

SUMMARY OF EXIT INTERVIEW  
WITH AVIS QUEEN, 12/4/78,  
BY DAVID ALSOBROOK OF NLC

Avis Queen, who is retiring after 20 years in the White House, worked in Special Reply, Presidential Correspondence. Her immediate supervisor was Dr. Joyce M. Cook. Mrs. Queen and 6 others worked for Dr. Cook. Essentially, Mrs. Queen and the others did the same sort of work.

Mrs. Queen first worked in the Eisenhower White House as a secretary for the Council on Foreign Economic Policy. After this organization was abolished, she went to the White House Correspondence Unit. For about 2 months, she worked as a typist; then she began to draft replies to letters from the public (to the President). Throughout her career, she found that the busiest times came when Congress was in session or when Presidential messages were going to the Hill. Her office dealt with a wide variety of letters--a cross section of the American public. Much of the mail involved reaction to Presidential actions and policies, as well as personal requests for assistance, financial and otherwise. Mrs. Queen found that the letters from families during the Vietnam War were the most touching. During previous administrations, Special Reply maintained "blue card cases," a file for crackpot letter-writers and those who wrote the President from administration to administration. Many of these extreme cases were culled out by the Secret Service for security purposes.

In this administration, incoming letters are first processed in the mail room and security area. From there, letters are sent to the Analysis Unit. This office examines the letters to see which can be handled as bulk or robo responses. In addition, the Analysis Unit will send letters directly to certain White House Staff units for replies or action. The letters that reached Mrs. Queen's office (Special Reply) usually required some sort of detailed research or special handling. In some cases, Special Reply will inform the writer that his letter will be handled by a particular agency or White House Staff unit. With reorganization, Special Reply began to handle fewer letters but began to do more research than in previous administrations. Before, the speechwriters and other units handled much of the research now handled by Special Reply. Now Special Reply handles about 700 letters at one time.

Dr. Cook, the supervisor of Special Reply, receives referrals from other White House units, as well as mail folders from the Analysis unit, special requests from White House units, autograph request, and gift items ("gifts with a gimmick"). This latter category includes gifts to the President with "strings attached," that is, certain things that the writer wants the President to do for him. Dr. Cook also devotes much of her time to dealing with her staff in drafting individual replies.

The Special Reply Unit uses form letters to some extent, but few of them can be used verbatim. Form letters are usually edited in order to be used in answering specific letters. The administration has attempted to put some form letters on the computer, but ~~this~~ has not seen the practical application

of this move. The Presidential autopen is used for certain letters, and in some cases, the President signs the letters himself. Landon Kite also has an autopen for his signature. In addition, Sharleen Volpe is responsible for the "Presidential Sample," a weekly sample of 9 letters from a cross-section of Americans. The President examines these letters each week. This job was handled by Mary Ann Forehand.

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