

**United Nations Oral History Project**

**Harding Bancroft  
17 December 1990**

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MILLBROOK, NY.

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JS Mr. Bancroft, I want first to thank you for participating in this Yale Oral History Project on the United Nations and I'd like if I might first to ask you to indicate what position you were in at the time that the North Korean aggression took place?

HB Well I was in the State Department, of course. The name of the division that I was in - division or an office, anyway - was called the UN Political Affairs Office, Political and Military I think at one point. It got reorganized under Dean Rusk, it was then a larger entity which I think was called the Office of UN Affairs. He preceded John Hickerson who was the Assistant Secretary for that at about the time that Korea - I'm not quite sure when the transition occurred and Rusk was made the Under Secretary, I think. He had left for the larger job in the State Department. Hickerson, who was a Foreign Service officer, a longtime Foreign Service officer, took his place.

JS Right. So you were in what was later known as United Nations Political Affairs Office?

HB That's right.

JS And at that point then, if you recall correctly, Dean Rusk was the Assistant Secretary I think for International Organizations.

HB: Correct.

JS And then you were there when the word arrived of the outbreak of hostilities? (HB: Right) And Dean Acheson was the Secretary of State, I think. Now how did the news reach you, what were you doing and what was the reaction within the UN Political Affairs Office (UNP)?

HB Goodness - I don't know. Obviously a major event. That's the best way I can describe it, it meant more work and of course it generated the idea of bringing together other nations to help on the side of the Korean war.

JS Yes, and I suppose the relationship between UNP and the Mission in New York was quite close?

HB Oh yes, we were on the telephone all the time, daily.

JS Because the first thing that needed to be done was the drafting of a resolution by the Security Council and I'm interested to ask, to what extent did you work on that in Washington, and to what extent was it done in New York - to your recollection?

HB I would guess that it was done first in Washington and then sent to New York for comments, and so on. Actually I was away at the very outset - it was in the summer, as you remember - and I was away up in Canada. So I wasn't there for that actual date; I of course came back within a few days and took my place. So for the first reaction to the outbreak, I was not present in Washington.

JS Now as the hostilities proceeded and the resolutions were put to the Security Council as US proposals, there was no

mention I think of Chapter 7 of the Charter which would cover enforcement measures. Do you remember whether this was considered or was there a specific reason why?

HB I do not remember anything about that, no I don't.

JS Later I noticed in the report of the Collective Measures Committee in which you participated, again, there's no reference to Chapter 7. There's reference to Chapter 6 of the Charter. Do you recall whether that was an issue or not?

HB No, I don't. I don't see why it would have become an issue, really.

JS Well it has certain relevance today because in the Gulf crisis at the present time, the resolutions that have been passed do refer specifically to Chapter 7. But I couldn't find any specific reference at that time and I wondered if that had been related to the fact that there was no military force available to the Security Council?

HB Yes, probably, that would be a likely reason.

JS Now thinking back - how did you in Washington in these days, the early days of the war, think of Trygve Lie who was Secretary-General at that point and who took quite a strong stand?

HB What did we think of him, what was our estimate of him? Well I always liked him. But I think you would get very mixed answers to that question. Some people thought that he was not as energetic as he might have been but in

general, you know, we were in favor of Trygve Lie. So I don't think that there's anything that I can add to that.

JS Now again, from the Washington perspective, one of the first things that was done after the war broke out, a note was sent to the Soviet Union asking for the Soviet Union to take action to stop the war. In New York, of course, Malik was not participating in the Security Council. Were there contacts, to your recollection, with the Soviet Embassy in Washington?

HB Not that I knew of.

JS Was the general assumption - as far as you recall at that point - that the Soviet Union was directly involved in the attack?

HB Indirectly, I think, more than directly. And I think that was the assumption, yes. That's my recollection. But you know, this was something that was talked about. I don't know what went on the office of the Secretary of State at that time but I'm sure that was the general idea, that the Soviet Union was behind this.

JS In Acheson's memoirs he describes how there was speculation in the International Organizations Department, probably in UNP, as to whether Malik would return to the Security Council before the, I guess it was the third resolution. Is that your recollection too?

HB Yes.

JS Now I'm going to get fairly soon to the work on the

Collective Measures Committee but first I'd like ask you about the Uniting for Peace resolution. Were you involved in the drafting of that?

HB Yes.

JS And was that done in New York or in Washington?

HB It was done in Washington, primarily.

JS Who were the primary participants in that?

HB Well I guess, I certainly was, and the staff in my office and then of course then, going on up, the Assistant Secretary. I think we began the thing.

JS And John Foster Dulles participated, I believe.

HB Yes, he did.

JS And Leonard Meeker, I think...

HB Yes, correct.

JS My real question is, how did you at that time see the real intent of this resolution? Was the effort to find a way to give action responsibility to the General Assembly?

HB Yes, it was to get around the veto. That was the real purpose of it.

JS And was there concern as to how this would fit with the Charter?

HB Well there was concern naturally but what we thought was that in the event of a veto by a Permanent Member of the Council, the United Nations itself should not be left without any authority to take action on behalf of all the

members. This, of course, I suppose in many ways was not in accordance with the original idea of the Charter. We felt it would be too bad - it would make the United Nations really a weakling - if a single veto could prevent united action by a majority of the members in a situation of a breach of the peace.

JS The initial resolution that passed by the Security Council (before the Soviet Union returned) used the words, I think, "calls upon Member States" and that approach was taken over in the Uniting for Peace resolution.

HB That's right, those are the words.

JS And that approach was taken over in the Uniting for Peace resolution?

HB That's right.

JS Was that to avoid any impression that this resolution authorized the General Assembly actually to impose action on the parties?

HB No, I think it was hope rather than imposition as the proper distinction. We thought that was the way to get as many members of the United Nations as we could, to help in this situation, recognizing that Chapter 7 was not available, as it were.

JS Right. So in fact it was not the intention of those who were drafting this to make compliance with General Assembly resolutions mandatory?



HB Correct.

JS So this distinction was always maintained.

HB I think that distinction was always maintained.

JS Can you give any of your recollections about the relationship between the State Department at this point and General MacArthur in the field? I mean, were you able to try to exercise any control at all over the military operation?

HB No, not as the State Department. We did not. We recognized that General MacArthur was a man who took charge and President Truman's action finally was something which we all thought as individuals as a good thing to have done. We thought he was a horse without a bit.

JS He was the commander of the Unified Command?

HB Yes.

JS As far as I can find, he never reported though directly to the Security Council or General Assembly, or....

HB No I don't think he ever did. He acted as an American general.

JS Did the State Department attempt to provide some kind of continuing reports on the war to the United Nations?

HB Not that I knew of. There may very well have been. In fact, I should think there should have been but we did not know about it and we did not participate in it.

JS Later there were meetings in Washington I believe with

the representatives of those countries that provided military forces.

HB That's right, that was under the wing of Jack Hickerson and he was the man who met with them very frequently and ran it as his own show, as an individual more than as a - no, not really as an individual. But he didn't bring his subordinates as it were into that.

JS And it is from other sources, I've been told, that accounts of these meetings were not given to the mission in New York either, so they just didn't know.

HB I think that's true.

JS So the amount of what I would call classified information that was passed to the United Nations with regard to the conduct of the war was very small.

HB I should think that would be true. It did not go through my office, anyway.

JS Now, in New York the General Assembly did seek to be involved in bringing an end to the war with the appointment of a ceasefire committee. Do you recall - what was the reaction in Washington to the appointment of this committee and to its activities?

HB I just don't know the answer. I didn't have any feel about it at all. I think some of us - well, never mind.

JS No, go ahead.

HB I was just about to say that some of us felt that this was being held too closely in Jack Hickerson's scope, as

it were.

JS So a lot was being handled by him personally?

HB A lot was being handled by him personally which we, his subordinates, did not know. Now he, I am sure, reported to the Secretary but it did not filter down to our office. He took that into his own hands.

JS I want to go back for a minute. Going back to the Uniting for Peace resolution, it is sometimes referred to in books as the Acheson Resolution. Some have told me that actually Dean Acheson had very little to do with it. What is your recollection of it?

HB Well I was very fond of Mr. Acheson, I was a great admirer of his. However he did not feel that the United Nations was a very important thing, that was his own personal thing. I think he didn't scoff at it but he wasn't a great enthusiast for it - for some reason. I think, as it developed - I think later on in his life he did have a greater respect for it than he did at the time of Korea, for example.

JS But as far as you recall, he was not very directly involved in drafting this rather important resolution?

HB No, Uniting for Peace, no.

JS It was more your group, with John Foster Dulles participating?

HB Yes. Well Dulles participated because of the fact that he was a delegate at the next session of the Assembly

and, my recollection is, that the Uniting for Peace resolution was fully drafted and presented to Dulles and he liked it and supported it.

JS Well actually I think Leonard Meeker to whom I have spoken suggested that you were perhaps the main drafter of the resolution.

HB I think I was, yes.

JS Now, to stay on that resolution for a moment. It of course was adopted by the General Assembly. Did it produce the results that you anticipated, or that you hoped for?

HB Well I suppose the answer to that is, having been adopted was all that could have been done at that time. We got the support of a majority of the General Assembly and it carried the weight that any resolution of the General Assembly does.

JS It was the basis for a later resolution imposing, or calling for, sanctions against the People's Republic of China. But those sanctions were not very effective, I think. Is that your recollection?

HB That's right.

JS So in this sense there was perhaps some disappointment in the effectiveness of the resolution?

HB Well this was the real world we were dealing with and the General Assembly, you know, really didn't have any power and it had no military force. But it was there, and it

was adopted by the General Assembly and was therefore part of the law of the world as it were.

JS Which it has remained. It has retained a real importance. But it is sometimes said on books written on the United Nations that this was an attempt to give the General Assembly the power that the Security Council....

HB I don't think that's quite right, I think what we felt was - and I know that was my feeling - that if the Security Council was unable to act in a situation where most nations of the world were in favor of the action, then it was perfectly appropriate for the General Assembly - as representing a majority of the world - to pass resolutions of that sort and take action on them. Does that makes sense to you? is that the way you would look at it as well?

JS Yes, it does, and I think's that realistic because from my reading of the history, if it had been the intention to give the General Assembly the same power as the Security Council, it was a failure, it didn't work. But from what you have said, and also from what Leonard Meeker has said, you were aware of this at the time and it was not the intention?

HB Oh sure, oh absolutely, yes. No it's the difference between a sort of popular vote versus action by a - hard to explain what it was, but it was a sense of the world rather than action-mandated action by the United Nations.

JS I guess the really crucial question to ask then - it was not your intention or expectation in this indirect way to change the Charter?

HB No, no.

JS And that this was something you were very aware of?

HB Oh yes, definitely. Because it was voluntary rather than mandatory - the action taken under that resolution.

JS The reason I stress this particular question, you know that the Soviets maintained that the resolution was illegal, and even today they have never accepted it, although they have complied with it.

HB Well, I think there's a difference between voluntary and mandatory.

JS Yes, and again to bring it up to date, the Security Council can act. Previously the Council hadn't been able to act without resort to the Uniting for Peace resolution.

HB I think now, under the action taken recently - we had the vote of all of the five powers - it is a different situation. And the vote of the General Assembly can't require action, whereas action by the Security Council can, theoretically.

JS I want to ask about the reaction in the Department of State when the Chinese did intervene. Had you had some expectation in advance of the Chinese intervention?

HB No, not I, no.

JS You did not? Because there was some word that came through the Indian ambassador ?

HB That's right, that's right, there was.

JS His name was Panikkar. This was ignored by General MacArthur, but you don't recall it making a big impression on Washington?

HB No, no I don't.

JS There are references in some of the literature to a sense of panic in New York among the missions there when the Chinese did intervene. Was there any of that sense in Washington?

HB Panic, no.

JS Concern?

HB Concern, yes, but not panic - I mean, it wasn't the end of the world.

JS What was done to deal with this new situation, were there any particular steps taken in order to counter the Chinese from a political point of view?

HB Not that I had anything to do with. The meetings that Jack Hickerson had as Assistant Secretary with the people who were sending forces - he was at the focal point and the little meetings was how it operated.

JS And that's where that would have been done...

HB That's right.

JS As I mentioned the Ceasefire Committee that was established by the General Assembly did work to find a

basis for a ceasefire really at the 38th parallel. Were you conscious of other efforts, separate efforts, on the part of individual countries to try to bring the war to an end in Korea?

HB Not that I knew of, no.

JS I would like to go on now to a somewhat later date and that is the point when the Collective Measures Committee was established under the Uniting for Peace resolution. You of course were involved in drafting that resolution. Could you give me a little bit of your thinking in the various aspects of the Uniting for Peace resolution? That is, particularly the establishment of this Collective Measures Committee? What did you have in mind at that point?

HB Well I suppose what we were doing in effect was taking advantage of the experience in the Korean business where a lot of nations did come and help - in a limited way, but they were behind the action in Korea. So we just asked nations, in the event of a war situation, a threat of war situation, to come to the aid of the party, as it were. We thought it would be a wise thing to formalize that by the creation of this Collective Measures Committee which would, as it were, write the rules of the game - how it could be done, how they should be called upon and so on. And that really is pretty much in the report of the Collective Measures Committee which I can't



very well add to. The British were somewhat reluctant - they were the most reluctant, I think of the members of the committee, in going too far beyond the original wording of the Charter of the United Nations. They had more reservations than any other country as I remember, although Colson was their representative, and was a very able and nice man. They had more of the attitude of the European Bureau, as it were, than the International Organizations Department in the State Department.

JS Again, the recommendations of the Collective Measures Committee seem to come close to the Charter provisions in Articles 42 and 43 but they're clearly different. What was the distinction you were trying to make there?

HB I should think that the distinction is the difference between mandatory action and voluntary action. If you operate under the General Assembly and under the Uniting for Peace resolution, well then you're doing it not as a duty, but as a voluntary act on behalf of the general good, of peace.

JS So in a sense, the Committee worked on the assumption that the military force provided under Articles 42 and 43 was not going to be available?

HB That's right.

JS So this was...

HB Well I'll put it another way. Not that it was not necessarily going to be available but that there might be

cases where it was unavailable because of the operation of the veto. Therefore this would take care of the situation. This, of course, was at a time when the Soviet Union was not playing ball with the other states and it was felt that this was so that there would not be a powerless United Nations simply because of the veto of one power.

JS Now the report of the Collective Measures Committee provides, or had the idea, that there should be what was called a military executive authority. Can you give any background on that idea, how did that originate?

HB Well I guess we just thought it up, and again for the same reason that we shouldn't - the idea of collective action under something like the United Nations should not be rendered powerless by the action of a single member.

JS Was the fairly autocratic conduct of the war by General MacArthur an element in your thinking, that is, that there should be some ....

HB Well it may have been in certain people's minds, it was certainly never articulated - not by any members of the Collective Measures Committee that I ever heard speak of it. That was never said.

JS Then it was an effort to deal with the problem of direction of a military undertaking by the United Nations, really, without defining whether it was the General Assembly or the Security Council, in recognition

that the Security Council or the General Assembly were too large to do this. Was that your thinking?

HB Well no, rather I think more the idea was to get the nations of the United Nations thinking about the possibilities of being called upon for military action and to get them to organize themselves in that regard. Some states did that quite literally, as I understand it, and went ahead and created, within their own military worlds - their own military establishments - a force of, a kind of a special - I don't know exactly what you'd call it now but we used to have a name for it. They would have a group within their own military establishment which was designed for operations under United Nations auspices in case there was a common action again as there was in Korea.

JS The committee report also provides for I believe a group of military observers. What was the intention there?

HB I don't think there was any greater intention than what is expressed in the language of the report, no. People kept asking - was there, did we have an idea of a legion, an international legion, to be ready at hand, and we would answer "no". We weren't trying to get up a legion [inaudible] but simply to have countries made aware of the fact that they might be called upon for action in the event of a United Nations resolution.

JS Was there considerable satisfaction with this report on

the American side when it was published?

HB I think so. Now it's hard to know what the Pentagon thought of it. They took it seriously, I think, but whether or not they thought this would really do any good (because they're autocratic themselves) I don't know. But we talked to them, an extremely able Assistant Secretary of Defense and his name -I've forgotten. He died - what was his name? Anyway, he was awfully good and he was the spokesman for this Frank .... And he was in favor of this but whether or not he represented the Pentagon at all, I don't know.

JS That is the question I want to ask. In particular the military executive authority that's foreseen in that report would take over command and control functions which in fact the US military has always been very reluctant to put under an international authority. So you did have some consultation with the Pentagon (HB: oh yes, oh sure) on that, at that time?

HB Oh yes, oh sure, yes. The British were equally afraid of that too.

JS Did you have the impression that, on the American side, there was any willingness in the Pentagon actually to designate certain troops as is foreseen in the report?

HB No, their response to this - we asked each country and their response was, that the whole Army, Navy and Marines could be at their disposal and they would work it out.

But they didn't want to have it a segregated group. That was my understanding of what their general position was.

JS Because it's also foreseen in the report that the United Nations could provide technical training for the individual countries as they designated forces for United Nations service. That was never taken seriously, as far as you know, on the American side?

HB By the Pentagon? I don't think so, never. They had no objection to it - they were fully aware of what was said here and what was being said at the time, by me as the fellow who was representing the United States. They were willing to go along with what we said but I think that in the back of their minds they said, "you know [inaudible]

JS In the report there is no mention of the Military Staff Committee. Did you give thought at that point to any role for the Military Staff Committee?

HB No, we didn't. I don't know exactly how to answer that question. I really don't know, that is my real answer. But the Military Staff Committee was - we were represented on the Military Staff Committee and they had meetings all the time but I never knew what went on in those meetings, nor did I ever know how seriously the upper reaches of the Pentagon took the Military Staff Committee.

JS Perhaps it was too closely identified with the Security Council, and only the Security Council.

HB Yes, that's probably it. But the Pentagon was not against this report at all, they were in favor of it. They thought of it as being a possibility in the event of a big war of getting more countries on the US side. Obviously that would be helpful.

JS How long did you remain concerned with United Nations matters in the Department after the report was finished?

HB Well, I'm going to have to think of dates. I left the department in '53, I think...

JS I think this was probably '52.

HB The report was dated '51.

JS The reason I ask is, my real question is, again to what extent was there satisfaction in the Department of State or disappointment in the results of this report?

HB I think there was general satisfaction except they didn't think it was a very important thing. I think that would be true. Mr. Acheson made a speech which I wrote a paragraph of and he talked to me about it and he said, "do you really want me to say this?" and I said, "yes". And he said, "well I'll say it then". I can't remember what it was - it was a good speech, and this is something that was put at the end of the speech. If it had it here I could show you.

JS But it did relate to collective measures?

HB To the idea of collective measures by the United Nations.

JS I want to go back for just a minute to the conduct at the

end of the war in Korea. The armistice negotiations that took place between the military commanders - to what extent was the international organization office in the State Department involved in those negotiations?

HB Not at all.

JS Not at all - and I think that probably answers my next question and that is, to what extent was there any consultation between the military commanders and the United Nations on what the terms of the armistice should be?

HB In the United Nations itself, the Secretary-General's office?

JS Right, right.

HB I doubt that if there was any.

JS So In effect, there seems to have been very little actual connection between New York and the United Nations and the conduct, either of the war or the conduct of the armistice negotiations as far as you know?

HB I think that's right, I think that the - during the war it was Hickerson and his weekly meetings, and I don't think the Mission in New York had anything to do with that at all.

JS Right. And that of course was only with those countries that were contributing troops and not the others?

HB Yes.

JS After the armistice was actually agreed, there remained

the very serious problem of the prisoners of war. And there again, my question is what was the role of the State Department in dealing with this problem - which was, in the field of course, handled by the military? It was a political question in many respects, were you ...

HB I was not involved in it at all.

JS Again, if it had been anybody it would have been Hickerson?

HB I would have been Hickerson.

JS And the same situation prevailed while the North Koreans were making very severe propaganda attacks against the United Nations command. As far as you know, the United Nations input into handling this prisoner of war question was non-existent.

HB Was non-existent.

JS Now - I'd just like to get your assessment as to whether this was the right way the war should have been handled?

HB The Korean war?

JS Yes. There was a United Nations flag there...

HB Of course there had to be somebody in the State Department who was the focal point for meetings between the other countries who were contributing troops, or helping in supplying the troops. And I think that probably the Assistant Secretary of State for United Nations Affairs would be as good as any person within the State Department to be the go-between, to be the person



who would talk with ..... .

JS My question really goes more to the aspect of the consultation with the United Nations and really, to the question of command and control. Was there at the time any sense in the State Department that the United Nations should have more influence on the conduct of the war, or of the negotiations to end the war?

HB The United Nations - that is, the Secretary-General?

JS The Secretary-General or for example, the armistice committee which was established? Or the ceasefire committee?

HB I don't know the answer to that.

JS No? It was not something that really bothered you?

HB No, no. UNITED NATIONS

JS Because if something like this military executive authority had been established then it would have been a different situation entirely. Dag Hammarskjöld

HB That's right. LIBRARY

JS And looking at the present situation - if this report were going to be written again, would you feel that there should be even greater insistence on the establishment of some kind of a United Nations authority which could be effective but which could at the same time maintain the influence of the United Nations on the conduct of the military?

HB Yes, I think so - if I understand your question, I'm not

sure that I.....

JS But it's the whole question of command and control - whether there should be any multilateral control over a military action..

HB Well I should think, if you think of it in the abstract, that there should be a central point which would have representation on kind of a central committee of those nations which are contributing forces to take care of problems which might arise because of the fact that there are multinational forces. I would think that would be a desirable thing - how it should be set up I just don't know. I mean, that's the only reaction I have to your question.

JS Now there's one part...

HB There's always going to be one nation that contributes the maximum, the greatest number of force and who is more directly involved in any war. So you're always going to have a problem with having a single person to make decisions, rather than having decisions made by a group. So it would be not too many fire chiefs. So it would be a workable arrangement.

JS That's one of the interesting aspects of the idea in your report of a military executive authority because it would bring the troop-contributing countries, in a rather limited group, into a situation where they would be able to give, not technical control, but at least guidance.

Which seems to me to be a very good idea.

HB Yes, a very good idea and very important, you see, because when you take the situation of the 39th parallel (or whatever that number was) should that be crossed? Should the military commanders go farther than the nations who had troops there want them to go?

JS And in the case of Korea that decision was made entirely by the commander in the field, right? And you and the State Department had no control over it?

HB Well, control may not be the right word. The State Department would be talking to the President of the United States in situations of this sort - and that would be the Secretary of State - he would be the fellow who would talk to the President. The President has to get involved in these things at that stage of the game.

JS Right, but there's one question in this connection going back to the war itself. The General Assembly passed a resolution relatively early calling for the establishment of a unified democratic Korea on the basis of free elections. According to Acheson's memoir, he never interpreted that as meaning unification of Korea through military action, whereas General MacArthur did. Now, were you aware of this distinction at the time in response to that resolution?

HB Yes, we were aware of it and we were worried about MacArthur.

JS You interpretation also was that the resolution didn't mean unification through military force?

HB Yes.

JS Now another question, going back to an earlier period in the war and that is, President Truman had his press conference in which he referred - or he did not exclude - the possible utilization of atomic weapons - in Korea. What was the reaction, again at your level in the State Department, to this statement?

HB Worried. I think that would be the single word to answer your question.

JS Worried - efforts were made in the Department to correct the impression, I believe, is that correct?

HB Yes, but I was not aware of that.

JS And Mr. Atlee came very quickly to Washington. Was your office involved in that Atlee visit?

HB No, it was not involved. There were three levels, after all. There was the Secretary, there were the Assistant Secretaries, and there were the chiefs of the divisions. So that was the hierarchy.

JS Now, just one final question in this connection. One of the things that was very much on Atlee's mind, besides the atomic weapon, was the conviction that under no circumstances should the Korean war become a war between Asians and Europeans. Was this also a concern?

HB Yes, yes definitely.

JS           Something that you shared, actually - in other words, it didn't originate with Atlee?

HB           No, no, it was a concern.

JS           And would you say that that was also the intention of the US government to avoid any war of that nature?

HB           Yes.

JS           And this underlaid perhaps the restrictions that were imposed on MacArthur as well?

HB           Yes.

JS           Those actually are the main questions I have, unless there's something that you'd like to put on the record that you recall as particularly important in this connection?

HB           No, I think that the one thing that was disappointing for us at the lower levels was the fact that Hickerson as the person who talked with the other nations' representatives kept that sort of closely for himself. It was a real pain in the neck and I think we were correctly critical, adversely critical, of the way that was handled. It was all one man. Now he spoke to the Secretary, of course, and that was the important thing. But it was too much of the single man. It should not have been done that way. In this case he should have had someone with him every time he went to those meetings, which were held on a weekly basis as I remember.

JS           Very good. Thank you very very much.

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