

INTERVIEW OF RONALD H. WALKER

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Ronald H. Walker has agreed to be interviewed regarding his service in the Interior Department with Secretary Hickel in the early months of the Nixon Administration. Mr. Walker, thank you very much for being available. Could you begin by telling us how you found yourself working at the Interior Department in early 1969.
- Walker: I had been a volunteer on the campaign for Vice President Nixon. I was a volunteer as an advance man. At the end of the campaign in 1968, a number of us were called back to Washington after he won to assist in the transition and with the inaugural. I basically handled or worked with others on the actual transition into the White House. My contact at that point was Tom Johnson, who had been a White House Fellow and is now President of the CNN, a terrific friend over the years. During the transition, a number of us volunteers were from the advance operation because Nixon became very attached to a lot of his advance men. He felt that we had helped him win. Advance work in those times was really a closeted, behind-the-scenes operation; no one really talked about it. It really got its jump start during the 1960 presidential campaign when President Kennedy had advance men. That were Dick Tuck, Jerry Bruno and those guys. When Kennedy came in, he sort of hid his advance men in various departments and agencies. Johnson did the same thing. Most of those individuals were kind of political junkies, you know, that wore the big hats, smoked big cigars, and talked about voting percentages and everything, whereas most of us with the Nixon group were really young chargers, and in many cases have gone on to be corporate CEOs. So there was a whole different kind of advance group. And as soon as Nixon won, he started recognizing some of the advance men. During the week of the inaugural, he announced that he was going to Europe. Which leads me to a story. There were four or five of us that ended up out of the 100+ that were asked if we had time (because none of us had jobs) if we would be willing to do this trip. So the company I was with, Hudson out of California, strong Republicans, said yes but we expect you back soon. Well I ended up doing the advance for London. President Nixon felt that it was important that he, as the newly elected President, go and pay his respects to many of these international leaders who had been friends to him when he was Vice President—De Gaulle was there, Churchill was still alive, Harold Wilson was Prime Minister at that point. He also went and saw the Pope. On Air Force One coming back, the President asked me to come up, and the President said, “I’d like to have you come to the White House and establish an advance office.”
- Willens: What was the approximate date of that trip to Europe if you can remember?
- Walker: February. He was sworn in on January 20, and three or four weeks later he made his trip to Europe. So it was within 60 days. There was no place in the White House. There had not been an advance office. I had to go talk to my wife, had to go talk to the company and everything, so in that interim when we got back from Europe, I went back to Texas and then to California, and it was at that point that John Whittaker (who was Secretary to the Cabinet, later became Under Secretary of the Interior under Morton) called and said we really need some help. He said we’ve got a Cabinet officer that has some problems with confirmation. And you may recall, when Nixon announced his Cabinet, it was during the transition, and we did it from the Shoreham, on live television.

- Willens: This was in December or January? Or was it after the inauguration?
- Walker: No, it was before he was sworn in. I don't remember the time frame. My memory tells me it was after Christmas. But he had his entire Cabinet there to be introduced. All had been confirmed except for one: Walter J. Hickel. And I'm reminded of a cartoon which I have at home somewhere, Herb Block capturing the President, because the theme was "Forward Together", and here was Nixon, and Herb Block had Nixon down to a T, with sloped nose and everything. Here's Nixon leading the parade with this banner that said "Forward Together", here's Mitchell and Stans and Finch and Bullett with Volpe and Laird, and about five or six yards behind is Hickel trying to get his pants on. It was terrific. He hadn't been confirmed. And that's when—who was the Senator from Alaska who was just giving him a ration of grief—can't think of his name right now. Senator Gravel?
- Willens: Who was presumably a Democrat.
- Walker: Democrat, hard nosed, and they'd fought each other over the years on everything. He gave Wally a real hard time. They took him on for his lack of environmental ethics is what they really came after him on.
- Willens: Was that the principal problem with his confirmation? He does recall that he had 23 or 24 people voting against him, and he recalls that most of them (in fact all but one) later on said they regretted their vote. But what were the issues?
- Walker: His lack of environmental ethics. That was the bottom line.
- Willens: What did ethics mean in that context?
- Walker: That he had violated Alaska's environment. He'd dumped in waters and raped and pillaged the countryside and everything, as Governor and as a private citizen. He was not the caliber and the type of person that ought to be the caretaker for America's treasures—the national parks, the land, the air and the seas and everything else. That was the bottom line. He wrote a book how to win confirmation in the United States Senate. And when you opened it was about 320 blank pages.
- Willens: That was not a serious writing effort?
- Walker: Blank pages! Anyway, there was another gentleman named Jim Hamilton who had been an advance man. The two of us were asked to go over to the Department of the Interior on an interim basis and help Secretary Hickel get his staffing taken care of. He had Carl McMurray who had come with him. Does that name ring a bell?
- Willens: No.
- Walker: He was his first Chief of Staff. Then a guy named Tom, I can't think of Tom's last name. He was from Spokane, Washington. He died of cancer. He came out of the bowels of the Department of the Interior. And that's when we found a guy named Dave Parker. I taught Dave how to advance and how to do scheduling. So I basically put together the environment around Secretary Hickel and helped him get his staffing, his schedule, advance operation, travel schedules, everything like that, and that was kind of my role. That's how I got involved with him.
- Willens: Had he been confirmed by the time you went over?
- Walker: Yes, he'd been confirmed. But he was still shaken and very disenchanted with Washington. And I think for all intent and purpose pissed off. I mean he was just kind of angry. Mrs. Hickel was the stabilizing factor, and he was so much fun to be with, and we all gravitated around him, so we were at his home often, and everything. He just sort of adopted us.

- Willens: Was it about the same time that Edgar Kaiser went over to Interior?
- Walker: Have you talked to him?
- Willens: No. He has been one of the very few people who has not been available to be interviewed.
- Walker: Yes. Edgar came over. He was assigned over there as a White House Fellow.
- Willens: He was a Democrat obviously, and the White House might well have felt that he should be . . .
- Walker: Out of there.
- Willens: . . . somewhere else.
- Walker: He caused Wally a lot of problems later on. Fast-forwarding for a minute, I am convinced that Edgar Kaiser was behind the leaking of that letter to Roberta Hornick at the *Washington Star* that he wrote the President.
- Willens: That's the famous "Cambodia letter"?
- Walker: I was in the White House at that point. I'm kind of jumping all around. It's a long time ago.
- Willens: No, go ahead, please.
- Walker: The letter was written privately. He called and talked to me about doing it. Dave Parker by this point had come from the Bureau of Reclamation down below, who was a landscape architect, and I brought him up, a bright young guy. He ended up coming to the White House after Hickel left, and now he runs the American (he might be somebody you want to talk to) Gas Association here in town.
- Willens: Really?
- Walker: And he was very close to Wally and still is. I'm surprised Wally didn't mention his name. They talked all the time. And if you need an introduction, I'll be happy to make that. But Dave Parker called and indicated that this letter was coming over and button down the hatches because he was taking on the President. Wally had five sons. His youngest one was gifted. And he and [Mrs. Hickel] were terribly concerned about the war, and those kids being drafted and going to Vietnam and getting killed for, you know, what is it all about. And at that point there were serious concerns in the White House as to what the war was all about, while it was winding down and Henry was flying all over the world negotiating, and "Peace at Hand" and everything else, and we've still got guys dying. And Wally was very concerned about that. So he wrote this letter in private to the President expressing his own personal feelings. That was fine. I'm sure some staff over there helped him draft the letter. They put it into a sealed envelope, and David made sure it was hand delivered. Before it ever got to Bob Haldeman it was on the front page of the *Washington Star* in a special edition. Wally had been invited (that was like a Thursday or a Friday, and President Nixon had these Sunday morning sessions where he had church services in the White House and he would invite Dr. Peale and Billy Graham and other members of the lay community to come and speak), and Wally and [Mrs. Hickel] were invited for that Sunday. By Friday noon his office had been called and he was disinvited. And shortly thereafter, Malek went over (he was in charge of White House personnel), Hickel had resigned, Malek went over and fired the rest of the staff and did it that morning. All a very bloody scene. That night we all kind of rallied over at Wally's house. It was kind of a sad environment and everything. I remember somebody called on the phone and said, "Do

you have Sinatra?" Ironically, Sinatra having passed away this week. And Wally said yes and he was told, "Well play 'My Way'." And that entire evening, we kept playing "I Did It My Way" all night long. I mean there were tears and everything else. And I was in the White House. I'd gone back to the White House, and yet we still stayed close. And that was the demise of Walter Hickel.

Willens: Do you remember . . .

Walker: Kaiser was the guy that leaked that letter.

Willens: Well Kaiser appears to have left Interior sometime in the fall of 1969, in October or thereabouts.

Walker: He was there when the letter was written.

Willens: I understand that the letter was written in approximately May of 1970, although I haven't gone into Hickel's book and other records to check the precise date. Hickel in fact didn't leave until later after the 1970 election, although everyone knew he was on his way out. There was some concern (I've heard it referred to) some political concern that removing him before the election would not be advantageous to the Republican Party.

Walker: I don't remember that.

Willens: But your recollection is that he was really in effect dismissed immediately after the letter became public. And you believe that the letter was written at the time when Kaiser was still in the Department.

Walker: Kaiser may not have been on staff, or he may no longer have been a White House Fellow, but he was around. He was there. I know that for a fact. Now, at some point while I'm with him, I'm still being called back to the White House because I've got this other role, and I'm doing all kinds of things there at the Department of the Interior. My title read Assistant to the Secretary for International Affairs. I never figured it out. But it was a position they just gave me. They got us on the payroll. At some point, I'm still going out and doing stuff for the President, doing advance work and everything. On one of those trips, we went to the Redwoods. Mrs. Johnson came, and we named one of the groves there the Lady Bird Johnson Grove. So therefore, I got Wally on that trip. While Wally was a good politician and stuff, he really didn't handle himself very well, because he was kind a gunslinger that the White House looked upon as somebody that just was off the reservation most of the time. Because he said what he thought and he oftentimes blew up and was just Wally. I mean you had to know him and everything. But Haldeman didn't like that, Ehrlichman didn't like that, John Whittaker didn't like that, and these are the guys over at the White House, with what they call the Gestapo mentality and everything else. But that White House had never been run better and has never been run better since, in terms of how it all worked. And I'll argue with the best of them on that. But by the same token it was a tough crowd. Wally didn't fit into that tough crowd. And he wasn't an ass-kiss like Mel Laird and John Volpe and Romney and a lot of those guys that had been moderate politicians. He spoke his mind. I want to say it was in and around that trip that Wally started talking to me about the fact that there had never been a Secretary or a President going into Micronesia.

Willens: What trip are you referring to now?

Walker: The Lady Bird Johnson trip, when he made that trip with the President. He was on Air Force One with the President.

Willens: And so . . .

- Walker: I don't know exactly, I cannot remember how the dialogue started. But it got to a point where it had gotten pretty serious, and he said maybe you should go and do what we call a preadvance . . .
- Willens: This is Hickel talking to you?
- Walker: Yes.
- Willens: Did you get the impression that he had discussed with the President the percolating problem there and that the President instructed him to go?
- Walker: No. I got the impression that he had talked to Kissinger and/or one of Kissinger's aides. Whether that was Haig or whoever it was, it was somebody on the NSC Council. But it was only after the fact. I think Wally picked this off as something there with the territories. And I think that your notes showed that there was a lady that ran territories that I did not recall. I don't remember that. I didn't have much to do with her. So I got asked to go do this trip. Because of my connections in the White House, I went to Don Hughes who ran the Military Aides Office and started putting some wheels in motion about getting a plane out of Andrews so that in fact if the Secretary decided to go do this trip, we could put together a fairly sizable group—with the Press Corps, traveling staff and everything else—and do it right. Well, long story short, when we took the Secretary of the Interior's budget, which was whatever it was, and when the trip was over, there wasn't any more in it. So that's what we did with it. But I've got to tell you something. As an advance man in those days, I didn't care about how much money it was going to cost. Just go get the job done. I don't think that could happen in this day and age.
- Willens: You went out there in advance at least once?
- Walker: Twice. And I can't remember whether it was the first trip or the second trip that Kaiser was with me. I think Kaiser probably lobbied Wally or Carl McMurray or whoever at that point. Then at some point, Carl McMurray, who had a drinking problem . . .
- Willens: Who was McMurray now?
- Walker: He was his first Chief of Staff.
- Willens: Oh yes.
- Walker: Where he came from I can't tell you. Little short guy. I want to say the other guy was Tom Kelly, but I'm sorry, I can't remember that. Then he brought in this Chief of Staff that had been his Chief of Staff when he was Governor of Alaska after Carl got fired or moved out or whatever the case might be. That all happened about the time that I'm leaving and going back to the White House. So his whole operation kind of changed dramatically.
- Willens: When was it that you recall going back to the White House?
- Walker: I think I went to the White House probably the first part of 1970.
- Willens: Did you think that Hickel had made up his mind to visit Micronesia personally before he sent you out, or did he make the decision based on the report you brought back?
- Walker: The report I brought back. Because when I went out, because of it being CINCPAC, with the support of Don Hughes, and at that point General Haig was in and around, I had a lot of contacts on my own that were helpful to Secretary Hickel and the Department of the Interior. So the very first stop that I made was in Hawaii, Honolulu, and the very first person that I went to see was Admiral McCain. He was the CINCPAC commander. At the time his son was a POW, that's Senator John McCain as we speak. And his dad was a piece of work. His dad was no bigger than John himself, skinny as a rail, but he'd wear

those big admiral bars and everything and he'd smoke a cigar, I'd swear to God it was as long as a leg. And he'd sit on the edge of the desk and he had that big cigar and everything else. He said, "Ron, anything you want." So I had a military airplane, I got military support when I got over there. Edgar and I went to every island. I mean I went to Truk, Yap, to places I don't think anyone's ever been before except maybe a Peace Corps worker or a missionary. And it was all done by seaplanes. I don't remember how long I was over there. But I really drank with these Micronesians. I met with the High Commissioner who was a political hack. I can't remember what his name was.

Willens: The outgoing High Commissioner was someone from Hawaii named Norwood, but Johnston was the one that flew out on the plane with Hickel to be sworn in out there. So you're thinking of the outgoing. There was an Assistant Commissioner named Screen.

Walker: That's who it was. Joe Screen?

Willens: Joe Screen was sort of an outspoken individual.

Walker: Yes. But it was informative. And I recall him at another time in my life, as a young boy, I had grown up in India, and went to an American missionary school in India. My father was an agricultural specialist who was the first American picked after the Second World War to go to India and help them start feeding themselves. Chester Bowles was the Ambassador. So I'd grown up in India, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon. I'd seen tech reps, I'd seen hacks, guys that couldn't make it anyplace else, and that's what Joe Screen was. He was a typical guy that you'd find in Baghdad, Beirut, India, that got a job and was there. That's what Joe Screen was all about. But he knew those people, he made great introductions for us, and I can remember visiting with members of the Legislature. And talking long hours into the evening about their independence, the problems they had had on Kwajalein. And I came back with all this information. I'm not a State Department functionary or anything like that. I'm just a regular guy that went out there and then reported back that we've got a real problem in Micronesia, Mr. Secretary.

Willens: What was the mission that he gave you when you went out?

Walker: To find out what was going on and to get a real good feel as to what was happening out there and to come back with recommendations as to what he and the Department of the Interior and the United States government ought to be doing.

Willens: And did you make an effort to visit each of the six districts?

Walker: All of them.

Willens: Including Palau and so forth.

Walker: Yes. And there ought to be a record of that somewhere.

Willens: I've not been able to generate that in response to our FOIA request of years ago. So that's one reason that I was anxious to talk to you.

Walker: You know, I don't know where, but I bet you a \$100 bill that I've got that file somewhere down in my basement.

Willens: So you're saving the materials from your political career?

Walker: No, not really. I took them from the White House with me, and then from the White House to the Department of the Interior, and then from the Department of the Interior I just started carrying this stuff around. I've been waiting to give it to the Nixon Library, and Nixon died, so they've got all of his stuff so they don't want mine. I can't throw it away.

- Willens: I don't want to burden you additionally, but if there comes a time when you can lay your hands on anything, I would be glad to come over and take a look at it and copy it.
- Walker: Interestingly enough, as we speak, my wife is trying to get me to, and she's doing some of it, because we are trying to give a lot of it to the Library and get rid of it, because if I retire and go someplace else, I don't want to be taking all of this stuff with me. Why don't we just stop right here and see where we are?
- Willens: Well, I am interested in what you heard from the people that you spoke to in the various districts. I assume that you met members of the Congress of Micronesia for example.
- Walker: Yes. I can't remember the names, I'm sorry.
- Willens: Did you formulate any impressions about the differences among the districts as you visited them?
- Walker: I can't say that. I can recall generalities that would have affected the entire region, and those were very similar in most cases. Except for Saipan and Guam, the rest of them were almost incestuous, serious alcohol problems. I can remember one thing that stood out, when I was thinking about you coming in. I can remember seeing dollar bills that had never been off-island. They were the oldest, dirtiest dollar bills I'd ever seen in my life, and I'd grown up in third-world countries. That sort of summarized my attitude when I left there. We've got a group of islands that the United States is responsible for and they have been completely been forgotten. And I think that was the message I brought back. And I said to the Secretary, "We've got to do something about this." And I think my impassioned plea was, "You ought to go see these people." And that's what generated the trip.
- Willens: One of the people that remained in the Interior Department down in the Office of Territories was George Milner, who had been there for years during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations and indeed back in the Eisenhower Administration. He and some others probably prepared this staff report that's in the book of documents that I gave you. Were you aware either from those materials or other conversations that in fact there had been a major effort in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations to put additional funds there and try to improve circumstances in the Trust Territory?
- Walker: Yes, and I think the general attitude was if funds were made available, they went to the wrong people and never got to where they should have been to help. I do recall that. I don't know that I have any specifics as to whether in fact those monies were actually given or moved into that area, but it was obvious from having been there that, if they were, they were terribly misused or ill-advisedly used in certain areas. Then you have to worry about how far down the line it really got, who got it in their pockets and stuff, because there was evidence of that. I think for the most part I sensed that there was graft. You'd go from one meeting to another meeting and another faction would be bad-mouthing this faction, and it's not any different I guess in any facet of society.
- Willens: Did you have any input from local people in the Marianas that their hopes were for a future relationship with the United States?
- Walker: Yes. And I think (if my memory tells me) that that was exactly what they wanted. There were people that wanted their own autonomy. I can remember one tough meeting in Kwajalein. What we would do is when the plane landed, we were met by a delegation. I don't know whether Joe Screen's office got the message around or whatever, but we were expected. And Edgar and I would go in and we would meet with the island leaders. There would be a table in a schoolroom or whatever the case may be, and one of the

leaders would sit next to me, and it would be Edgar and myself, and then we kind of took turns, basically bringing the Secretary's greetings and the President of the United States' greetings, and we're here on a fact-finding mission, that's exactly how we described it, and we would like to hear about your concerns and your interests. And then we would take copious notes during the time, and then we would translate those notes, and that really became our file to go back and brief the Secretary and at that point Russ Train who was the Under Secretary. Russ had not necessarily been in favor of any of this.

Willens: Why was that?

Walker: I hate to be on the record with some of this stuff.

Willens: Well, I have heard from others that the Secretary and the Under Secretary didn't communicate too well.

Walker: I'll try to be as diplomatic as I can. Russ Train was an Eastern Establishment snob—tweed coats, patches on the elbow, old worn shirts and ties, and no pun against any former fashion elitist. Wally Hickel, tough, hard-nosed, mean son of a bitch, grown up in the United States, gone to Alaska, made his fortune, worked his butt off, boxed, he was just a street fighter and just everything else. The two of them were like oil and water. I think when they put Russ there that they probably thought Russ could sort of keep a handle on him. Nobody was going to keep a handle on Wally Hickel then, probably not now. Boyd Gibbons, who was the Deputy Under Secretary, was Russ's deputy, tried to be the emissary, and because of Boyd and my relationship, there was some continuity between Russ's office and the Secretary's office by virtue of our friendship. I was down in Russ's office a lot because Wally would have staff meetings and not invite him. So then I'd go down and debrief him as to what was going on, and you could see the tension building. So I think anything Wally wanted to do Russ was going to be against, and he went behind his back and went to his pals in that Eastern Establishment group that was there.

Willens: I'm not part of that.

Walker: Me either.

Willens: While you were conducting these fact-finding missions, Mr. Train was participating in something called the Under Secretaries Committee that in late March began to consider what the new federal policy ought to be with respect to Micronesia. It looks from the records and the interviews as though that effort was very separate from what you were doing as a way of advising Secretary Hickel. Do you recall hearing anything about the Under Secretaries Committee's deliberations?

Walker: Yes. I think what we did, and this all came after Wally's trip.

Willens: After Wally's trip?

Walker: My memory is, and I didn't find anything that would contradict that in there. Is that not yours?

Willens: No. I may not be making myself very clear. Let me start this way. Both State and Interior in February of 1969 and early March started being concerned about Micronesia for different reasons, and they prepared papers to advise their newly-appointed leaders as to the situation. Out of that emerged the first Presidential review of Micronesian policy since Kennedy did it back in 1962.

Walker: And that happened in 1969.

- Willens: In 1969. And it happened in fact as Secretary Hickel was flying out. The Presidential decision was made and communicated by Kissinger that (1) the trip could go forward; (2) it articulated what policy he should announce there; and (3) it approved this idea of an action program. So there were deliberations in March or April before he went out in the first day or two of May. So the question is—did you and Kaiser have any input to these Under Secretaries Committee deliberations?
- Walker: No. The only thing I did was that I debriefed on more than one session Russ Train and Frank Bracken and Boyd Gibbons at some length and I may have missed somebody else. But it was kind of the Under Secretary's little group down below that—when I came back from any of these Presidential trips—would sit me down just like the CIA and then suck me like a prune, that's what they did there. So I shared everything with them at that point, but I never made any official or formal presentation to any State or Interior committee. Once we got the trip planned, and there were all kinds of problems. Was it going to go, was it not going to go? Should we use the airplane? And I can't remember all the facts and details. Don't remember that.
- Willens: Let me just interrupt. Was there any opposition to the Secretary making this trip?
- Walker: Yes.
- Willens: Where did that come from?
- Walker: The White House, I think State at that point, that was Bill Rogers. I don't know that Rogers so much was involved in the process.
- Willens: The Under Secretary was Elliot Richardson at the time.
- Walker: Elliot Richardson. I don't know. I can't remember that.
- Willens: When you came back then and reported after the two trips that you recall making to the Secretary, as I understand it, you recommended that he go out there personally?
- Walker: Yes. And I can remember him asking me to work on the White House to see if we can't pull this trip off. And that was really the last thing that I did for him before I left. So I went to the White House and started lobbying for the Secretary to go make this trip. I can remember doing it with Herb Klein, I can remember doing it with Jim Clausen, with Zeigler, with Buchanan, and everybody was supportive that Wally was the best person to do it, because of Interior and the territories.
- Willens: Secretary Hickel recalls that ultimately he did have a conversation with the President about it, and the President said something in essence that you've lived in a colony all your life, why don't you go out there and take a look.
- Walker: I did that.
- Willens: Does that square with your recollection?
- Walker: Yes. It does. Had you not told me that, I don't know that I would have remembered it. I do know that he met with the President, I do know that the President was supportive of him doing this, and that was the final outcome. I think some of the lobbying that we had done counteracted what was either going on at State or whatever else, and that was way above my pay grade at the time.
- Willens: How did it come about that he was authorized to announce publicly for the first time that the United States wanted to have a future relationship with Micronesia? Do you have any recollection as to what the purpose of his trip was?

- Walker: Yes, I do. And I hope I'm correct in this. It's just one man's opinion, and I've tried to think about this in reading your book. To the best of my recollection, I was already over there when Wally met with the President.
- Willens: You were already over in Saipan?
- Walker: Yes. We had to do two things. When we left Washington, we had to stop in San Francisco, and I'm going to put my advance man's hat on, because this is what my job was, and then from there to Hawaii, and they were briefed by Admiral McCain and his crowd, overnighed at Hickam, and then they flew to Guam, where he addressed the Territorial Legislature. So we had a rally at the airport for his arrival. There had never been a Secretary of Interior there. I started getting in those days you called them twixes, and now you'd call them fax, but it wasn't a fax, it was a twix, about a Presidential message. My memory says that there was actually a Presidential statement about Wally Hickel's visit or his upcoming visit, and the President was supportive of that. Wally got the message that he was to be delivered a message either from Kissinger or wherever it came, so he came with a mandate. One of the reporters, I want to say it was Time magazine . . .
- Willens: I don't know.
- Walker: I'd looked in it for some of your articles. I saw the Christian Science Monitor. I didn't see any of the magazines.
- Willens: No, that's correct. I don't have all of them actually.
- Walker: You should go into Lexis/Nexis to look that up.
- Willens: Yes. Some of that stuff's not on, going back that far.
- Walker: The Secretary at that time maybe was Saltonstall, right?
- Willens: At one point I think so.
- Walker: I think it was his son that was a correspondent that was deathly opposed and angry about this trip for God knows whatever reason, and I tried to think. There was something between him and Kaiser, and I'm not sure what that was all about. Because Kaiser was debriefing some of these reporters behind the scenes, which was a Democratic-Johnson kind of thing that they did. Whereas if we'd done that in the Nixon Administration, they'd have fired us. Faster than greased lightning. They had people that briefed, that knew what they were briefing about, everybody else keep your mouth shut. That was not the Johnson style. And Kaiser was doing this. So Kaiser was pumping out some stuff. I can remember that there were some stories that were flying around that got Wally in trouble by virtue of some of these leaks. We attributed that to Kaiser. On this trip, Kaiser was a disaster. It was kind of like, I'd say Edgar, please, would you just shut up right now. You're on territorial grounds that we've not been allowed to talk about. Policy and stuff like that. I mean we were taking notes, not making policy there, and he would stick his nose into things.
- Willens: That was during the fact-finding trips or also when the Secretary came out?
- Walker: Well when he was out there, I don't know that. My memory tells me that he was still mucking around.
- Willens: Well, do you remember meeting a former Congressman named Neiman Craley?
- Walker: Yes. I do remember that.
- Willens: He was in charge of public affairs at the time.
- Walker: Right.

- Willens: Was there any consideration given by you as an advance man to offering the Micronesians a small amount of money in order to show up at the airport?
- Walker: Yes.
- Willens: Did you in fact do that?
- Walker: No.
- Willens: Do you recall any impression from Craley and others in the Trust Territory government as to the desirability of the Secretary coming out?
- Walker: It's my recollection that everybody was very much in favor of a visit from him. They would have liked to have had the President, but Secretary Hickel was a good alternative. I don't know that I ever sensed any kind of a problem there.
- Willens: What is your recollection about Hickel's delivery of the message and the reception that he got?
- Walker: His delivery was not very good. The message was kind of discombobulated. And I don't know that the reception was all that great.
- Walker: Had you helped in preparing . . .
- Walker: No. I don't do remarks. I will tell you this. We had a crowd at the airport in Guam. I did not pay for that. It was not very big by my standards. We had a little bit of a crowd on the motorcade route, but I had thrown out handbills and I had tried to build a crowd.
- Willens: This was on Guam or Saipan?
- Walker: On Guam. Then I had to make arrangements to move different airplanes. Some of them wanted to fly over Tinian, which is where Enola Gay and everybody else had taken off from for Hiroshima, some of them wanted to make a tour of that while they were there. So some of the Press Corps went and did that. Then we moved Secretary Hickel over to Saipan. And I'm going to tell you a couple of stories real quick. We got over there, and we stayed at a place called the Royal Taga, trying to do this in a Presidential style, which is what I was up to at that point. It was not easy, let me tell you. They didn't have a suite. But I took the switchboard, which was a dumb thing to have done. First of all, we arrived. And I had taken, I don't know, maybe 25 or 30 cars out of a junkyard, and taken them and parked them on blocks near the airport, so as we came out of the airport, they only had one convertible on Saipan, it had a broken windshield, I'll never forget this as long as I lived. So we came out of the airport and everything, we had a band out there, these people were dancing, it was a zoo. It was awful. So they come off, and Hickel's got a garland around his neck, and [Mrs. Hickel] has her garland. They greet the committee and everything, and we go through the crowd, and they get in the motorcade, and I've got a motorcade now, and I've got broken-down busses. I mean it was the sorriest looking motorcade you've ever seen in your life. But I'm got Wally and [Mrs. Hickel] riding in this convertible. And as we came out of the airport, look over here, there are all these cars that are parked over there, so the press is saying they have a hell of a crowd. We probably had 200 or 300 people out there, and I didn't pay for any of them. We bussed a lot of them in from various parts of the island so they had transportation. And as we're going through town, I had certain signs, you know "Welcome Mr. Secretary". And here they are, and people are sitting on their porch, spitting betel nut juice, and Wally and [Mrs. Hickel] are waving at people going through. So we arrive at the hotel. We take them up to their room and everything. I'd gone down to the switchboard and said I want all the calls going into Secretary Hickel to come through my room. And I had some local schoolteacher that

was helping me set up the advance office, so any phone calls that came in, messages or anything like that. So I went to bed. Whatever we did, I don't remember that. My phone rang early in the morning, and it was Mrs. Hickel. She didn't know it was me, and I didn't want her to know it was me. She said, "This is Mrs. Hickel and I'd like to order some breakfast." So I changed my voice and started like talking like them. And I took the order, and then I went down to the kitchen, got the order for them, and had them to deliver it. But by mid-morning I changed that phone system back to where it was going straight to the switchboard. I told that story to [Mrs. Hickel] years later. God, she laughed. She had no earthly idea that was me. But that was how she arrived.

Willens: Some of the newspaper reports state that there were about 3,000 people at the airfield, that it was the largest crowd ever assembled. Then subsequently at the speech, and I think what was the Mt. Carmel School auditorium, there was a crowd of 3,000 or 3,500.

Walker: Being an advance man, there are all kinds of ways to make crowds look larger. One of the rules of thumb is, you go to a room that is a lot smaller than the crowd you expect, and that's what Mt. Carmel was. We had people outside, and it's very easy to tell somebody yes, here's the police commissioner right here, and police commissioner, how many people do you think is out there, and he'd say oh, about 3,000, 3,000+, and he'd tell that to a reporter, the reporter didn't know any difference. We may have had 800 to 1,000 at the airport. I know that they reported 2,500 or 3,000. They'd talk about crowds along the motorcade route. When you couldn't see out of the bus, you know, but Hickel, God, he told that story . . .

Willens: Which story? About the motorcade?

Walker: I didn't tell him that until years later. He'd been gone, we were up in Alaska . . .

Willens: The cars alongside the road were basically junk cars that were immobile?

Walker: No. Well, what I had done is I'd taken a parking lot, or a parking field, and I'd put real parked cars in front, and behind that is where I put all those junkyard cars and everything like that up on blocks, so it looked like there was this huge crowd of cars out there, so there's got to be a lot of people at the airport, right?

Willens: Absolutely. When you reported back to Hickel about the desirability of a trip, were you thinking primarily that there was a need for just more federal attention to programs, to education or health, or were you thinking in terms of political status and trying to address that issue?

Walker: I think there was a quid pro quo there from a standpoint that we needed to show a presence. It's one thing to do it from Washington, which had been done all along, and their basic message to me was, all we get are words. All we get are promises and stuff. Nothing ever happens. And as a result of that, show us something of significance. And I came back saying the significance is going to be you're going. That would be the greatest message you'll ever extend to the Micronesians. To have something when you get there to give them.

Willens: There was something called an action program developed in Interior before he went out, and he summarized it in his remarks, involving such things as the use of the Seabee units to build infrastructure, more Micronesians in the government, improvement of salary levels. Did you have any understanding of where that action program came from?

Walker: No.

- Willens: Were you aware at the time that you visited out there that the Micronesians had their own Future Status Commission that was recommending something called free association?
- Walker: Yes, I was.
- Willens: Did you have any conversations with Micronesians about those recommendations, and did you think that they were inconsistent with what the United States wanted at the time?
- Walker: I don't remember.
- Willens: Some of the newspaper articles make reference to the preliminary reports that this Commission was going to recommend, although its report wasn't going to be official until July or so of 1969. Secretary Hickel is quoted in one of the *New York Times* articles as saying well, there are some very interesting recommendations in that report.
- Walker: I don't recall that.
- Willens: But you don't have any personal recollection today as to what you heard about these political status alternatives?
- Walker: No, and when I read that I wracked my brain to think. There were those that we talked to that wanted their own status. They didn't want to be associated with America any more, with the United States. The United States government had not really done well by them. I can remember there was one very frank discussion in Yap, where it got a little heated. Actually that happened more than once. I mean there were some pretty heated exchanges. Then we'd all go down to a local pub or tavern or whatever, a grass thatch roof, and drink beer. So it wasn't a hostile environment, but there was anger. And we were the first people that were there on any kind of official status from the United States government to rant and rave at. That's kind of how I looked at it. I felt that part of my role was to take those spears and arrows and everything like that and regurgitate that back when I got back. They're hostile, you know, they're not happy. They feel like they've been used. That was the general attitude I came back with.
- Willens: The end result of Hickel's discussion of status was to invite to Micronesians to come to Washington later that year to work out legislation with respect to their future status. Did you have any role at all in the discussions that preceded that set of Micronesian negotiations?
- Walker: Other than a number of the members of that delegation had been actually my counterparts that I'd worked with. At that point I think I was in the White House, and I was invited to a reception with them. They brought their wives. As a matter of fact, years later one of the daughters is still in and around town. I see her fairly often. She worked there in the Territories office. I'm trying to think of what her name is. Her father was one of the big guys over there.
- Willens: Peter Coleman's daughter?
- Walker: Fred Radewagen. Thank you very much. That's exactly. What was her name?
- Willens: I don't know. I just met her for the first time actually. I interviewed Fred a week or so ago.
- Walker: Peter Coleman's daughter, that's right.
- Willens: There is reference both in the excerpt from Secretary Hickel's book that I gave you and in other documents to an encounter that he had with Dr. Kissinger upon his return from

Micronesia. Did you have any conversations either with Kissinger or Hickel about their discussions with respect to Micronesia?

Walker: No, at least not to my recollection. It would have been Wally's style to have shared that with me. I was going to say that Wally was kind of hot and cold. He would be excited about having a chance to talk to Dr. Kissinger, and then in the next breath, Kissinger had slighted him. There was a not a warm, fuzzy relationship there. And of course, you've got to know Henry too. And I know Henry not as well as I know Wally, but I know Henry pretty well. The only way to handle Henry was to pull practical jokes on him. Then he wouldn't know what to do. Tie his shoestrings together.

Willens: Yes. I do want to interview him at some point, but I think I probably have to interview some of his staff people first. Did you ever encounter someone named John Holdridge?

Walker: Sure. I know John really well.

Willens: I'm trying to locate him. He's in Bethesda, but his telephone number is unlisted. I have to try to get a number from somebody who knows him.

Walker: Do you know Dick Solomon, Richard Solomon?

Willens: Actually I think I do.

Walker: Solomon would know how to get hold of him. What was the other guy who was with Henry all those years and everything? Not Holdridge. A little short fat guy. Oh God, I see him around town all the time. What the hell's his name?

Willens: He was there during the early years of the Nixon Administration?

Walker: Yes. He was on Kissinger's staff. Kissinger had Winston Lord, John Holdridge, Richard Solomon was just a really young guy.

Willens: There was someone before Holdridge who seemed to have the Trust Territory assignment, but I forget his name at the moment. But I do have documents with it. I'll pursue that.

Walker: I'm trying to think who was on that trip with Hickel who stayed. He had representatives from other departments with us on that trip I'm thinking of.

Willens: Did he?

Walker: Yes. There was somebody from State on that trip, but I'll be damned if I can remember who it was.

Willens: Well what was your assessment of the trip in terms of serving the purposes that it set out to achieve?

Walker: When it was all over, I thought it was terrific. I thought that he had done well. You know, just to meet Wally, to be in his presence and everything else, there is enthusiasm and excitement around him. He brings enthusiasm. He overstates certain things, and I'm not saying that he did in this case, but there's just nothing not to be enjoyable about being around him. So to put the trip in that context, I think he made lots of friends on behalf of the United States, and I think he left them with the feeling that something was going to be done. I just don't recall whether it was done or not, I just don't remember.

Willens: Did you ever hear later in the year in October 1969 about the first round of negotiations and the dispute with respect to limiting U.S. control over land in Micronesia? Is that an issue that you remember hearing about?

Walker: No.

- Willens: Did you hear anything about the success of the initial negotiations between the Micronesians and the Interior Department delegation?
- Walker: Yes. What my initial thoughts were in that regard is that it was sort of not a real success, but not a failure. My memory tells me the Micronesians came expecting a lot more than they were able to leave with, or their expectations were higher than what was actuality. That's about all I can recall. I don't know whether it was land as much as it was more economic support, economic aid.
- Willens: There was some emphasis by the Micronesians on having their own constitutional convention to write their own constitution, and the United States seemed to have been reluctant in that time to permit that.
- Walker: I do remember that.
- Willens: The United States position in late 1969 was to try to bring all of Micronesia under U.S. sovereignty as a unit governed by an organic act like applied to Guam and the Virgin Islands.
- Walker: Right.
- Willens: In part the Interior Department's support of that approach resulted from its concern about Congressman Aspinall and his influence over policy toward the territories. Did you have any personal dealings with Congressman Aspinall?
- Walker: No, only staff. There were three or four Congressional staff guys that went with us on that trip as well, and Aspinall's one of those was Charlie Leppert. Does that name ring a bell?
- Willens: Yes, it does.
- Walker: Charlie was on that trip. As a matter of fact, that was the first time I'd ever met Charlie I think. Have you talked to him?
- Willens: No.
- Walker: Charlie's around here in town. I haven't seen him recently. But we're all getting old, you know that?
- Willens: Yes, there is that problem. He had another staffer who was very well known out there named Taylor, but he had died.
- Walker: Didn't Wayne Aspinall pass away as well?
- Willens: Yes, he has.
- Walker: All the good guys.
- Willens: Yes.
- Walker: We just lost Bebe Rebozo, Sinatra.
- Willens: Yes. We could do a chorus of "My Way" here on tape.
- Walker: That's a good story, though. I already told you that.
- Willens: That's a great story. What was your understanding as to Aspinall's influence on the Interior Department?
- Walker: Big. He and Allen Bible and Julia Butler Hansen, whew! Don't tangle with him. Aspinall. Mention his name, and the fear of God would fly right up and down the halls.

- Willens: Both Hickel and Harrison Loesch recall that on a personal level they could deal very effectively. Is that your recollection?
- Walker: Yes. I look back on those years as when you could deal with the principal, the Member, oftentimes the deals were always very pleasant. It was when you stepped one step lower, and I guess it's no different today, maybe it's even more rampant. But you got the staff, then it got all kinds of problems and stuff. Hickel had no problem with any Member of the House and the Senate, maybe Gravel and some others. He and Ted Stevens had a falling out, and they never have resolved that, and yet Wally's the one that gave Ted his start. And you get a couple of pops in Ted and he'll tell you that. But there was some rancor later on. Ted had supported someone else to be Governor, and when Wally went back there and ran again, I think that's when some of the problems started happening. And Harrison, wasn't Harrison in charge of congressional relations at the time?
- Willens: I don't think he was officially. I think there's a Mr. Bracken who is referred to.
- Walker: No, Frank was general counsel.
- Willens: He was general counsel at the time?
- Walker: Yes.
- Willens: I've seen the name Melick as somebody who may have been a lawyer involved, and he is no longer available. Well the whole thrust of these early negotiations was to try to keep the Trust Territory together as a unit. That proved to be unsuccessful over time, and my question to you is whether you at the time had any judgment as to whether that was a viable achievable objective?
- Walker: Again, I'm on the fringes of all of this, but my recollection is that it wasn't so much piling sandbags in Micronesia as it was trying to ward off a major fallout between the leadership of Micronesia and their plebiscite, the organic act that they were working off of, and trying to bring them back into the family of man as far as the United States concerned. They were pretty far off the reservation from the way they were going. At least from Hickel's standpoint, I think the trip helped ease some of that tension that we experienced and got most of the slings and arrows exposed. And yet I think you'll find in some of the dialogue and stuff like that that I was applauded by virtue of my openness and candor and the thousands of miles that I flew going to these chicken shit islands. I mean, it was a lot of work, and being open and candid and receiving information, knowing that I was fact-finding, going back, that helped Hickel on his trip. Then I was told later by Secretary Train and others that that had gone a long ways to help us with our relationships there.
- Willens: Did you ever go back? Specifically, did you ever go back during the time that you were at Interior and the White House?
- Walker: No.
- Willens: So you never went back after being there during Hickel's visit?
- Walker: No. Well, that's not true. I went to Guam three or four times on our way into China . . .
- Willens: Was this with the President?
- Walker: Yes. But not in a capacity of any official capacity.
- Willens: Were you with President Nixon then when he stopped off in Guam in I think August 1969 on his way to, was it China?
- Walker: No. He was on his way to see the splashdown of the Apollo 11 astronauts.

- Willens: That's right. I see that arrangements had been made for a brief meeting between President Nixon and some of the Micronesian leaders. Had you heard? Were you aware that such a meeting was going to take place?
- Walker: I was in India.
- Willens: At the time.
- Walker: I was doing the advance in Bangkok, India and lower Pakistan.
- Willens: Do you know whether Secretary Hickel ever personally reported on his visit to Micronesia to the President?
- Walker: I don't. What my memory is is that we tried desperately to have that meeting transpire, and we couldn't get past Kissinger, so the message was delivered to Kissinger, who in turn I assume delivered it to the President. But that's kind of the way Haldeman and Kissinger ran the White House. Cabinet officers, unless you were Bill Rogers, and eventually Kissinger cut Rogers out, unless you were John Mitchell, Warren Stans, Bob Finch, I mean Laird couldn't get in, Volpe couldn't get in, Hickel couldn't get in. It was that closed circle around him. You went through staff.
- Willens: Did you have any dealings with Laird or other Defense Department people in connection with what they wanted to achieve in Micronesia?
- Walker: Not to my recollection.
- Willens: So by the fall of 1969 you were basically back at the White House but occasionally doing work over at Interior?
- Walker: I think by the fall of 1969 I probably had left Interior. I don't know exactly the time and everything, and it was almost full time at the White House. When did we go to Micronesia?
- Willens: When did . . .
- Walker: Wasn't it June or July?
- Willens: The Hickel trip?
- Walker: Yes.
- Willens: No. It was the first few days of May. May 1, ended up May 3 at the airport, May 5 at the Mt. Carmel speech. Then I think you flew out that night. At least that's what he says in his book.
- Walker: I have an autographed picture of Secretary Hickel and [Mrs. Hickel] on the airplane after we had finished that trip. I am a whipped puppy, and I am absolutely sound asleep on a seat on the airplane. And I got in Joe Holbert. Does that name mean anything to you?
- Willens: No.
- Walker: Joe Holbert was kind of Wally's personal aide. Had done a sign that said "The Advance Man, ever alert, ever cautious, ever diligent." And here I am just absolutely sound asleep.
- Willens: It was around your neck?
- Walker: Yes. They placed it right here. They took that picture and autographed it.
- Willens: We're looking for new pictures for our book.

Walker: I've got some great pictures of Hickel. I took him on one trip to Voyagers, Minnesota that he'd never been out on. See I later became Director of the National Park Service, which was ironic, in all of the scheme of things, and I replaced a guy named George Hartzok. George had been there forever, was a 30-year veteran, and when I got named, Nixon didn't like Hartzok, Hartzok had more clout on the Hill than he did, George got fired. When I was announced, he was making a speech somewhere and he said, "You know, I've known Ron Walker. As a matter of fact I tried to hire him when he first came to Washington, but I just didn't have this job in mind."

Willens: If you ever go back to Saipan, you'll see the Park Service is running a major park. Ron, are there any other recollections you have of this very brief chapter in your professional life?

Walker: It was a long time ago. The book was very helpful, but it's like I tell everybody else, when I was named Director of the National Park Service, I got called over and I went into the West Wing of the White House, and I never went to the third floor of the West Wing. That's where Ehrlichman and all of the Domestic Council and everybody were and everything. That was the layer of substance. That altitude was up there. I was building crowds, raising money and doing all kinds of stuff. So when I went through a lot of that substance stuff in there, I was never involved in that.

Willens: Well subsequent to the Hickel visit, Kaiser went out on several times dealing with substance. Did you hear from him about those meetings? Did he report to anyone other than the Secretary?

Walker: I can't answer that.

Willens: Okay. Thank you very much.