George McKee Elsey

Biography

George McKee Elsey served Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Johnson during the tumultuous years between 1942 and 1953, and in the late 1960s. His positions included commander, U.S. Naval Reserve, duty officer in the White House Map Room, 1942–46; assistant to the special counsel to the President, 1947–1949; administrative assistant to the President, 1949–1951; executive assistant to the director, Mutual Security, 1951–53; and special assistant to the secretary and deputy secretary of defense in 1968-69.

Elsey became one of President Harry Truman’s most valuable aides through his contributions to the administration’s foreign and defense policies. Elsey’s intelligence summaries, written while he was in the White House intelligence and communications center during World War II, facilitated Truman’s preparation for the conduct of foreign affairs. Elsey and Clark Clifford wrote the seminal report in 1946 on American-Soviet relations that forecast Truman’s major Cold War policies.

Elsey’s writing skills and strong advocacy of presidential power drew him into domestic affairs beginning with the State of the Union message of 1947 and subsequent speeches through 1951, including the final draft of the March 1947 speech that set forth the Truman Doctrine. In 1948 he prepared the notes for each of Truman’s informal rear platform talks on the famous “Whistle Stop Campaign.”

In 1953 Elsey began a long association with the American Red Cross, serving as its President from 1970 to 1983 when he was named President Emeritus. He has served as a director or trustee of many other organizations, including the National Geographic Society, the Brookings Institution, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the White House Historical Association where he has also been President. He has donated valuable historical materials to the Roosevelt, Truman and Johnson libraries as well as to the White House. He returned the last World War II situation map prepared for Franklin Roosevelt to the White House during the Clinton administration and it now is on display in the historic Map Room.

Elsey continues to share his experience with the public through oral histories and television documentaries, including CNN’s recent series, The Cold War.