



## An Unplanned Life: A Memoir

George McKee Elsey

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An Unplanned Life is the scintillating memoir of George Elsey, a small-town kid from western Pennsylvania who, at age twenty-four, was assigned to Franklin Roosevelt's top-secret intelligence and communications center in the White House. As an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve, Elsey helped brief the president and his senior associates on war events. He and his map room colleagues acted as the secretariat for Roosevelt's cabled exchanges with Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, and Chiang Kai-shek; filed records of "summit conferences"; and stored in safes plans for future operations. He also traveled with the president in order to code and decode the classified messages that flowed between the presidential train or ship and the White House.

Elsey's duties continued with Harry Truman's succession to the presidency. He decoded the famous message from Secretary of War Henry Stimson reporting the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and carried it to President Truman. In 1947, he shed his Naval Reserve uniform and joined the White House's civilian staff as assistant to the special counsel to the president. In 1949, he became administrative assistant to the president, and, in 1952, he became a member of the Mutual Security Agency staff. During those years, he grew very close to Harry Truman, and thus, a major portion of *An Unplanned Life* relates to his experiences then.

In the first postwar winter, Elsey was frequently the only staff member who accompanied President Truman on the USS *Williamsburg*. In September 1946, Elsey submitted a report to Truman on U.S.-Soviet relations, which came to be well known as the "Clifford-Elsey Report." Providing Truman with notes for some two hundred of his "back-of-the-train" informal talks, Elsey played a part in the best remembered feature of the "Whistle-Stop Campaign" that resulted in "the political upset of the century." In addition to his years at the White House, Elsey also touches on his post—White House years—his time in private industry, his months with Clark Clifford when Clifford was trying unsuccessfully to extricate America from Vietnam, and his long association with the American Red Cross.

An Unplanned Life is a fascinating look at the life of an extraordinary individual who played an important and unprecedented part in two different presidents' decisions and affected the course of our nation. Anyone with an interest in history will find this memoir fascinating and invaluable.



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