

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH LCDR (ret) HOWARD BRUENN, MC, USN

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Interview With Dr. Howard G. Bruenn, Cardiologist to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

When did you join the Navy?

After Pearl Harbor I went to the enlisting office on Church Street[NYC] where I was interviewed. They told me to come back after my next birthday and they would make me a lieutenant commander instead of a lieutenant. I reported to Sampson [Naval Hospital, Sampson supported the nearby Naval Training Center on Lake Seneca, NY.] The hospital had not yet been commissioned. They had a policy whereby who ever came first could pick what he wanted to do regardless of his specialty training. A doctor who reported earlier chose cardiology and I was made a ward officer. I brought my family up a few months later, and very soon thereafter was ordered to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. There I was made cardiologist for the hospital and consultant to the Third Naval District.

This was something I had been trained for. As Truman used to say, I was the last backstop. I had my own office at Bethesda and saw people only by appointment referred from various areas in the Naval District. Officers who were eligible for promotion were seen in the Naval Dispensary in Washington. If there was a cardiac or vascular problem they would be sent to me.

One episode I can't help but remember. At the Naval Dispensary, something unusual was detected in a captain's electrocardiogram. He was sent to me for my opinion. There was no history of symptoms. These officers were terribly anxious to be promoted and as far as they were concerned, they were in great shape all the time. I looked at the cardiogram and talked to the patient and made a diagnosis of coronary disease. I entered this diagnosis in his health record and heard later that he had been promoted. About 6 months later he dropped dead on the deck of his battleship. Dr. Harper, Chief of the Hospital, called me and asked what I had put down on that man's health record and I told him. He said, "Thank God" and hung up. I concluded that had I not put my findings in the health record, I would have been at Guadalcanal the next week.

Why had they assigned you to Bethesda?

It was a great mystery to me. I was still in my 30s when I was transferred there. I had been at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York, where I was a resident physician and a member of the faculty. When I came back after the war I tried to find out how the Navy had obtained information about me. How I got transferred from a ward

officer in a boot camp to the head of the cardiology department at Bethesda is still a mystery.

Who did you work for at Bethesda?

I was on my own. I had my own staff--technicians, secretaries, and so forth. It was a very enviable job.

When was that?

It was the early part of '43.

When you were at Bethesda, did you have any dealings with VADM McIntire [Ross T., Surgeon General of the Navy]?

No.

What was McIntire like?

I found Dr. McIntire very pleasant and friendly. When he first called me about the President, he said "I'd like to have you take a look at him."

The President's secretary, Grace Tully, mentioned that some months before, she had found that he had fallen asleep at his desk or he had momentarily lost consciousness while he was signing a document. She said that they were all concerned. In fact, it was Anna [Anna Roosevelt Boettiger, FDR's daughter] who got Dr. McIntire to call you and have you check him out.

The initial thing that brought me into the picture was Anna. She put the pressure on Ross McIntire to find out what was going on, because the President was not himself.

And you were pretty shocked by the President's condition?

Yes, I was. He was thought to have had an upper respiratory infection and had not quite regained his strength. When I went over him and I found that he was in acute congestive heart failure, that put a different aspect on the whole situation. Dr. McIntire asked me to write out what I thought should be done, which I did. When I gave him my recommendations for bedrest, diet, etc., he said, "You can't do that. This is the President of the United States!"

He summoned the honorary Navy medical consultants. Among them were [Dr. James E.] Paullin, who was the President of the AMA at the time and Dr. [Frank H.] Lahey from Boston. We sat around a table and I showed the assembled doctors the x-rays, the electrocardiograms the blood pressure readings, and the results of the physical exam. They asked me what I thought we should do. I said that we had to

digitalize¹ him and follow the above procedures. They thought that was all too drastic and extensive.

They went up to see the President the next morning and examined him. When they came back they agreed that I could go ahead with the digitalization.

I digitalized the President and in about a week or 10 days the results were spectacular. His lungs, which initially had been congested and with a small amount of fluid, were now clear. His heart, which was enlarged, had diminished in size. His coughing had stopped and he was sleeping soundly at night. Dr. McIntire said: "If you have rapport with the President, this is now your problem." And that's how the whole thing started.

McIntire kept himself out of this pretty well. He knew his shortcomings; he wasn't particularly interested in internal medicine or cardiology. This was out of his field. He was perfectly willing to let somebody else take it over.

How did you feel about accepting that tremendous responsibility?

Obviously enough, I was a very much impressed and a little apprehensive. But the President was such a nice person that we had no problem. He became another patient. I would go down and see him four or five times a week at the White House and, of course, I went with him on his trips.

Yes, thank goodness the President did very well, although the pressures were tremendous. You see, the President was the government. He was his own Secretary of the Treasury, his own Secretary of State. He was running the works, including the war. On the other hand, he would sleep like a baby on a train, on a ship, on a plane. He had the ability to push problems in the background and really get an adequate night's rest. And that was very helpful.

There was a period where he said he couldn't taste his food. What was that all about.

I thought at first that he was getting too much digitalis. That's one of the signs of overdigitalization. So we cut it back, but that didn't make any difference.

Was there any medication for hypertension?

No. We tried to cut down on his weight, and to reduce stress,

¹Digitalis, or foxglove, is a powerful cardiac stimulant used to increase heart function and efficiency.

be sure he got a good night's sleep, cut down on salt--the usual things. But there was nothing directly to control it.

For the blood pressure, the only thing you could do was cut down on sodium [and control] the diet?

We tried to cut down on his weight, and to reduce stress, be sure he got a good night's sleep, cut down on salt--the usual things.

His breakfast habits would today make us throw up our hands in horror. He loved his eggs with fried ham or bacon every day. I'm sure that didn't help.

That's right. The main thing we eliminated was quantity and calories.

Did he have any other problems: Dr. McIntire mentioned the upper respiratory problems in his book [*White House Physician*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, NY, 1946].

Dr. McIntire was a nose and throat doctor and he concerned himself with the President's voice. He wanted to be sure he had a good speaking voice. [He did that] using sprays.

But the President did have some significant medical problems in the past. He had developed a profound anemia about 1938 or '39. And the polio was an extraordinary thing. He was essentially paralyzed from the hips down and could only support himself with braces. But there was an understanding even before I came. No picture was ever taken of him standing. He was always behind a desk. But it left him with very poor development of the leg muscles. They had just wasted away. But he did have tremendous shoulders and chest. In fact, he weighed something like 185 to 190 pounds with nothing here [gesturing toward his legs]. One of the things we tried to do was to take weight off. It was easier on his heart, easier on the blood pressure, etc. Unfortunately, some of it came off his face and he began to look haggard. That was the reason, you see. And then we had a job trying to get him to eat again. He was so pleased with his weight loss, we were forced to tempt him to eat.

Jim Bishop, in his book, *FDR's Last Year* [William Morrow & Co. Inc., NY, 1974], over and over says the President didn't ask about his health, and therefore Dr. McIntire didn't tell him. But didn't Roosevelt know how ill he was?

He never asked me a question about the medications I was giving him, what his blood pressure was, nothing. He was not interested. He had a job to do and the hell with everything else. I remember when the pressure was put on him to run for the fourth term. All

those people around him depended on the President exclusively for their jobs, for their reputations, everything. I'm not only talking about the secretaries but such people as Steve Early, the press secretary, everybody. The President was the center pole, no question about it. And [Robert E.] Hannegan, who was then Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, wanted the President to run. They all wanted him to run. And he wasn't particularly anxious to run.

Even knowing he was a man of destiny?

He felt he had done his job. Not quite, that's true. He felt he had to complete the job but he knew he wasn't a 21-year-old either, although he never asked any questions. He was always interested in seeing me come and talking to me. It took a certain amount of persuasion to [convince him] to run. It wasn't a "I want to be President for another 4 years" sort of thing.

He then wasn't keen on running but he must have asked himself this question? "Who are we going to put up if I don't run?" Who was there in the wings who he would have trusted to carry on his programs in the Democratic Party? What kind of shining light was there?

There was nobody.

Getting back to the condition you found him in in March of '44...
He was in heart failure.

What do you attribute that to? Was it a lack of exercise because of the polio, or 12 years of unremitting stress? Diet?

It was the high blood pressure. From what I remember from his chart, it was first detected at least several years before I saw him. And then the cardiograms showed that he had underlying coronary disease. He never complained of any chest pain except, if you remember, on one occasion when he gave a speech at Bremerton, WA, on the fantail of a destroyer.² He kept on with the speech and came below and said, "I had a helluva pain!" We stripped him down in the cabin of the ship, took a cardiogram, some blood and so forth, and fortunately it was a transient episode, a so-called angina, not a myocardial infarction. But that was really a very disturbing

²FDR made this speech on 12 Aug 1944 at the Bremerton Navy Yard, WA, on his return from his Hawaii consultations with Nimitz and MacArthur.

situation. That was the first time under my observation that he had something like this. He had denied any pain before. But this was proof positive that he had coronary disease, no question about it.

I recall Jim Bishop in his book [FDR's Last Year] said he had strained his intracostal muscles and it was not heart related.

This is very tangential, but Bishop was employed by a movie producer to write a script on the President's last year based on his book. The producer of the film contacted me and asked me to go over the script. There were so many fallacious, unbelievable untruths. I went over the script with their screenwriters and they produced a documentary which was superb. It was about 10 years ago. It starred Jason Robards and he was awfully good. So was the fellow who played Stalin. I thought it was an extraordinary documentary of what actually happened. I had to go up to Toronto to help them film it and it was a very pleasant experience.

I recall that scene from the film where the doctors had just examined the President and realized just how ill he was.

That was just before he ran for the fourth term. Incidentally, nobody asked me whether he should run or not. I was Mr. Anonymous most of the time until the President asked me to be in some pictures. Have you ever seen pictures of me with the President?

No.

Would you like to see one?

I would love to. [Bruenn proceeded to take the interviewer to his library, where he showed him several photos of himself with FDR.]

During the time you took care of the President, did you have an office at the White House?

No. They gave me a car and I would drive down in the morning and see him then go back to work at the hospital.

You then had your own patients to take care of.

Oh, yes. I had my office hours. [Taking care of the President] was so-called "temporary additional duty."

One of the first trips the President took for rest and recuperation after you came on was the one he took to Hobcaw, Bernard Baruch's place in South Carolina. What are your recollections of that?

[All the trips followed] the same type of pattern. We would

all be told to appear in the basement of the Bureau of Printing and Engraving where a special train came in. We were assigned our cars, berths, and so forth. We would leave in the middle of the night about half past 12 or 1 o'clock. Once we got where we were going, we would be assigned bedrooms, etc. I would see the President every morning, examine him, and then I might go down to the pool if we were at Warm Springs. But I was always on call. The Secret Service knew where I was all the time. Life went on very casually. Guests would sometimes drop in for dinner. The President was really a master of the situation at the table. There was no question about it. He smoked his Camel cigarettes, had his martini before dinner. He would go for boat rides, sleep late in the morning, perhaps take a nap in the afternoon. It was ideal for this type of thing. Every day the bag would come in from the White House with the mail and all the papers would be signed. That took about half an hour or so and that was all the business that was done.

What was Baruch like?

His glory days were during the First World War. First of all, he was a great gentleman. But, to be perfectly honest, I don't think the President took very much of his advice, but then the President never took very much of anyone's advice. Domestically, he listened to people to hear what they had to say and then he made up his own mind about what he was going to do. Hawaii is a good example. One of the reasons for going to Hawaii was to determine the next episode in waging the Pacific war. Nimitz wanted to go island-hopping; MacArthur wanted to take the Philippines first. They offered the options and the President made the final decision. It was always like that.

Do you think he went to that Hawaii conference with an open mind to hear both sides?

Oh, yes. They sat down in this lovely room and they really talked it over.

Did you get a chance to meet MacArthur and Nimitz? What were your impressions of those two gents?

MacArthur was... Well let me give you one illustration. Before we docked in Hawaii, I was up on the bridge [USS *Baltimore*]. The President and a couple of admirals were there too. We were all very casually dressed in khakis and no neckties. As we came into Pearl Harbor a little boat came out with [VADM Robert L.] Ghormley dressed in whites. As we entered the harbor there must have been a hundred ships there with sailors manning the rails in whites making

an extraordinary appearance. We finally docked and at least 20 or 24 flag officers came aboard to pay their respects--Navy, Army, Marines, Air Corps, the works. Everybody sat around for maybe half an hour. All of a sudden over the loud speaker: "General MacArthur is coming aboard!" And here he came wearing a leather jacket and his soft hat, making his appearance. He was that kind of a guy. He was a dramatic...

Kind of a prima donna.

Exactly.

How about Nimitz?

Very quiet, reserved. A typical reserved Navy admiral. A great fellow. Quite different.

Wasn't it on the trip to Hawaii that the President was nominated for his fourth term.

Yes. He was nominated while the train was in the yards in Chicago. He accepted the nomination in a railroad car. Anna and the photographers were taking pictures. He was up at one end of the car and we were sitting in the back. As one of the naval photographers took a picture of the President they also caught me. I was leaning over. That's the first picture in which I appeared. The only reason I bring it up is that it was this picture that was published in *Life* magazine. The doctors at my hospital--Presbyterian--recognized me and were aware of what was going on. This was the first they knew of my role. I had been warned to keep my mouth shut because wherever I might be, the President might be there too and they didn't want any unnecessary knowledge being spread around.

The campaign followed this. Had the Republicans gotten hold of information concerning the President's precarious health, it would have been a whole different situation.

That brought up the problem: Should he or should he not have run for the fourth term? And I must say, in all honesty, if I had been asked what my opinion or judgment was, I would have been greatly swayed by the circumstances. Here we were in the middle of a great war which had been conducted fortunately or unfortunately on an almost personal basis between Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt. I can say unquestionably that when Truman came in after the President's death, he had seen the President twice and knew nothing about what the hell was going on. The President had a personal relationship with these others [Churchill and Stalin] and I thought that was damn

important.

McIntire was the spokesman on the President's health and everyone was saying that the President didn't look well, what was wrong with him, and he would say "It's nothing, it's simply an upper respiratory thing, he's had the flu or a case of bronchitis," or whatever. He really couldn't say anything else. All this I can understand--politics. What I have difficulty with is reading McIntire's book, which he wrote in 1946. In it he maintained, to the bitter end, that the President was essentially a healthy man for his age. His blood pressure was normal. His heart signs were normal and everything else was normal. While the President was alive, for political reasons, McIntire had to maintain a positive image. But once FDR was dead and a whole year had gone by, McIntire felt compelled to write his memoir and in it he goes through the whole litany all over again. Can you think of why he did that?

I didn't publish my paper until 1970 and that sort of blew the door down as far as the actual facts were concerned.

So, it wasn't really until 1970 that any of this came out.

That's right. There was always the question of violating the relationship between the patient and a doctor. Anna [Roosevelt] really went after me to write this thing but got permission of the three brothers--they all thought it was a pretty good idea--just to clarify the situation. There were so many rumors, even years after his death. For example, the Russians wanted to have an autopsy; they thought he had been poisoned or something of the sort. So I did write it on the basis that the family wanted me to. The editors of the journal agreed. I must have gotten over 150 requests for reprints of that article.

My contact with McIntire stopped when I left the Navy. We communicated--letters but nothing about this.

There were also allegations that the President had cancer. Not that fellow from Dartmouth?

Yes. "Unanswered Mysteries on the Death of Franklin D. Roosevelt." [Harry S. Goldsmith in *Surgery, Gynecology, & Obstetrics*, December 1979]

There have been a number of books and papers written by people who had no contact with the patient.

Goldsmith reiterates your 1970 findings, but then steps off from there and talks about the President having cancer. He also brings

up the subject of Dr. Lahey.

Lahey, at the only meeting we had following my initial examination [in March 1944], said, "This is nothing in my field." and signed himself off.

Lahey really didn't have anything to do with the President's care after that?

Oh, no, not a bit. To my knowledge, he never saw him again. Dr. Paullin, some time after the President died, wanted me to give him my notes, but I didn't give them to him. I was afraid that he might do what Lord Moran [*Churchill: Taken From the Diaries of Lord Moran*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1966] did to Churchill. He went into some pretty personal things and did himself and Mr. Churchill no good. I can tell you Churchill was very fond of his scotch and so on, but that had nothing to do with history.

Back to the cancer, Goldsmith went into this thing about the mysterious pigmentation above the President's left eyebrow. He says there's a photograph that was taken much later in which the pigmentation is missing.

That's a photograph error or something. He never had anything wrong with that. He had something on top of his head, something benign. A doctor named Winchell, a surgeon from Mayo, took it off at Bethesda, no problem.

The thing that has bothered historians, and you mention it in your paper, is the fact that FDR's medical records have disappeared.

It's one of the strangest things. When I'd come back [from seeing the President at the White House], I would go to Dr. Harper's office³ or Duncan's⁴ office and they would give me the chart and I would write a note for that day concerning what I'd found, return it to the administrative office and then it would go back in the safe. After I wrote the final note, I never saw it again, never saw it. You might find it in your files, I'm not sure.

It's gone.

Isn't that curious?

I suspect, well it's all circumstantial, but the person who had

³CAPT John Harper, MC, USN, was commanding officer of the National Naval Medical Center during World War II.

⁴CAPT Robert Duncan, MC, USN, was NNMC's executive officer.

the most to lose from those records being made public was Dr. McIntire.

That's right.

He really took a risk during the President's life choosing to keep the whole thing bottled up. In 1946 he really went out on a limb, thinking, of course, that this material would never be divulged, by saying that the President was perfectly healthy. The fact that he looked tired was not abnormal for a man with his responsibility. "Besides he didn't follow my advice. I told him to rest and he couldn't. He was the President." But there was nothing organically wrong with him. McIntire said it time and time again. I can't imagine him ever wanting those records to see the light of day.

Sure. I don't see how anyone other than somebody in some official position could have gotten their hands on them. Well, it's one of those mysteries.

What kind of preparations did you make for Yalta?

Very little because I was just a passenger. I was told to appear at the train site. We went down to Norfolk, boarded the ship [USS Quincy]; it was a very pleasant journey. We got to Malta and then we had a succession of people coming in to see the President, including all the commanding officers of the British Admiralty who were in the Mediterranean. It was quite a party. We took off at night from Malta to fly to Russia--the Crimea.

The President's bed was perpendicular to the plane's axis. It was a big, wide bed. But he refused to have a safety belt. We were afraid that if there was a sudden stop or something, he would be tossed right out of the bed. [Michael F.] Reilly, [Chief of the White House Secret Service detail] and the rest of us talked it over before we took off and decided that when all the lights were out, I would creep in and position myself on one side of the bed so that if he fell out of bed he'd fall on me. We took off without any problems. The next morning, the President said "It's lucky I recognized you as you came in."

I understand that was quite a hair-raising flight.

Well it was in this sense. We had a lot of people going to Yalta--from the State Department, from the Chiefs of Staff. We must have had a hundred or more. The President's plane took only 12 people. We had to go over Greece, which was then occupied by the Nazis. Everyone was anxious to get on that plane because it was the only one with fighter escort.

Who was on the plane?

Anna Roosevelt, ADM [William D.] Leahy, RADM Wilson Brown, the President's naval aid, MGEN Edwin M. Watson. Jimmy Byrnes [James F.] was there and [Secretary of State] Stettinius, and the chiefs of staff.

What kind of welcome did you get when you landed in the Crimea?

It was not a very nice day, cold and rainy. But they had a guard of honor. [V.M.] Molotov, [Soviet Foreign Minister] was there, Stalin wasn't but a couple of other fairly high dignitaries were. They had a few refreshments for us.

It was quite a ride to Yalta--about a 5- or 6-hour ride by car. The roads weren't magnificent.

What did you see along the road?

The Germans had been there and it was pretty desolate. It was in February too and it was a wintry landscape with devastated houses and so forth.

Did you see any troops lining the roads?

Not when we went through. Churchill had written a note to the effect that if you had looked far and wide, you couldn't have chosen a worse climatic place than Yalta. They found that their palace had a lot of vermin, etc. Our Navy sent in a party to clean the place up and make it habitable.

When you got to Yalta, the Navy people had already cleaned it up so Livadia Palace was in good shape.

The Germans had taken all the metal--all the brass knobs had been taken off; it was pretty bare but it was clean. Once we were there they took good care of us. They would bring the food down to us, from God knows where. There certainly wasn't much around that place.

Did you go for trips outside the palace?

We explored Yalta itself. I had a roommate by the name of Ed Flynn [Edward J.] He was the boss of the Bronx. God knows what he was doing over there at Yalta. But he turned out to be a very nice person. The President would use the jeep to be driven around, he and Anna and [Averill] Harriman's [U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union] daughter. They would sort of scout around. There really wasn't much to see.

Did you get a chance to chat with any of these people, Harriman, for example?

No.

What about Churchill?

I had met him at Hyde Park, when he came for the [second] Quebec Conference. Yes, I met him the first time in Canada. He was short, and roly-poly, more or less--always with a cigar. We never discussed our family affairs or anything like that, but he was a very pleasant person to chat with.

What were your impressions of Stalin?

When Stalin came visiting, that was a performance. He came to Livadia, which was our palace, for the conferences. Stalin and his party were [staying] a couple of miles away. The route was lined with Soviet troops. When he got to our place, he got out of the car. There were four husky Russians surrounding him and they marched in. There were machine guns all around the place. He wasn't taking any chances. But he was quite a fellow. I saw him several times. He was relatively short and broad and a bit brusque. But he was an impressive person.

You were an observer, more or less.

I didn't have anything to do with the conference itself.

Yalta must have been extremely stressful for the President.

What they were doing was whipsawing him. [British Foreign Secretary Anthony] Eden would see him in the morning, Churchill in the afternoon. And this kept on going, and then there was the Conference at night. There was no rest for the poor man.

Of course, Churchill had his own agenda too. We are always given the impression that Churchill and Roosevelt had this very special relationship that they had maintained throughout the war and that they saw eye to eye. But this is not what was actually going on at Yalta; that's not the way it was at all, was it?

No. They had a deep appreciation for each other and when the President was going to run for the fourth term, Churchill volunteered to come over and politic for him. The President said, "Winnie, if you love me, stay home."

Yalta simplified was that Roosevelt wanted the United Nations and didn't want the old order to be reinstated after the war.

The President acted almost as a mediator between Churchill and

Stalin. Those two just couldn't get along. He maintained good relationships with both men until we got back home and the Russians began monkeying around with Poland. Then the President got very upset. He wrote a letter to Stalin protesting that this was not what had been agreed upon. But then he never saw him again.

Was Roosevelt in any kind of physical or emotional condition at that point in February 1945 to be dealing with the likes of Joe Stalin? Was he at his best?

The President was a very stubborn man in his own way. He saw the possibilities and they were not satisfactory--fighting over Berlin or over Poland. You just can't do that. He tried the best he could to get the Polish government in exile in London back into Poland, but no go.

Some historians have said that FDR was too trusting as far as Stalin was concerned.

As I understand it--I wasn't at this particular conference--but it was agreed that Poland was going to be a democratic nation with the government of exile included. The Russians just turned it around and put their own people in and then what could you do?

Some historians, when looking back at Yalta, have equated the very word with sellout. I, myself don't subscribe to that. If you looked at the situation, Soviet troops were already in Poland and the eastern part of Germany. If FDR had told Stalin to get out or else, Stalin would have said, "What are you going to do about it?"

Nothing. There was absolutely nothing. Most people don't understand that. It's the same thing with the story of Berlin. The Russians were already in there. Do you want to fight a war with Russia over Berlin? Our boys were terribly anxious to come home.

On the way home, after Yalta, the President had meetings with King Farouk, Haile Selassie, and King Saud. I understand the meeting with Saud was a real circus.

Well, you know how it happened? Our government sent a destroyer to Saudi Arabia to pick him up. He got aboard with his retinue and a flock of sheep and he ate only what they killed and cooked on the fantail of the destroyer. Saud was rather old and feeble and was helped aboard our ship. He and the President had a very pleasant chat. I was not there. They exchanged gifts. In fact, the Saudis gave gifts to most of us. I got an Arabian headdress and a vest watch with his inscription on it. I still have it. And he got an airplane

or something. These things are planted in my memory; its extraordinary. I could draw you a picture. Saud died soon after that. I have some pictures of that meeting taken by the Navy.

What was the President's health just prior to going to Yalta, because when he got back he certainly looked terrible.

There was no great change. There were a few time when I really got worried about him. He had an attack of gall bladder colic down at Baruch's place. And I'm no surgeon but with a few simple things, the thing subsided and that was that. When we got back we took an x-ray and he did have stones in his gall bladder. But there were one or two other situations. He had seen this movie about Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations. Wilson really got pummeled. The President said "By God, that's not going to happen to me!" And his blood pressure was [gesturing] about that high that night. Then it came down the next morning.

Another time out at Yalta, they were having a set-to, particularly about Poland. That night after the meeting he had something we call pulsus alternans which means that every alternate beat was less strong than the previous one. That's a very bad sign. But that too subsided after 12 hours.

What's that a precursor of?

It's a combination of heart and blood pressure. We certainly put the clamps on him by cutting down his activities for the next 24 hours and that too subsided. And on the way back he was fine. But he was so disturbed about Pa Watson's death.

I understand that General Watson was quite ill on that trip and died aboard the Quincy on the way home.

He had a serious prostate problem. He couldn't void. I had to catheterize him. Finally he had a cerebral hemorrhage and died within a couple of days. The President was pretty badly shaken up. They had been together for many years.

Did the President show any visible signs of upset?

No. He showed what you would if a good friend of yours passed on. He felt very sorry and reminisced a bit about their past and so forth.

What was the President's mood when he went on that last trip to Warm Springs in April 1945?

Actually, he was having a very pleasant time down there. He loved that place and spent a good deal of time there. He had his

two cousins with him, Daisy [Margaret] Suckley and Laura Delano. He was really having a ball. He took the car out driving around the countryside and so forth. They bent over backwards for him down there because he had been an old patient.

Of course, the thing that happened was so dramatic, so unexpected. As a matter of fact, I had seen him that morning and he was alright, nothing unusual. He enjoyed his breakfast and I went down to the pool, not that I liked swimming particularly but it was a pleasant place to go. And then the Secret Service came down and said that something had happened to the President. They took me right up to the cottage and he was unconscious. Arthur [Prettyman], the President's valet and I carried him into the bedroom, put him in bed and I did what I could, which wasn't much, and got in touch with Washington, with Ross McIntire. He notified Mrs. Roosevelt and Dr. Paullin, who originated in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Paullin jumped in his car and came over but by the time he got there, which was perhaps an hour or so, perhaps two hours, I was on the bed giving him artificial respiration, and then his heart stopped. His breathing stopped first and as I was pumping his chest Paullin came in just about that time. We put a shot of adrenalin into his heart--sometimes that starts the heart up again--nothing worked. And that was it.

But there was good evidence based on what you had seen already that it was a cerebral hemorrhage. You could tell by the dilation of the pupils?

Yes, by the usual things, the rigid neck, what they call a subarachnoid hemorrhage, I'm sure. When I was aware of the amount of damage that his brain had received from this episode, it would have been a tragedy if he had survived. But that did not limit in any way what we had tried to do. But the way I was feeling, "Oh God, this poor man has really had it."

It was a bolt out of the blue.

There's no way to predict anything like that? One would have suspected that his heart would have gone.

We were concerned about that all the time. That was the weak spot, but he had a significant blood pressure. We had brought it down somewhat, but under certain periods of stress, it would just shoot up. But there was no stress at that time. He was having his portrait painted by Mme. [Elizabeth] Shoumatoff. And he was perfectly relaxed going over papers from the White House.

You found evidence in your earlier examinations of

arteriosclerosis?

A combination of arterial change and the blood pressure which was a constant strain on the arteries. For some reason, one popped.

He never showed any signs of what you expect with hypertension, kidney problems?

His kidneys were excellent, and all the blood tests that we had done so far. These were the two areas--the heart and the blood pressure--and, of course, [with] a man of 62 or 63 something like this can happen but you just didn't think about it too much because he seemed so well. His memory was excellent. So, as I said, it was out of the blue.

You said in your 1970 article that had you had the modern drugs we now have to control hypertension, you might have been able to perform miracles.

Unquestionably, it would have had a beneficial effect on his blood pressure, which was, presumably, the initiating factor in his final illness. In the last 10 or 15 years we have been able to bring down that [pressure] down in practically everybody.

As you know, the President was the personification of a father to so many people in this country. I will never forget after he died in Warm Springs, the train. The last car of the train had lights, not spotlights but lights. And there were four servicemen standing at each corner of his casket--Navy, Army, Air Force, and Marine. Almost unbroken, even at that time of night, lining the rails from Georgia up to Washington, people were standing and crying to say nothing of the stations we went through. It reminded me of the same type of thing that happened when Lincoln died. It was an extraordinary, moving situation. I will never forget it.

What happened after the President's death? Where did your Navy career go after that?

I went back to my usual job at the hospital [Bethesda], which had not been interrupted; I had kept that all the way through, broken only by my visits to the White House and on these trips. For example, when I was due to go on a trip, the administrative officers knew I would get orders to accompany the President on such and such a date. When I left, the hospital, they knew the President was going. I would get orders each time from the Bureau [of Medicine and Surgery]. When I'd get back I would just take up where I'd left off at the hospital.

I kept that up for some months after the President died until I was finally discharged in the early part of '46. I returned here [New York] hopefully, to start my practice again after 4 years.