

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

February 19, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the proper age for elected officials. In the interview segment, ER's guest is Secretary of Navy Francis P. Matthews.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Elliott Roosevelt, Secretary of the Navy Francis P. Matthews

[ER:] Good afternoon, this is Eleanor Roosevelt. I am happy to welcome you for another visit here in my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel. As usual I have a guest that you will be anxious to meet and as usual Elliott will assist me on the program. And now, here is Elliott.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Mother. There are very few of our listeners who do not list among member of their immediate families a young man who is either serving with or contemplates going into the Navy. Because of this, today's broadcast will be of special interest to those particular listeners as we have as our guest the Honorable Francis P. Matthews, the Secretary of the Navy. The secretary has consented to tell many interesting facts about navy activities that heretofore have not been made public. A listener, Mrs. Newcomber of Iowa, has written Mother a long letter asking what her feeling is about the destiny of our country being guided by men of advanced years who have forgotten the rigors of war and who are out of touch with everyday life. I found Mother's reply to Mrs. Newcomber so interesting that I'm going to ask her to discuss the problem before her recorded interview with Secretary Matthews. But first, a word from our announcer.

(Break 1:29-1:35)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Our question today comes from uh Mrs. Newcomber of Newbury, Iowa. She saw Mother's television program and wrote about that, but she also asked a question which will be of interest to our radio audience. She says, "May I tell you in the-in the beginning, we're a rural family, raise corn, oats, chickens, etcetera. As I write this letter, I very humbly feel and know that what I'm doing now is an American freedom, expressing our thoughts. And I know my letter will be received with an open mind, too. Don't you feel we have too many men who have the control of our government who are too old? We must remember that in many companies men and women are retired at sixty-five. Seems to me after so many years of their contacts in politics, that they have so many obligations to other people and things that it's hard to give of their best to the country's interests. Seems to me we should be putting younger men at the controls of things, men who have been in the midst of battle and know what peace means."

[ER:] Well, I have always in favor of youth, and I think anyone who studied our own history knows that our government was founded by young men and that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were written by men, most of whom were in their thirties. So, there's not a -- no reason why anyone in the United States shouldn't have a feeling that youth is a great advantage. Um I do think that uh--granted that age keeps certain attributes of youth, like elasticity and flexibility of mind--um experience has also some um advantage and if you grow old well uh there are certain things that you ought to have which ought to be a help to you. For instance, you should have learned um the real values of life. Um now I-I think I would agree that at sixty-five perhaps people-- um most-most of us who are sixty-five um should not be given a strenuous, a hard um labor of a manual kind to do, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] but I think I would say that there are many people who do preserve a mental vigor um and uh can make a contribution of-- for a long time uh beyond that. The minute I think their powers are failing, uh

they should be retired. But if you have um preserved your mental powers, if you have learned from experience, um if you have gained a certain philosophy, you should be of great help to the younger men. For instance, you--there should be much less that you are afraid of.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] Um you should be able uh to-to face life uh with a much greater uh calm and better--therefore, better objective approach. Uh you should look at um whatever the circumstances are uh with a-a--with a total lack of fear. You should also have learned what are the real values of life. You should discount some of the things which tempt people in youth and lead them astray. Eh you should know that um, for instance, uh power for power's sake has no value at all. Uh power uh, because of the benefits that can be achieved through power, has value as long as it is well used. That same thing can be said of money. Um money in itself has no particular value, but money well used has value.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes. (6:31)

[ER:] Um so that it-- [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] I uh might choose a very eh uh simple explanation. I remember when I was very young, in fact uh when I had just one child, Anna, um and we were giving a dinner party and the cook left and I couldn't cook anything, nothing at all. [Elliott Roosevelt: Hmm.] And also, I didn't know one single thing about taking care of a baby and the baby had only been home a very short time [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and uh I was miserable, miserable until I found someone to come in and cook dinner. Um and I kept wondering what would happen about that party, not realizing that if I hadn't had any dinner um somehow I could have arranged to have something sent in and it wasn't so desperate anyhow. And um then the baby decided to cry and the baby cried steadily from the moment the first guest arrived until they went home. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] And I was the most miserable person, running upstairs to look at the baby, wondering if the baby was going to die, not knowing whether -- calling up the doctor and having the doctor say, "Well are you sure there isn't a pin pricking the baby?" Looking at every pin, finding no pin to prick the baby, and finally having the doctor say, "Well, perhaps, the baby has a little wind." Turning the baby over, patting its back, doing everything I could think of. It was just plain [Elliott Roosevelt: Ornerly.] deviltry, I think. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] I don't know what was in the baby, probably my own fears and nervousness. [Elliott Roosevelt: Uh-huh.] With the result that after everybody went home, the baby settled down and slept peacefully all night. Well now, I thought that the evening was tragedy. I can remember perfectly, I was just miserable. Uh and as a matter of fact it didn't matter at all. Everybody went through that same thing, and today it wouldn't phase me in the least. If I [Elliott Roosevelt: In other words you think that the--] didn't have dinner, I wouldn't have dinner; I'd have scrambled eggs! [ER laughs] (8:42)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You think that the experience uh um factor might be important if we were to throw young men of inexperience into the middle of all of these very weighty problems that face us today that it [ER: I think they're face--] might be like -- feel somewhat like you did with the baby.

[ER:] With the baby! Exactly. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, on the other hand, I read recently uh that all of the great military leaders in history have all been young men.

[ER:] Ah well, I -- that's what I meant when I said physical things. I don't think that you should keep in position [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] where you have to have [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] real physical strength and-and you do really have to have it there because your men, and-- have to really be led to a certain extent. You have to be able to do at least a good part of what you ask your men to do.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, that's- that's very interesting point of view because uh this article went on to point out uh that our military leadership in this country uh is, almost all of it, in the uh late fifties and sixties and even up into the seventies.

[ER:] I wouldn't mind having some of the people who do the planning, the strategy, eh back-- that's different I think.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] On the other hand, in this article it pointed out that uh-uh the usually-- the older head, military head, uh who got his experience-- actual field experience in his strategic planning [ER: Wasn't able to meet the things of today.] during an earlier war can't uh [ER: No.] change to meet the new conditions.

[ER:] No, that's quite true, and I think that should be taken into account. But I think there are people who who might be able um to do it, who would be valuable because of certain things uh that they might know about uh human nature, about-- they might have a wider experience of peoples. Um they might have certain things to contribute, but not in the field.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] No uh, but of course uh we've got a--we've got a situation here. Uh I remember at the end of World War II, the Air Force announced that they were going to bring in the younger uh leaders to plan for the air force of the future, and um one of my very close friends was one of those that was chosen. And he was uh at that time uh thirty-eight years old and was considered a very young lieutenant general. Uh, he uh was brought in and this article goes on to point out that the Air Force thought that they were bringing in a surprisingly young man but that uh actually Napoleon was all through with his career by the time he was thirty-eight. [ER laughs] So that -- I think that maybe uh you might say that uh the pra-place where we have turned more to younger people is in-in our House of Representatives. I think there's [ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap] a greater proportion--

[ER:] I think that's very good. I think that's excellent, and I personally would not keep in either the House or the Senate uh people uh who become, in any way, inflexible because I think they have to be able

[Elliott Roosevelt coughs] to meet uh [unknown phrase]--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well Mother, you and I have met a number of our more um uh shall we say elderly statesmen. Um, would you say that they had not become rather inflexible and have uh become practically uh-- [ER: Some are inflexible.] well, I was going to say ossified, but--

[ER:] Well some -- [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] that's what I mean. Some are inflexible, and yet others are not. I don't find, for instance um to take uh an example of-of considerable age, I don't find-find that Mr.

[Bernard] Baruch is inflexible.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, Mr. Baruch is a very remarkable man. Uh he is uh what one might call uh-uh an old body but a very young mind. Uh but I think that all too often the --I-I'm thinking, for instance, of a certain senator that I know quite well who comes from a southern state who uh is so old that uh I sometimes wonder what makes him hold up, but he's got very young ideas. He gets into fist fights and all sorts of things. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] (13:23)

[ER:] Well, um I don't happen to-to know many eh uh well enough. But-but I-I would feel that after a certain age uh perhaps all of us--I'm nearing the age, so perhaps I feel a little more kindly towards the aging [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] than you do. Oh but, um I was just thinking the other day that I hope my young people would tell me when they thought the time had come um that I should retire. [Elliott

Roosevelt: Well, I think--] And I think a lot of older people should be told when they should retire and should do so gracefully.[ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I can assure you that you haven't reached that point yet because none of your young people can keep up with you at all [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]. When that day comes, then we'll tell you to retire.

[ER:] Alright.

(Break 14:10-14:20)

[ER:] The role of the United States Navy in peace as well as in war is, of course, [ER clears throat] of extreme importance, but at times it seems overshadowed by the importance of our air force. I'm very pleased, therefore, that on a recent trip to Washington, the Secretary of the Navy graciously consented to be a guest on my program to tell us of the Navy's plans and progress. I present to you the Secretary of the Navy, Francis P. Matthews.

[Francis P. Matthews:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. It's a great honor to be on your program and to have this opportunity to meet your great radio audience and uh to speak a few words in behalf of the Navy and uh to inform our fellow citizens of something better about uh the Navy and uh its importance in this period of our--the critical history of our country.

[ER:] Well you know uh, Secretary, that I uh am perhaps a little biased about the Navy and the Marine Corps because my husband was so involved in the Navy, and um then in the last war I had two boys in the Navy and two boys in the--one boy in the Marine Corps, one boy in the Army Air Force who always said he was out voted when he came home! [Laughs] So, I have a real interest in the Navy, and I am delighted to have this opportunity of talking over with you a little about its development. Now, a great many people wonder whether a powerful navy is always a force for war or whether it can be a force for peace, and I'd like to ask you how you feel? [ER coughs]

[Francis P. Matthews:] Well, may I preface what I am going to say in answer to your question by stating that we in the Navy--one of the things that we're most proud of and most grateful for is the part that your husband played in developing our navy. We have the greatest navy in the world today and that is uh largely due to your husband's service as Assistant Secretary of the Navy from 19- uh 13 to 1921. He started many of the things that uh have resulted in making the Navy the great power that it is today. And uh the fact that we do have a big navy, the fact that the-the Navy is uh occupying the position today that it does in our uh Department of Defense doesn't mean that uh, in any sense, that it is a power for anything but peace. That's its principle mission, and uh the fact that this country has a large navy at this time means that the potential force and effectiveness of the United States arms--it is visualized for the people of the world, and uh if we keep our navy strong as your uh husband anticipated it would be and as he tried to make it, I think it's the greatest power for peace that we can possibly have at this particular time. (17:41)

[ER:] I have a great feeling, of course, for the unity of the services and their ability to work together, and um [ER clears throat] and- and I-I have felt that it was exemplified really by the way the Marine Corps and the Navy work together, how well you could weld together um uh services that work uh in time of war together but also in time of peace-- can show um what a spirit will do. Now, I have felt that our navy in the Mediterranean uh was really making history, and I wonder, because we have had a fleet there I understand-- I have heard about it occasionally-- and I wonder what you feel about um the role it has played in the last few years.

[Francis P. Matthews:] Well, the presence of our fleet in the uh Mediterranean has been obviously a great power for good. It has uh occupied a position of uh-uh prominence in the consideration of the uh international problems and uh there it has exemplified what uh we in America can bring to uh bear in order to enforce peace in the world. We have uh-uh--it has symbolized a stability that uh is important. It gives reassurance to the rest of the world, and we have also uh demonstrated in Greece what we could do to help that country in meeting the problem--the critical problem which it faced recently. We brought about, uh through the help that we gave to Greece from the Navy, uh the possibility of it meeting the forces which were threatening the very safety, the very existence of Greece, and I think ha-that has been very reassuring to the people in that part of the world and has dem-demonstrated the unselfishness and the disinterestedness uh of our people here in this country and their willingness to share with the rest of the world the resources we have which can be utilized so effectively for peace and uh to demonstrate that we have no ambitions in the way of aggression. We have--the-the rest of the world has nothing that we want. All we want is peace and we're willing to use what power, what force, what resources we have in order to bring peace not only to ourselves but to all the world.

[ER:] Well, uh I happened to be in London [ER sighs] a few years ago and our flagship came in and I went aboard to visit it, and I was interested in the enormous um almost pride that the British people took in seeing our flagship there. I think that um perhaps it's uh-- it is as you say a-a great reassurance to people, it gives them a sense of something tangible that in the increasingly grave situation um that we face in the world as a whole um is a-a-a tangible strength that they can put their finger on and-and hold onto so to speak. Now what changes come about because of this increasingly grave world situation in our whole naval program? (21:29)

[Francis P. Matthews:] Well, obviously, our uh situation has been one in which we have had to make uh available the resources of the Navy. During--at the end of the last war, the men who were in charge of the Navy uh they uh realized that we did have uh large resources in the way of ships and uh equipment in the Navy and uh with uh I think astute foresightedness, they worked out a plan whereby it was the ships, so to speak, were put in mothballs and held in reserve and it has been a-a matter of great satisfaction to see how uh we--it's been possible for us in a uh in an unexpectedly short space of time to make those ships available for reactivation, for-for active use in the Navy. And uh also, of course, as in the Navy as in all other departments of modern warfare, there have been developments and there are--there is a an evolution in progress and as a result we've had to uh increase, for instance, um the-the numbers of our ships and uh we've had to uh also increase and develop the types of ships, particularly-particularly the carrier. The carrier today is the most important ship in the Navy. It uh is a development of modern warfare, and of course, we have to keep that abreast with the development of the times. (23:09)

[ER:] Well, you must've uh been happy eh uh at a recent vote then. [ER laughs]

[Francis P. Matthews:] Well, we were very happy at the recent uh um bill that was in-- the adoption of the uh bill in the-in the uh House of Congress uh allowing two mill--two billion dollars for the development of uh new ships and the building of new ships and particularly with respect to the development of the large carrier. There was a great deal of talk uh a year and a half ago when I became Secretary of the Navy about the so-called super carrier, and uh in the process of the uh administration of the Department of Defense the uh progress of the building of that carrier was discontinued; in other words it was canceled. Uh in this new bill that has been adopted uh there is provision made for the building of a-a-a larger carrier. We don't like to call it a super carrier in the-the Navy. It is simply a-a step in the development, uh the progress of building the carrier, keeping up with uh what we've learned from the use of the carrier and making it more modern, and to provide a-a proper floating base, a floating landing field for the larger type of airships, which we use in the naval--in the air arm of the Navy.

[ER:] Well, um that um constant improvement is what, of course, makes us strong in every um area. It has to go on um on the land and in the air and on the sea because we know that other people are experimenting and we must uh keep abreast of them. And I've always felt that one of the great strengths uh that we have was our ability to accept the fact that other people were going ahead and always to try keep abreast and keep um ahead of the thinking and, therefore, of the development. And I am very glad that Congress has allowed the Navy eh to go ahead because I know there are plenty of people in the Navy ready to go! And now, Mr. Secretary, for one minute we have to have a break, and then we'll come right back because there are some questions I'm very anxious to ask you.

(Break 25:41-25:52)

[ER:] Now, we will come back to our conversation and I'll ask uh the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Matthews, a question that I know is in the minds of a great many people. Um, we've heard a good deal about the rising strength in the Soviet Union and the extraordinary new submarine that they are building, and I would like to ask uh what you feel is the possible role of the submarine and um what we ourselves uh are hoping for--I know you can't give away any secrets, I don't mean that, but I mean what the general thinking is on subject of the submarine?

[Francis P. Matthews:] Well, we uh in the Navy are especially conscious of the menace of the submarine. We almost lost two wars on account of the submarine. In the last war we lost fourteen million tons of shipping uh through the uh then uh modern submarine but which to us now seems uh-uh somewhat obsolete. So uh um anti-submarine warfare has uh first priority in the development of uh the Navy's resources. Of course, the uh ideal way to get uh the submarine and to uh fight it is to find it where it's under construction and destroy it there, and if not there then in the yards in the pens where it's uh-uh kept uh in-in waiting to go out uh on its mission of destruction. And uh then if you can't get it there, we have the idea uh we've built an anti-submarine sub which stalks the submarine and tries to kill it before it has a chance to uh reach its victim and accomplish its purpose of destruction. (27:53)

[ER:] I was very familiar with much of the uh um first part of the last war when we were really unprepared for the activity of submarines and our-our uh um ships going to Great Britain suffered great uh losses and, of course, uh um it meant a very serious situation for Great Britain which is an island and has to have some supplies. And one of my boys was on one of our destroyers in that very first uh group um and so I have heard a great deal about this and have a particular interest in what we're doing so that um--I have a feeling, of course, that if um other nations know that we are prepared that is the best insurance against uh-against war that we have.

[Francis P. Matthews:] Well, we think that we're uh prepared. Of course, we're not as well prepared as we'd like to be. You're never as well prepared as you'd like to be for-for war and to meet the enemies' uh attacks and threats, but we have a very comprehensive uh plan of anti-submarine warfare. And we're working at that constantly, and I said with first priority. And we're getting good results. Obviously, as you say, I can't uh outline[ER: Mhm.] uh the-the means by which we hope to meet the submarine menace, but the people of America can be sure and be satisfied uh that the Navy is uh conscious of what its obligation is in this respect and I think I can say uh safely that if uh--and we-we hope it doesn't happen, but if we get into war again that we'll be better prepared than we have ever been to meet [ER: And I hope--] the submarine menace.

[ER:] with all my heart that we don't get into war. I am interested primarily in preventing war. But the conflict in Korea has made us all conscious of all these different phases. Now we don't seem there to have uh run into submarine warfare particularly, but there must be somethings that have been brought about as results--as a result of your experience there.

[Francis P. Matthews:] Yes, uh th-that's true because we didn't know in uh the uh campaign in Korea and we don't know now uh whether or not we'd be subjected to submarine attack. So we have to proceed, anticipating, and uh-uh being ready in case such a development should transpire. So we have learned a great deal uh with respect to submarine warfare and uh submarine menace even in Korea, although as you say we have not been subjected uh to to-to actual submarine attacks.

[ER:] But there must be other innovations that come about as a result of the Korean situation. Are there any special ones that you want [unclear]--?

[Francis P. Matthews:] Yes, there have been uh many lessons learned uh from uh the Korean campaign. Uh we have learned uh of course--and it's very vital and very important--we-we've-we've learned the methods of cooperation better than we have ever uh appreciated it before. Uh first under the auspices of the United Nations, the people of the different countries have worked together under the magnificent leadership of General MacArthur, and uh they have demonstrated uh that it's possible for the free democracies to-to work together and for their troops to combine in one force to oppose a common enemy. And uh we've learned uh to work together ourselves at the three forces, the three departments of the armed forces, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. And uh we have got invaluable lessons in cooperation in-in the in-inter-utilization of our respective powers and uh weapons and the things that we're capable to do in our respective fields. That has been most heartening and most gratifying. (32:07)

[ER:] And now, didn't you really do a remarkable um feat of transportation um with planes and [unclear]--?

[Francis P. Matthews:] Yes, we did. For instance, in-in one example is what happened when the [USS] Boxer made a-an eight day trip across the Pacific with over a thousand men and-- badly needed in the Army and in the Air Force uh and uh also carried with it uh vast quantities of cargo and some badly needed planes, and it was really an outstanding accomplishment and shows what can be done when it's necessary to meet a-a critical emergency.

[ER:] And then the Navy must have done some rather extraordinary work in the transfer and redeployment of the Marines, for instance. (33:02)

[Francis P. Matthews:] Yes, uh we did. The Marines um a-as always um have--in this last campaign have uh shown uh the- the high quality that they exemplify in their service to this country. It's uh an organization of course that holds a special place in the hearts of the American people. Your distinguished son was a member of the Marines, and it's been my privilege to learn of his uh inspiring patriotism and his great courage and uh --that he has a high place in the affections of the uh the Marines. And he's typical of- of what a Mar- a Marine is, and what-what the American boys uh do -- will do for their country.

[ER:] Of course, I learned something uh in the last war, sir, that interested me very much and has been underlined for me just lately. Eh uh when I visited the first hospital on the west coast in the last war, the people I saw were the Marines, and some of them were even from Jimmy's raiders in the Pacific. And uh the other day I was talking to someone--I haven't been visiting hospitals, I've seen some of the men, but I haven't been visiting hospitals as a regular thing, but of course it was my job in the last war as the President's wife to do it. And uh I was interested to find that some of our first returned boys are again the Marines [ER laughs]. So that the Marines get the first task uh --blow so apparently in all our wars.

[Francis P. Matthews:] Well that's what the Marines are, of course. They're a force to be used with the Navy, and they make the landings when we approach a foreign shore. And it's our business in the armed forces to keep war away from the shores of this country. So the Marines bear the brunt. They're-they're-

they're the first shock troops, and they have uh of course they-they meet a-a-a terrific test of their ability. They're a specialized group, a professional group, and uh consequently they number among the first casualties of any uh clash with an enemy.

[ER:] They show great courage even in burying their casualties. I can tell you stories about some of the wounded Marines which um would break your heart, but still would give you enormous pride in their spirit both in burying -- what means a handicap for the rest of your life, and uh in-in the things they do in war. (35:37)

[Francis P. Matthews:] I'm sure what you could tell me would uh um just simply duplicate things that uh I've observed personally. I was over in Korea and uh Japan recently, and I saw the Marines there in the hospitals. And by the way, can I say something about another development that we've had in--learned from Korea? And that is the use of the helicopter that uh has been developed, and that-- and it's a great value in uh saving lives, in transporting the wounded from uh-uh the field, from the front line back to the hospital. And that that has been used with great effect, and uh as a result many, many, many lives have been saved. It's a significant development uh and from our experience in this Korean campaign. (36:26)

[ER:] I've noticed that. I've noticed uh pictures, and I've read about that and been extremely grateful for it because uh the helicopter, of course, is a new invention and I think all of us are grateful for anything which saves lives. And all of this that you've been telling us is something which I hope is building strength to prevent war. And now, Mr. Secretary, I'm terribly sorry but our time is drawing to a close, and I will have to just thank you for taking time to come on this program and tell us about the Navy.

[Francis P. Matthews:] It's been a great privilege to be with you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Thank you.

(37:13)

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