem was, but he was not a well man.

RITCHIE: How did those hearings ever come about? How did they begin?

WATT: Somewhere along the line we must have gotten his name, and Duffy handled those hearings. He would know.

RITCHIE: I was wondering if Robert Kennedy had anything to do with them.

WATT: He was attorney general then, because he was our first witness in those hearings. There's that picture of him testifying. But we had

Joe Valachi in executive session three times I think and we got a lot of material before we went into open hearing.

RITCHIE: He was sort of a strange character. Do you have any impressions of him now, thinking back?

WATT: He was very protective of his family. We never knew who they were or what their names were. He had a wife and children. He went to several prisons because they [the Mafia] kept catching up with him and his life was in danger. You know he killed somebody by mistake in prison thinking they were after him, and it was a person who was not after him but he hit him with some kind of a blunt instrument thinking he was going after him. Because he knew the kiss of death was on him because of this Mafia thing. Then he told us all about the “Cosa Nostra,” which is the official name for the Mafia, which we had never heard before. It means “Our Thing” in Italian. Then he was finally in a prison in Texas or New Mexico, and Duffy used to go down to visit him periodically. Valachi was writing a book. Duffy used to go down to talk with him, and I think may have helped him out

with his book. He was on the top floor of the prison, isolated completely. He had his television and all the comforts of home, but he was in isolation in prison for life. He died of cancer, didn't he? I remember they were even consulting with him and asking him questions about things as late as when we had the SEC hearings, because Eugene Anguilla, who came to work with us on loan from SEC, went down to see him about something officially from the committee, and I remember it was the night before he died.

RITCHIE: Was he a good source of information?

WATT: Apparently.

RITCHIE: I know there was a lot of ballyhoo about him at the time. It was a very well publicized event, but I never could quite figure out what it all led to.

WATT: Well, I don't know if we had any legislation from it, but at least we knew a lot about the Mafia and different individuals in the Mafia that we didn't know before. Of course, I think the biggest mystery of all time is the Jimmy Hoffa mystery.

RITCHIE: The disappearance?

WATT: Yes.

RITCHIE: Did the committee ever consider investigating that?

WATT: It was very unfortunate. They had a lead from some witness who said that he could tell where he was buried and all. It was all relayed from one state to another and it was a real cloak and dagger thing. This witness, the last I heard, was on the west coast somewhere and two of our investigators went out. Then they came back to Detroit, or outside of Detroit. What their information was I don't know, but the next day the papers said they were out in the field digging, and there was a lot of ballyhoo about it. It gave the committee a real black eye. They were all for letting one of the men go, and the other one was not mentioned. But it didn't work that way because the one they wanted to let go was a person who had been hired by Senator McClellan. McClellan said, "Why should he be fired and not the man who was hired by the present chairman?" There was a big to-do about it at a subcommittee meeting.

RITCHIE: So they didn't let either of them go?

WATT: No. But the fellow that Senator McClellan had hired, several years before was never given another assignment. He had one assignment after that, but that's all he had.

RITCHIE: So they had been suckered into it by the witness?

WATT: Apparently, but the rumor I heard was that he was killed.

RITCHIE: The witness?

WATT: This person who was the informant. Now who it was, or anything else about it, I don't know. That's one reason why we had to be so careful about our long-distance telephone calls, because that would have been a real source of information for anybody who wanted to find out who was telling what to whom.

RITCHIE: Did you ever have any worries about having your phones tapped?

WATT: Our phones were checked every so often and Senator McClellan's was checked every week during the Rackets Committee because it was bugged during the Rackets Committee. Also, his phone at the Fairfax Hotel. Of course, he had threats to him at the time too during those two years. I never knew about them at the time because he didn't talk about them, but I've heard since that there were threats. I don't think Senator McClellan would have ever paid attention to a threat, though. It would just make him mad and he'd go all the way out on the investigation. That was the impression I got.

RITCHIE: Did you have any trouble with Valachi in terms of security, and putting him up and taking care of him while he was testifying?

WATT: Well, you see, in a case like that, where he was a prisoner, the Department of Justice had led all of that. He had around-the-clock protection from the United States Marshalls, who protected him whenever he was staying. We've had other people like that. They passed a law a few years ago for immunity for people who would talk, and we had several of those. We had to go through a court process to get them, and then the Department of Justice would put them up and protect them.

RITCHIE: Later on in the 1960s, the big hearings that you had from 1967 to 1969 were the civil disturbances investigations. They started out with riots in the cities, particularly in the South, and then eventually covered a wide area including college campuses, and the staff was considerably expanded again.

WATT: I think we hired six additional people just from government agencies on loan, because it was a temporary thing and people weren't going to leave another just to come for a period of six months or so. I think we had four or five

different agencies that sent us people on loan. We hired a couple of people who were not working, but they didn't prove to be that good.

RITCHIE: At the beginning there was a jurisdictional debate over who was going to get that investigation. Senator McClellan seemed very determined that he wanted the Permanent Subcommittee to investigate the riots. Was there any particular reason why he was so adamant on that?

WATT: Not unless it was that we didn't have anything else going at the time. Or else they were persuading him. Because many times the other senators would persuade him to take something that he wasn't that keen on.

RITCHIE: Other members of the committee?

WATT: Well, just senators in general. It wouldn't necessarily be just from our committee. I remember I had to go and get approval from the full committee, and we had to poll the committee, because Bob Kennedy was a senator already at that point. When I went to his office I had to wait such a long time for him because he was tied up. I had to get a majority of the signatures from the full

committee in order to get a resolution in to get authority for the subcommittee to conduct these hearings, because it was outside of our general authority, and also for the extra \$150,000.

RITCHIE: When you say it was outside of your general authority, most of your investigations were about government agencies and their activities.

WATT: Initially our function was one little sentence in the reorganization act of 1946, Public Law 601, that had the jurisdiction of the Committee on Expenditures on Executive Departments, which was the name of the committee at that time. The subcommittee was set up on the basis of that to investigate wrong-doing in the executive departments, that was what it boiled down to. That was the only jurisdiction we had for quite a few years, but it covered quite a bit! All the executive departments, and it also pertained to all subcontractors for the government. I think the “five percenters” hearings were covered in that way.

RITCHIE: But these were investigations of civil disturbances in municipalities.

WATT: Yes, but we had to have a special resolution to hold them, because we already had incorporated

other areas. We even had to have a resolution when we investigated homosexuals in government, why I don't know. They had added the Rackets Committee authority when that wound up, that was incorporated in our resolution. Then after the riots hearings were over, that was incorporated in our resolution, so that gave us all that added authority. I don't know why we got it, but he must have had persuasion somewhere along the line.

During the riot hearings we had one conference on the aftermath of the riots here in Washington. It was just a conference. There were a lot of things going on at that time, and it was not easy to get senators to attend. I know Senator McClellan sat in on it, but at that point it was not official because we only had one senator. I remember we had the chief of police of Washington and we had Ramsey Clark who was attorney general then, as we had a lot of people who were involved in the Washington government. I remember that Ramsey Clark was so arrogant and disrespectful to Senator McClellan that I turned off on him completely. He was very arrogant in his replies to Senator

McClellan, as if he looked down on him, and I was very indignant that he treated a United States senator like that. I still am! Another one was that Patrick Murphy, the former police chief who is back in New York now, he was there. But I remember that conference because I was so incensed to think that anybody could be that rude to a senator. We had an all-day conference, I think it was made public later. As a result, this law suit that is still pending came out of that.

RITCHIE: The McSurely case. What was the story behind that?

WATT: Well, we had the criminal court case, I testified during that. But in the civil case I haven't been involved. We had a John Brick, who was a writer but not an investigator, but he wanted to get into investigating. How it came about, I don't know, but he went to Kentucky and served a subpoena and got a record of these people from the county or from the state.

RITCHIE: It was from the local police chief.

WATT: Or somebody, yes.

RITCHIE: They had been organizers.

WATT: Yes, down in Kentucky. That's how it all came about, and the civil case goes back to the fact that they claim—and Senator McClellan asked me

but I didn't know anything about it and didn't want to know—but the main thing they were basing it on was that they claimed that Mr. Brick went through the files that he brought back and read a letter, supposedly a letter from Drew Pearson to Mrs. McSurely. And they claim that he put them up to ridicule because he showed the letter around. Well, the way I understand it is that he showed it to Senator McClellan and Senator McClellan said, "You put that away and don't show it to anybody." And that was the end of it. That was the story I heard. They brought that up in the criminal case, too, which had nothing to do with it.

RITCHIE: Did you have to testify on that?

WATT: No, they didn't ask me about it, because I knew nothing about it. I had to testify about the fact that Mrs. McSurely was subpoenaed to produce some records. When she came she said that she didn't have them or wasn't going to give them, or something. Anyway, Senator McClellan said, "You come back here next Friday in this room at 10:30 and produce those records." So then I went up and sat in the hearing room knowing full well that she wasn't going to show up, but I had to do

it because it was a result of a subpoena, and I was to call if they showed up with the records. I was to call Senator McClellan, whose office was right next door. I waited there until 12:00 or 1:00, so we would make it legal. Then I had to testify that they never showed up. That was my reason for giving an affidavit. They have all those files for this case, apparently, because I turned everything I had over to them.

RITCHIE: The original files were returned to the McSurelys, weren't they?

WATT: I don't remember that. I imagine they were.

RITCHIE: The case really was that the committee had acquired the files from a local officer illegally; and it's been 10 years in the courts, hasn't it?

WATT: Since 1967, 12 years. It came up again recently. They even put it to the Supreme Court who referred it back to a lower court.

RITCHIE: Was there any other case affecting the committee like that?

WATT: Not that I know of.

RITCHIE: Usually the committee would have subpoenaed the records from the people themselves, rather than from the local officers.

WATT: That's right; and the funny part of it is that the original complaint was to all of the senators on the subcommittee for a million dollars, or whatever the amount was. Then it got down to Senator McClellan, and our chief counsel, Jerry Adlerman, and John Brick. And then Jerry died, John Brick died, and they were tying up their estates, which was not much, but Senator McClellan died and his estate is still tied up. Then they had Don O'Donnell come down from New Hampshire and give a deposition. This was in the early 1970s. I understand they sent for him again just the other day. They tried to get a hold of Bob Dunne who had nothing to do with it. He's over in France, and he called us all upset wanting to know what it was all about. But they are just dragging it out. So then they tried to get a hold of Don again, but he just sent a letter back unclaimed when he saw the signature on it. Evelyn Adlerman is an invalid, she lives down in Florida, and they were trying to get in touch with her. They called me to find out if I knew where any of these people were. Most of those people just worked in government all their lives, they don't have anything.

The sad thing, the part of it that was so strange and coincidental was that John Brick's wife works and did work for a psychiatrist who was treating this McSurely woman. It was just coincidence, but somewhere along John mentioned that his wife worked there, and of course, she made a big thing out of that, that he held her up to ridicule also because she was seeing a psychiatrist. So it's pretty sticky all along.

RITCHIE: Was that the only occasion when John Brick worked for the committee?

WATT: Oh, no. He was a regular. He first appeared—he was a very brilliant writer, had a best seller, and was a historical novelist, he'd written some children's books, too, I was very fond of him—but he had helped Senator McClellan write his book.

RITCHIE: *Crime Without Punishment?*

WATT: Yes, he had put it together for him, did the research and so on. Then he was teaching in a college in Dayton, Ohio, and he decided he wanted to come back. I think he got in touch with Margie Nicholson, secretary to Senator McClellan. He was not on the committee while working with Senator McClellan on

the book. He was being paid by the publishers, but he was interested in getting into investigating. He was one of the most devoted husbands that I've ever seen. He and his wife were so happy. It was just a heartbreaker when he died.

RITCHIE: The whole riots investigation seemed so different from the rest of the investigations that the committee held. There were no charges of corruption or mismanagement.

WATT: Well, they were trying to find the causes. They wanted to get to the bottom of them so they could maybe stop them.

RITCHIE: Did they have some sense that there was an organized movement there, rather than just spontaneous eruptions?

WATT: Well, some of the cities had them at the same time, so it had to be organized. But I don't even know what they were about now, it's been 10 years. I remember the riots on the campuses, but I don't know what they were about.

RITCHIE: Do you think there was a sense of bewilderment on the part of the committee, to try to find out why this was happening? Or did they have a theory about what was going on?

WATT: I don't know. They called the presidents of several colleges. One day we had several presidents, professors, and Al Capp, the cartoonist testified! The scariest part of the whole thing was that day that they were burning all those places in Washington and all the smoke was coming down here. We thought they were going to burn the Capitol down. That was a scary day. Were you here then?

RITCHIE: I was working at the Library of Congress that day.

WATT: Then you were here when all that smoke was drifting on down, when Hecht's was on fire, and Landsburgs.

RITCHIE: All of 7th Street and Blandensburg Road.

WATT: Yes, and 14th Street all the way out to where I used to live.

RITCHIE: How did this news reach the committee?

WATT: We had our radios on all day.

RITCHIE: You stayed at the Capitol through the whole day?

WATT: Yes, we went home the usual time. Of course, we went by the Southwest Freeway. We moved to Virginia in 1967 and this was in 1968. We had a maid who had worked that day, and she was petrified because she lived down right in the middle of where it was all going on. She

was just scared to death. But I think she had a sister who lived in Virginia and she went out there. I've never seen anybody so petrified in my life. She lived on 6th Street not too far from U Street, in that area.

RITCHIE: Some of the testimony that I've read from those investigations was pretty violent in itself. There was a fellow named Frederick Brown with the SNCC in Nashville who talked about the need for violence. The committee members seemed quite shaken up by that.

WATT: Then we had the Black Panthers from Chicago, that was a scary thing, too. They told about this church, and how they had their meeting in the basement, a dungeon under the church, and all the arms they had down there.

RITCHIE: From out of this grew the investigation of the Office of Economic Opportunity and its funding of various groups.

WATT: We held hearings on that, but I think that was pretty much mismanagement.

RITCHIE: It seemed as if the committee felt more comfortable dealing with the mismanagement of a particular government agency like the O.E.O. than they did in trying to deal with social causes.

WATT: Oh, yes, because you knew the government wasn't going to disrupt it at any moment, and they were supposed to be responsible people at the head of it. But we still had difficulty getting files from them. They were sort of fending off and not giving the right information. It was not a very satisfactory investigation on the O.E.O.

RITCHIE: Because they couldn't get material from them?

WATT: We didn't know really what was going on there. Maybe they didn't either. But I remember that it was not all that satisfactory.

RITCHIE: Did the committee have any connections with the Kerner Commission that was also investigating the riots?

WATT: No. I doubt very seriously that we got any information from them. It's the same with House investigations. The House and Senate are jealous of their prerogatives, and frequently the House will carry on an investigation the same time the Senate is. Once in a while we've said, "Let's get this going before the House side takes it on." And two or three times they beat us to the draw! So there was duplication.

RITCHIE: The last big investigation under McClellan was into the PXs in Vietnam. That also got a lot of public attention at the time.

WATT: Senator Ribicoff chaired those, as I remember. He went over to Vietnam with Duffy, they went over to get firsthand information and a look at it. I think Duffy was over there a couple of times. There were a lot of shenanigans, there's no doubt about it.

RITCHIE: There's a line in that letter you showed me from Carmine Bellino.

WATT: That's right, he was there, too.

RITCHIE: He said that it was the same old story, "The line officers run everything until a Congressional committee finally looks into what they are doing."

WATT: That's why I thought it would be interesting for you to see that letter. It brought the war a little closer to you, the reality of it. It showed how they were in danger zones.

RITCHIE: Well, it was different type of work than the committee was used to doing, under frontline conditions.

WATT: Yes, that's right. Later on, after Senator Jackson took over, we had one day of hearings, on some of those people who were involved. I

think one changed his story, if I remember rightly. But there was just one day of hearings. Four of the main people came back and testified.

RITCHIE: It's listed here in 1973, "Fraud and Corruption in the Military Club System."

WATT: That was the year that Senator Jackson took over as chairman.

RITCHIE: The work of the subcommittee seemed to diminish during the last couple of years when Senator McClellan was chairman. The number of investigations declined. Was his attention being diverted elsewhere?

WATT: Yes. Also Jerry Adlerman, who had been with us for years, he came on the committee a few months after I did and became chief counsel after Bob Kennedy left, he retired in September of 1971. We got a chief counsel who had been on the committee during the Rackets Committee, who we thought would be good. But he was a complete wash out. He was impossible. He came over from the House side. We thought he was going to be great, we just greeted him with open arms. Well, it turned out that he was scared of his own shadow. We had one little hearing the whole time he was on the committee.

RITCHIE: He lacked the confidence to initiate an investigation?

WATT: Well, I think he spent more time thinking about the staff. I would go in and he would say, "I'm going to fire so-and-so today." The next day he was going to fire somebody else. Of course, he didn't have the authority to fire anybody, but kept tempers stirred up all the time. I was pretty unhappy at that time. In the meantime, Senator McClellan was not around. We were like stepchildren because he was tied in the primary. He was in a runoff for his job in the Senate.

RITCHIE: For the nomination?

WATT: Yes. So he was in Arkansas all the time. He didn't have time for the committee. So in that period we were just stepchildren, really, because we had a chief counsel that we had no confidence in. Poor Jerry was upset because he had recommended him, but Jerry didn't know because he had seemed like a great guy. But he just didn't have it. I think the House side sluffed him off on us because they wanted to get rid of him. I've always had that feeling. He had been on the Roads Subcommittee on the House side, a nucleus of five went over

from the Rackets Committee when it wound up, to join that committee over there.

RITCHIE: Which committee was that?

WATT: It was a subcommittee of Public Works, roads and highway subcommittee. Anyway, he went over there with Walter May, and George Martin, and George Kopecky, and Jim Kelly and others. But there were a bunch from the Rackets Committee that went over there when the committee wound up. Then the senator came back, after the run-off but none of us would tell him anything because we figured it wasn't our business. I wasn't about to tell him. But anyway, John Brick finally told the senator about all the problems we were having. Everybody on the staff was saying that part of John Brick's problem was that counsel.

RITCHIE: What happened then?

WATT: Then in January of 1973, Senator McClellan gave up the subcommittee. He stayed on the full committee. He stayed on the subcommittee, but gave it to Senator Jackson. Then Senator Jackson hired a new chief counsel, but the outgoing counsel kept insisting on getting a top job in the State Department. Well, they worked and got him one,

“kicked” him upstairs in May. He was just on the payroll until then, and then Howard Feldman took over as chief counsel, and everything changed then. Senator McClellan had been chairman for so many years that I had forgotten there had ever been another chairman. Then I started saying, “I wonder if so-and-so would like this the way I’ve been doing it.” Because everybody has different ideas. So I just completely forgot anything I’d ever done before and checked on everything, no matter what I did, to make sure it was what the new chairman was going to want. And he’d been on the committee since 1953, so he was not new to me.

RITCHIE: Did McClellan continue to have an active interest in the subcommittee after he stepped down as chairman?

WATT: He came to the meetings and they all looked to his expertise and experience for the conduct of the meetings. He came once in a while to the hearings if we couldn’t get a quorum. There was one time when there was somebody testifying who he was particularly interested in, but the rest of the time he stayed away. Well, to begin with, Senator Jackson rarely came and I think he felt that, “If Jackson

didn't come to the hearings for me, why should I go to them for him?" I think that's the way he felt. So, anyway, I had heard rumors for two or three years that Senator Jackson was going to get rid of the whole staff when he took over. Of course, that didn't concern me because I could have retired any time after my 20 years, and I already had about 25 years by then, they had a big party for me on my 25th anniversary in 1972. But he didn't let anybody go.

RITCHIE: He didn't?

WATT: There were a couple of people who had retired and were on retired status but had moved back, whom he let go. He didn't think we needed them. And gradually people left. They were so independent they didn't want to do what the new chief counsel wanted to do, so they quit. When you get a new chief counsel and chairman you've got to adjust. You're not going to tell them what to do. So we lost about three or four people that way.

RITCHIE: Didn't they drop the file clerk who kept that elaborate card index?

WATT: No, they just didn't send the files down to her, so she retired.

RITCHIE: She just quit?

WATT: Sure, because they weren't giving her filing to do, she was all upset. Howard didn't believe in that much filing. So for all that period the only things we have are those that Sally Olson, his secretary, kept in her file. So you had to go through the whole thing to find out anything you wanted. After a hearing was over the papers would be boxed up and sent to the National Archives.

RITCHIE: We talked to the file clerk and she was saying that after 1973 the card system stopped, and now they are trying to fill in the gap.

WATT: You mean Frances Cresswell? It was funny, her father and mother were friends of ours, he's a doctor. Frances is the youngest of six, and the others are all lawyers and doctors, and she was sort of the tail end of the family. She had just graduated from college and the family decided it was time that she got out on her own. I mentioned that the committee might have an opening, and my husband said, "Well, Frances is looking for a job, why don't you have her come in?" I said, "They don't want anybody for a couple of months." Anyway, Watt called her and Frances came in. I have never

met her before, but I talked with her and told her that, “They aren’t even going to interview for this job for a couple of months, but I’d like to take your application.” Then I went in to Duffy, who was acting chief counsel because Owen Malone had left and they hadn’t appointed a new one yet. I said, “Duffy, I have a girl out here who’s very nice. I don’t know her, but I know her parents. She’s interested in a file job. Do you want to talk to her, or should I tell her to come back in a couple of months?” He said, “No, I’ll talk to her.” So I took her in, and when she came out I went in and Duffy said, “Let’s hire her, she’s got class.” So they hired her on the spot! She came to work the first of the next month.

RITCHIE: And she’s putting the card system together again? That’s great.

WATT: Yes, she just graduated from college and never had a job of her own. Now she’s had to get out on her own. But she’s doing all right. She’s got a mind of her own.

RITCHIE: I think it would be good to stop at this point, and next to take up the period when Senators Jackson and Nunn were chairman. I would also like to do a little retrospective, looking

back over how things have changed over the long period.

WATT: Yes, I was thinking the other day about Jimmy Hoffa and how he went on down through our lives until they were trying to dig him up out in Detroit! There were a lot of spaces in there, but the fact was that he was back-and-back before the committee.

RITCHIE: When we talk about the more recent period, we can consider that a “Part III” of the oral history, and put that under restriction.

WATT: Yes, because there were some things that turned me off, that I would like to talk about, but I don’t want them released now.

RITCHIE: You can speak freely, but we can keep the transcript closed for whatever period you would like. But we can do it in a way that the earlier material can be made available.

WATT: Because I’m afraid I will be apt to be pretty critical of some of the things in the last 10 years.

RITCHIE: That’s fine. Actually, one thing we are interested in is assessing how successful people, and committees, and programs were; and failures and mistakes are just as important as successes. So we do want to look at

the problems, where things went wrong, as well as the high points.

WATT: Yes, because some of the behind-the-scenes things were so political, and I've always kept away from the politics. Whenever things get real political they get sticky, as far as I'm concerned.

RITCHIE: But even your assessment of your counsel who was too nervous to begin any investigations, I think it's important to recognize that.

WATT: I told everybody he was nuts, he was off his rocker. I thought he was. I have a strange way of showing my displeasure. When I used to get mad at him I would slam drawers. When I got mad at Howard Feldman, I slammed doors! Everybody on the staff knew when I was mad at the chief counsel!

[End of Interview #5]