

Exit Interview with Carol Ann Rambo, Director of Advance for Mrs. Carter

Interviewer: David Alsobrook of the Presidential Papers Staff

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Transcriber: Lyn Kirkland

Note: Parts of the Exit Interview are either hard to listen to or inaudible.

Alsobrook: First of all, Carol Ann, will you tell me what positions you've held in the White House?

Rambo: For the last approximately a year I've been Director of Advance for Mrs. Carter. Prior to that I did consulting work for the White House Press Office under Jody Powell, traveling and setting up press arrangements for the President.

Alsobrook: Was that previous job a White House job or an outside job?

Rambo: It was a consultant job.

Alsobrook: Okay, it was on the outside.

Rambo: Yes.

Alsobrook: Were there other job experiences that you feel helped prepare you for this job?

Rambo: [Laughs] I don't think anything can prepare you for the insanity.....years of working in politics and [inaudible] working with many different people, both in this country and internationally.

Alsobrook: How would you describe your duties in this particular job on the First Lady's staff?

Rambo: What I did is set up all aspects of Mrs. Carter's travel any time she is out of the physical environs of the White House proper, even in Washington, D.C.

Alsobrook: And you've done this for the last year and a half?

Rambo: I've done it for the last year.

Alsobrook: Are there certain trips that stand out in your mind as you think back about that period?

Rambo: There are a lot of funny, funny experiences that we've had. But, I remember the very first trip I did for Mrs. Carter which was a communities trip across the country into Springfield, Massachusetts, and Ohio and St. Louis and Davis, California, where she looked at all the solar –

uh—activities going on in Davis: the bike paths, the solar homes, all the innovative designs for the streets and everything else to save energy.

Alsobrook: Were there other members of the White House staff that you worked closely with in setting up that particular trip, like Ester Peterson's office?

Rambo: Actually, no. I just sort of took it from Kathryn E. Cade, Mrs. Carter's Director of Projects who worked on picking the sites and I was brought in after the sites were picked and put it together.

Alsobrook: Were there any specific problems that you had to deal with in advancing this particular trip?

Rambo: Well, Mrs. Carter rode a bicycle [both laugh] and that lent itself to having a lot of Secret Service agents in golf carts following around and things like that, but there weren't any particular problems. We went to see a wonderful school in Springfield, Massachusetts, and to see their volunteer program which is extensive in that community.

Alsobrook: She seems to enjoy those kinds of things when she is dealing with children and people.

Rambo: She really loves it and she loves to get out and do those different kinds of things because I think, I believe, Mrs. Carter feels she is the ears and eyes for the President because he cannot get out and travel the way she can and he can't do some of the things that she can do for security reasons and, of course, for time reasons. I think it's invaluable, actually, to the administration that she looks on her role in this way.

Alsobrook: You mentioned dealing with the Secret Service. Would you list some of the other people that you have to deal with in advancing a trip like this one?

Rambo: You work with the press office. You work with the sponsors and hosts of the various invitations that Mrs. Carter has accepted. You work with the local officials of the communities you are going into. You work with the Congressional Liaison people in the White House and also we often take Senators, Congressmen and their wives with us on these trips, so we have to work with their offices and we work, of course, with the governor's office and mayor's office of whatever state or city we are going into.

Alsobrook: You mentioned some funny episodes along the way over the last year. Can you recall some of those?

Rambo: Let's see. We've been going at such a hectic pace it's hard to separate them. We've had---uh—I'm trying to think. I'll have to think about it for a second. We have had some funny experiences--- people who got left [laughs] behind in states, but mostly it's gone pretty smoothly.

Really, it's just a frantic pace at which we're going all the time, trying to set things up for Mrs. Carter's travels and also for the President when he travels overseas. Last Summer I spent six weeks in Vienna, and Korea, and Japan, going back and forth, back and forth. I think that was kind of funny. At one point we were staying---Mrs. Carter was going to stay ---at a hotel in Kyoto while the President was leading some Economic Summit. We kept switching the rooms back and forth because bugs kept appearing because it was the rainy season and she finally ended up staying in a Tatami room, after I went over there to try it out and tried sleeping on the floor to see what that was like. That was difficult dealing with the government because of the intensity of their security over there.

Alsobrook: In Japan?

Rambo: In Japan, right, which, of all the countries I've been to, which I think is about 15, was surprisingly the most restrictive place of any.

Alsobrook: Carol Ann, do you travel most of the time with the First Lady when she's on the road? Are you with her?

Rambo: No, I travel--it depends on how many trips we have, but I travel about a third of the time. I usually do foreign travel. I travel a third to a quarter of the time. Lately she is traveling so much that I don't travel very much. I will usually go out, occasionally, to get a look at the people that I hire to do the work as consultants.

Alsobrook: Local people you mean?

Rambo: I hire people from all over the country who go out and do advance work for Mrs. Carter. The President's office functions in the same manner. Depending on the travel, you never know, right now we have 15 people out. You wouldn't hire that many people, nor would you need that many people on a full time basis. We generally hire people that had done the work before or who were on the campaign, or who had been recommended by the people who set up the program or the seminar.

Alsobrook: What kind of person would you be looking for to do that kind of work?

Rambo: We look for someone who is tactful. Someone who has a lot of tact and has a lot of stamina and is willing to do everything they can to make the trip the best that it can be for Mrs. Carter. The thing about advance work, the reason it came to be, is because the easier we can make it for Mrs. Carter, the more time she has in whatever particular community or visit or factory, or day care center, or elderly housing complex, or whatever, to visit with the people that she left the White House to go see; so they're not sitting around worrying about whatever car comes next and where is this person going to ride with Mrs. Carter today. It makes her time, every minute of her time, so much better used.

Alsobrook: She doesn't like to be worried with all the details then or every little thing, right?

Rambo: Oh no. There is no reason to bother Mrs. Carter with that, or conversely, the President. I've also done work for the Vice President and Mrs. Mondale. There's no reason to bother them with that sort of thing because they're out there to find out about a program, to look at what the citizens are doing and highlight and spotlight something that has worked well, usually; and sometimes, because the press being the way they are, where there are problems, a problem that needs to be addressed and that needs to be brought back to Washington.

Alsobrook: What kind of schedule, for example, did the First Lady have this week?

Rambo: Well, this week she is taking a Carter/Mondale campaign trip. My role has switched a little bit with these campaign trips because I am a federal employee, but I have much more of a coordination role than I used to have. We're still working out the details. This is Tuesday and she leaves Thursday morning and we're not even sure exactly what she is going to do [laughs] but she is going to Montpelier, Vt., and from there to Manchester, N.H. to go to a factory and a telephone company and then into New York City to go to a dinner in Chinatown with the Asian-American community for the Chinese New Year. It is a fund-raising dinner. We stay overnight in New York, pick up the next morning and fly to Pees Air force Base and go to see two factories and one senior citizens complex in over in Portsmouth and she flies to Manchester, N.H., where she is going to go to three receptions with members of the Irish American community, the Greek American community, and a third reception. Then we go to Nashville, N.H., for a large thousand person reception and then we're going to a Police Appreciation Night police ball in Nashville. Then she is going to drive to Andover, Massachusetts, to spend the evening and she gets up on Saturday morning and does interviews with the media from Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill, and Newberry Port; and then we're driving into Boston for an event not set yet and then she's back on Saturday afternoon. So, it can be extremely hectic working out the details for all that.

Alsobrook: Is it true the President always likes for her to come back here on the week-ends? I have read someplace that he doesn't like for her to travel or campaign on the week-ends.

Rambo: Yeah, we try to be gone, we used to try to schedule her travel on days when he was traveling so they were both gone at the same time, but they do like to spend week-ends together and the President is pretty adamant about getting back so he can have the week-ends with Mrs. Carter. They very much guard that time together.

Alsobrook: Carol Ann, she obviously has a lot of stamina though. Is there a personal side of Rosalynn Carter that the public never sees that you've seen in your job here?

Rambo: Yes, there is. The one thing about Mrs. Carter, I think that I have seen from my time with her, she relaxes, really relaxes, only with her family. And all of the fun things about Mrs.

Carter—she really does mostly with her family. She is very, very good to work for. She is not personally demanding or whatever, but because she is so demanding of herself when she travels-- --I've seen her more than once shake two or three thousand hands a day. She does not want to go into a senior citizens' complex and not greet every single person that lives there. She does not want to walk through the room and shake ten hands and sort of wave at the doorway and go away. Mrs. Carter knows that these people want to meet her and she wants to meet them personally, and so when she is traveling—when she is out working and traveling—really it is work to a great extent-- because we don't put very much relaxation or rest time into the schedule. She's always working on a speech. We did one trip the other day which was terrible, where she gave nine speeches, and four sets or five sets of press comments [both laugh in amazement]; and by the end of the day I was exhausted, and as we were flying back, I think this is important, we were flying back after a terrible trip to Florida. It was hot, it was long, and she had had eight speeches in one day and five sets of press interviews and we were overnight twice. It was just a long trip and it was quite successful, but nonetheless it takes it out of you. And, on the way back from Florida, it's about a two hour flight, I'm just sort of collapsed, and Mrs. Carter passed, and chatted with the back about ten minutes, and got a glass of water, and opened something up. I leaned over the seat and I couldn't believe it; Mrs. Carter was working on her Spanish. She studied her Spanish for two hours all the way home on the flight, when anybody else, who had less stick-to-it-ness, would have just given it up because it had been a very long three days.

Alsobrook: Carol Ann, could you tell me a little bit about how the staff is organized here in terms of responsibilities?

Rambo: Well, I work in the Advancing and Scheduling Office and Mary Hoyt is the Press Secretary and there is a staff under Mary Hoyt. Madeline MacBean is Mrs. Carter's first Personal Assistant has two assistants who work for her who take care of Mrs. Carter's personal correspondence and gifts and everything personally that Mrs. Carter needs. Katherine Cade is Director of Projects and she does all of Mrs. Carter's work on health legislation, on Cambodian relief for refugees, and anything that falls in that area, of course, and she has two secretaries that work for her, and Gretchen Post is the Social Secretary to the White House and she has three or four people who work for her. She does everything inside the White House. And then you have the Scheduling Office, Jane Fenderson is the Director of Scheduling and I'm Director of Advance Operations, and I have two people that work for me and Jane has one who works for her; and, Kit Dobbelle is the overall coordinator for the East Wing for Mrs. Carter's office.

Alsobrook: You came in about the same time that Kit Dobbelle came in. Is that it or you come in before that?

Rambo: No, Kit Dobbelle came in late last fall, last September, and I came here in February when I came as a full time consultant and I came on the payroll full time in April.

Alsobrook: Can you describe how the office has changed since Kit Dobbelle has come in?
[Apparently Rambo shakes her head no.] Okay.

Alsobrook: Could you tell me a little bit about any kind of records you have created in this role?
What types of records have you created?

Rambo: I don't know what you mean.

Alsobrook: What correspondence? Reading files?

Rambo: Actually very little, my records of what I've done here would really be in the trip files with Mrs. Carter's schedule but I do very little----- I do most of my work on the telephone. There would be some notes as I work on the telephone.

Alsobrook: You don't have to answer letters or anything like that?

Rambo: Well, I do, I deal with letters from people who have written after a trip if there was a problem or someone was unhappy, fortunately that does not happen too often, or with someone who had a request, and Mrs. Carter had mentioned something to them and asked them to get in touch with the office or with me, that sort of thing, but as a general rule, I will not have a large volume of correspondence that comes through here.

Alsobrook: There are times that give you personal satisfaction. Was there a certain trip that you have planned that gave you a great deal of personal satisfaction as you think back about the time you have been here?

Rambo: You know actually I guess I thought Mrs. Carter's trip to Kyoto, Japan, the only foreign trip that I went on and did for Mrs. Carter, worked out quite well. It was hard to put together. I guess the one I look back on, just as I look on the first trip that I did for Mrs. Carter, which was a domestic trip, was for the President. It was the first trip that I ever did for him. It was the town meeting in Clinton, Massachusetts. I did the press work on that. And I did his first foreign trip, a trip to England. I to the Economic Summit and the four power meeting. And to say that I really didn't know what I was doing yet is an understatement. [Alsobrook laughs] And he was very big into saving money...

Alsobrook: This was back in '77 now?

Rambo: Back in '77. And they sent us out to England and we had to travel on the military transport plane where you have to wear ear plugs and wear a coat and we traveled to England that way, which was certainly not exactly the first class way to go. And when we got there, they sent us out about 7 days in advance of the President's arrival there and it turned out I did the press work on it for the press office, and it turned out that what we did in that period of time, I would personally spend the same time to go to Louisville, Kentucky, for a two hour stop for the

President, and we did this for London for five days. He had three airport arrivals and three departures because he left and came back and left and came back and he had 26 motorcades and 52 press pool movements and by the end of it I was a walking zombie, but we got it done. It is amazing what you can do if you have to. After that experience they started lengthening the time and also there were only four of us, total, *four*, to put the whole thing together and now for that length of time they would send four or five press people and four or five staffing people because it just takes so much to get it together and we didn't realize the magnitude of it. I think from that I finally realized that in a lot of ways it pays to get folks to go out and do advance work, things that anybody can do, but it's particularly important before any advance work for overseas went into a meeting in England with all the Economic Summit participants and all of a sudden I realized, we were sitting around the table and I was from the United States, and there were representatives from Japan, one from Germany and one from Italy. It was really quite funny because the German was heavy and bald and in a three piece suit and kept tipping back on his chair the Japanese was very intense (it was almost a caricature), the Italian was white, Christian, and had his coat thrown over his shoulder, and was smoking his cigarette in a holder, and I was the only woman--- from the United States and [laughs] I thought the whole thing was really quite funny. The Englishman said we are making sure everybody is happy.

Alsobrook: As you travel, I wondered do you ever have time for a vacation.

Rambo: The first five months I worked for Mrs. Carter I only had two days off. [Both laugh] I think I took one day of a week-end twice. I said I am not going in at all. Particularly in the last few months with the terrible situation in Iran, which was in the closing cycle. I spent Christmas in Iran one year for the President. Mrs. Carter had been picking up a lot of the President's already scheduled travel and certainly the Vice President is picking up a large portion, a very large portion of it also. But it has just increased the work load over here tremendously. We are trying at the same time, particularly in the campaigning, we are very much trying to incorporate all the things that Mrs. Carter has been interested in as a First Lady into what she is doing, so that she isn't just going out and doing campaign trips and letting all the things that she doesn't want to let fall through the cracks. Her interest continues in health legislation and [she's] looking into the many, many innovative programs that have been started all over the country in mental health and mental retardation, working with entitlements and programs and all those sorts of things ...and you don't want to let that fall and: so when you pull them all together it makes for no time off

Alsobrook: Once the President is re-elected she will pick up on those issues again most likely.

Rambo: She hasn't dropped them, it's just that she hasn't been able to spend as much time on them in the last two months as she would like and we're trying now to, as she goes on campaign trips, to incorporate some of them, those areas, in what we do.

Alsobrook: Can you tell me what a typical day for you would be like? Say the First Lady is traveling and you are here. What would that day be like for you in terms of duties and so on?

Rambo: If she has just gone out, it gets a little quieter around here. [Alsobrook laughs.] But, because we are going so often we mostly are getting Mrs. Carter on the road and have to pick up and get our advance personnel back out on the road. All sorts of details, administrative details, hotel rooms and valets, and cars and media contacts, and usually by the time Mrs. Carter is out traveling, then we are pulling together the next week's or the week after that's schedule or the month after that, talking to the hosts and determining what they have in mind, and telling them what goes, what's the terrain where Mrs. Carter travels. Is there press along the route? Often times the hosts don't realize. And often times, too it's because they maybe knew Mrs. Carter from before, when she and David Langford just got in the car and drove into town, and looked for the radio tower and went to the station and said "would you like me to talk on the radio?" [Alsobrook laughs] and Mrs. Carter could stay in their home in a bedroom. Now, if you want to do anything like that, it takes an awfully lot of preparation: rooms full of people, telephones, and you go in with all sorts of things that didn't even exist then. Often it is very gently trying to let the people know, the hosts know, she is the same person but unfortunately things have changed and everything that goes along with it now

Alsobrook: When did you first meet the President?

Rambo: I didn't meet the President until after he was elected President. In the campaign I worked for Walter Mondale. I had worked many years ago for Hubert Humphrey when he was running for President and because of the number of people who I knew from the Humphrey campaign days and working for the Vice President then, they called me in Oklahoma. It was Mondale who was tapped for Vice President for Carter and asked me to come up for the campaign and work for Carter, so I worked for Walter Mondale and a little bit for Joan Mondale.

Alsobrook: A lot has been written about how affectionate the First Lady and the President are, holding hands and such? Did you ever see any examples of that in the time you have been in the White House?

Rambo: Yes I have. Yes, I think that in working for Mrs. Carter you see domestic issues. You see Amy more and more of a family type atmosphere. Yes. I think frankly their relationship is the most incredible one I have ever seen. I have never known two people who were so constantly aware of the other. They solicit their feelings and their views. It is genuinely close to a real partnership...and really, really caring about the other one---how the other one feels and thinks. It beats anything I have ever seen. An example is Mrs. Carter called one time from a trip and she had been picked up to go ---they were going to go fishing. The President was here and she wanted a hat to fish in and I called over to the residence and asked the woman over there if

she could dig out one of Mrs. Carter's hats for fishing and I guess the President happened to be walking through or whatever when she went in to do that and he went in and personally picked out the hats and sent them over with a note saying that if you don't think these are right let me know and I'll go back and look again. [Both laugh and Rambo says "I don't know an awfully lot of husbands who care." And they laugh some more.]

Alsobrook: [Laughs] Okay. Lastly, I think Charles told me you are going to work for ABC. Is that right? Can you tell me anything about these future plans that you have?

Rambo: Well, I am going to work for ABC TV news. I guess in many ways I would not have gotten the job without this experience I have gotten here. I *know* I would not have gotten the job without the experience I have gotten here, both in working for Jody Powell in his office with the press which I did for a long time and then coming here. I at least have perspective on all of this. I certainly hope that I do not turn into a cynical news person but I'm not going to be a reporter. I am going to work for the news division, public relations for the news division, and I will be traveling, starting the day after I leave here, to New Hampshire and to all of the primary states setting up coverage and working with the print media and working and getting to know the political reporters from the local papers, and through that, getting prestige and better product for ABC news. I owe a lot to Mrs. Carter and the President and to Walter Mondale and Joan and all them. There are some wonderful people that work here. I really have made some lasting friends for years and Nancy Jordan who works with me who has been with the President and Mrs. Carter forever. It has been tremendous. After that five months with only two days off I needed help and I got Nancy to start doing this and she is turning into an excellent desk person for advance. [Alsobrook laughs]

Alsobrook: She started off as a volunteer, didn't she?

Rambo: She started off as a volunteer in the Social Office. I'm really proud of her. I feel like she's my child. She had never done this before but I'm teaching her how to do it, but there are any number of people that I hope I see again. I think that I will.

Alsobrook: Have you ever thought about what you would like to be doing ten years from now?

Rambo: With the kind of work I do, I only think about tomorrow morning. [Both laugh] I really haven't. I haven't decided if it's good or bad, but this job really doesn't allow me the luxury of thinking that far ahead. If you are doing a good job I think that you work for the here and now and you try to plan---you don't want to try to just play catch up all the time. But in what I did, in my position in advance, directing advance, is so much more immediate in nature, that I've sort of gotten my mind set---a kind of immediacy of problems and I really don't know in 10 years, although I lived in Oklahoma a long time and I do miss it. I miss my gardening very much. I don't know that I will ever go back to it, but it's a nice thought.

Alsobrook: Finally, Carol Ann, can you give me a permanent address, a legal address, and a telephone number where you can be reached several years from now? Say, somebody at the library wanted to talk to you again at some time.

Rambo: I'm about to move into a new apartment at 2127 California St., Apt. 102 in Washington. I think if you wanted to reach me you could reach me through my brother-in-law and sister, Robert and Debbie Miller. They live at 3505 Spring Rain Lane, NW, Washington, D. C. Their phone number is 966-3365.

Alsobrook: OK. Lastly, before we settle, is there any area of your work that you feel we have neglected in the interview, any project you've been involved in or anything that was especially significant?

Rambo: I really don't think so. It would be just be more and more examples. As we've traveled around the country, all I can say is I hope the President never ever in his whole life goes to Yazoo, Mississippi, in July because it sure was *hot* down there. [Both laugh] It was a grand stop but I remember I had the lights on and I kept talking to Walker about how hot it would be and finally during the program I had to have him do the lights, and I went up and I read it and it was 125 degrees where the President was standing and trying to talk and he finally shed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves.. People were fainting and I had the boy scouts bringing water to the audience. It was just so hot in that gymnasium. But I would say that one thing about it, it seemed in the winter we'd go north, in the summer we'd go south. If I had it to do over again I would try to reverse that trend. But other than that, that's all.

Alsobrook: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your time.