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Subject: ARRB Interviewed Joe O'Donnell
CALL REPORT: PUBLIC DOCUMENTS Author: Douglas Horne/ARRB Date Created: 02/28/97 THE PLAYERS WHO initiated the call? Review Board's representative in the call: Jeremy Gunn; Douglas Horne; Dave Montague; David MarwellWitnesses/Consultants's representative in the call: Joe O'DonnellDescription of the Call Date: 02/28/97Subject: ARRB Interviewed Joe O'DonnellSummary of the Call:ARRB staff called Joe O'Donnell for the second time today to conduct a more in-depth interview on audiotape; our initial interview of Mr. O'Donnell was on January 29, 1997. The interview, conducted by Jeremy Gunn, lasted approximately 44 minutes.We began by asking Mr. O'Donnell to describe to the best of his recollection his professional training in photography, and his photographic experience. He indicated he attended college at MIT in Boston, and at another institution in Oregon, but did not specify whether the training was in photography, and was unclear about whether or not he had received degrees from these institutions. He joined the Marine Corps in 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and ended up being assigned duties as a combat photographer for the Marine Corps during World War II. Although he received some training in aerial photography in PBV aircraft, he said that most of the photography he shot was on the ground. He said he photographed men in combat, and in the course of his duties he did have occasion to photograph wounded men, and to observe gunshot wounds. He said that he photographed both Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the ground following their destruction by atomic bombs, and that as a result (of radiation-induced physiological damage) he had a damaged spine, had to walk with two canes, and could no longer stand up straight. He mentioned with some bitterness that the government could locate neither his combat photographs from World War II, nor his Hiroshima and Nagasaki photographs, and said he felt this was a cover-up of some kind.Following World War II, Mr. O'Donnell said he worked at a variety of commercial photographic endeavors, including, for a short time, a business started by his brother-in-law and him called Pictures, Inc. His memory of the timeframes for these various photographic endeavors was admittedly uncertain. At some point (circa 1948, as he recalled), he went to work for the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), and said he was often detailed to perform White House photography. He relayed to us various anecdotal recollections of photographic jobs he performed for the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations; he seemed unsure of exactly when he retired but seemed to remember doing so during the Johnson administration. He remembered that at one point during his employment, Edward R. Murrow was the director of USIA.When asked to remember the names of other Federal photographers working at the White House (either from USIA, or from other agencies or arms of the Government), he remembered Oliver Pfeiffer, Frank Warner, and Joe Pinto from USIA, and "Knut" Knudsen
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