

**Arleigh A. Burke, Oral History Interview – 1/20/1967**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Arleigh A. Burke  
**Interviewer:** Joseph E. O'Connor  
**Date of Interview:** January 20, 1967  
**Location:** Washington, D.C.  
**Length:** 39 pages

**Biographical Note**

Burke an Admiral, and Chief of Naval Operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1955-1961), discusses his frustrations with the Kennedy administration, including Robert S. McNamara's changes to the Department of Defense, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, general lack of respect for procedures and lessons from the past, and censoring of a speech that Burke was to give in January 1961, among other issues.

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**Suggested Citation**

Arleigh A. Burke, recorded interview by Joseph E. O'Connor, January 20, 1967, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Arleigh A. Burke

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Oral History Interview

with

Admiral Arleigh A. Burke

January 20, 1967  
Washington, D.C.

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Admiral Burke, I was wondering if you, in watching the campaign between Richard Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon] and John F. Kennedy, had any particular reason to be pleased or not pleased when you discovered that John F. Kennedy was to be the next President of the United States?

BURKE: Well, I was Chief of Naval Operations then, and being in the service, I served the President of the United States, and it didn't make any particular difference which party won the election. Of course, naturally, we followed the statements that the candidates made to see what they might do, but as far as being pleased or displeased at that time, no.

O'CONNOR: With your first contacts with him, did you have any feelings about or any worries of confidence with regard to this man because of his youth, perhaps, or charges of inexperience or something like that? What I'm really trying to get at is your first impression of the man, your feelings toward him.

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BURKE: Well, the first impression that I had was on his State of the Union Message—no, it was when he was sworn in. Of course, I was there

along with the other Chiefs, and I have never heard a better speech. It was wonderful. I thought, "This is a magnificent speech. It's the best statement of the policies in which I believe that I have ever heard." As he said it, I was extremely proud on that day. Now, before then, before that day, I had briefed him along with other people, at times, I don't know just when, but on various matters, and it was like briefing anybody else. I mean, you got no opinion of the man. But his acceptance speech, I still think, is one of the best speeches I've ever heard. Unfortunately, in a very short time I was not so sure that the people that he brought in with him understood that speech at all.

O'CONNOR: Well, I was going to ask you about some of the people that he brought in with him, starting from Secretary McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] on down. I'd be interested in knowing what your feelings were about the men who came in, and really that you had to deal directly with.

BURKE: Well, Secretary McNamara, when he came in, was inexperienced. But perhaps I'd better go back a little bit farther than that.

O'CONNOR: All right.

BURKE: Most of the people who came in with President Kennedy came in with the idea that they would eliminate government red tape; they would eliminate the old way of doing things; they would make a lot of changes because certainly there were things that had been done that shouldn't be done anymore. Something new should be devised. There would have to be a change, a dramatic change. Well, immediately, they cut through what they thought was red tape, but what they thought was red tape was standard procedures for doing things. And so immediately there was chaos, because nobody knew who was doing anything. The President, in a very short while,

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would call up one man, ask his opinion, and other people who were responsible for that activity would not be called. At first I thought the President has seen to it that this information has been distributed to the people who really should know about it, but the President hadn't. And this was true with his subordinates, too. So nobody knew who was in charge here on any particular item. This went on for quite some time.

You asked about Mr. McNamara. Mr. McNamara was a brilliant man who came in with the same ideas that everyone else of the new people came in with. Possibly they had been briefed on making changes. I think they probably were, but I don't know about that. But it seemed as if they thought this: "We've got to make some changes. We've got to make the first hundred days impressive. We've got to do a lot of things fast and differently." They hadn't been in government before or in big organizations before, or at least most of them hadn't. Although Mr. MaNamara had been president of Ford, it was only for a very short while. But before that he was primarily a staff man and an economist, and so he didn't have experience in administration of the whole of a big organization. There weren't very many

experienced administrators in the group. So Mr. McNamara had a lot of ideas, and a lot of them I thought were pretty good. But at the end of about two or three weeks or something like that, I became concerned. I got into my office early every morning, at 7:15, usually, and he got in early, too. I found that out shortly. So one morning I went down to see his secretary, and I said, "I want to speak with the Secretary sometime when I've got an hour and I'm not going to be interrupted by mail. I don't want anything on his mind. I don't want the telephones to ring or anything like that. Will you arrange it? I don't care what date it is." She said, "Tomorrow morning." And I said, "Well, Peggy, I don't think you understood. I don't want just an hour; I want an uninterrupted hour with him not worried or not concerned about something else." She said, "I put the mail on his desk, so I'll arrange it. If something does come up during the night, why I'll call you and you can come down another time."

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So I went down to see the Secretary the next morning at 7 o'clock or thereabouts. When I started off, I said, "Mr. Secretary, I'm quite a bit older than you are. I've been in this jungle of Washington for a good many years. I would like to explain some things that you aren't going to like. But I'd like to have you listen, and as a matter of fact, you must listen. I've got this to get off my chest."

And then I said, "I don't think that you or most of the people in the new Administration really realize the power that you have, that you're wielding, and the influence that you have, not only within the United States, but throughout the world. I don't think you know what's going to happen when you do the things you do, the effects that they will have on civilization for a long, long time to come. Because it's very easy to destroy. It only takes a few minutes to destroy an organization or to destroy a building or to destroy a structure, to destroy things that a lot of other people have spent lifetimes, a succession of lifetimes, in building up. It takes only ten seconds to destroy your own reputation; it takes a lifetime to build it. It only takes a little while to destroy any structure, but it takes a long, long time and a lot of thought to build it. So before anything is destroyed, you should know what's going to be built to replace it. You should have a pretty clear idea of what's going to be built and be pretty sure in your own mind that it is really good."

And I said, "Now, I know that you will agree with that. What you won't agree with, possibly, is that your primary job here is to build the future. What happens day to day should not be of concern to you because what you should do is to plan for the future. And the measure of whether you are really good or bad shouldn't be measurable in your own term of office. It should only be measurable ten years after you have left office, because what you will be building will be the military power of the United States for the future which won't be known until ten years after. If you do a good job you probably won't get very much credit for it because there will be a lot of people who will have contributed to this good job,

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but your best job will be what you can persuade, encourage, help others to do, because one man by himself, no matter who he is or what he is, cannot do very much. Lots of people can do much. But the measure of your success should be the forces that you leave behind you."

I gave him an old naval example that the measure of a good captain is how his ship runs when he is not there, because if he has to be there, then his organization is improper. And I said, "Now, if you get so immersed in details, in operational details particularly, that you have to make those daily decisions, then your policies are wrong or not understood. Your objectives also are either wrong or not understood, both of which you should have determined and which you should spend your primary time on—the policies and objectives of this department of yours. If you have to make the day to day decisions, you are messing into details which somebody else could run better, not only because it's their job, but because they've had more experience and know how. They would carry out general instructions within your policies and towards your objectives if they know what they are and they are clear. But if you get immersed in details, it isn't so much that you're going to do the improper things on the details, it's that you are not going to devote your time to the most important thing that you have to do—to establish our objectives, where we are going, and the policies by which we get to those objectives. And those will not be known because they will not have been formed. You will not be able to do both jobs." And there were a lot of other things of a similar nature I told him. He agreed with...

O'CONNOR: Was he receptive to this?

BURKE: Yes, yes. And thereafter I went down to see him two or three times a week in the early morning, or he came up to see me, until I left. Now unfortunately, he is a man who likes details, and the errors that he has committed are the very errors that I was afraid he was going to commit by watching him operate for two or three weeks and wanting to know all the little details, which if he knows, indicates he is wasting that much time trying to find out what those details are.

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And a man who does that doesn't make any of the little mistakes. The little things are done properly; he only makes tremendous mistakes. Which have been made. Basic mistakes which will not be measurable for ten or fifteen years from now, but they will be measurable then. Maybe not by us.

O'CONNOR: Well, in referring to the basic mistakes that have been made, can you be more specific than this in talking about mistakes that were made, that you recognized when you were in office?

BURKE: Certainly. In the handling of details, and he didn't have an overall objective. We still don't have any objectives. We don't know where we're going as a country. Now, you ask ten different people, intelligent people, what our real objectives are in Vietnam, and they can't tell you. You ask what our objectives are in the Middle East or what our policies are in the Middle East, and they don't know. There will be a lot of beautiful words of doing good; we will make progress; we will do all of these things. But what really are our specific objectives? Consequently, everybody's running off half-cocked in different directions. Let me just give

you a specific example. It's just recently occurred. Mr. McNamara said about a year ago when the budget was submitted that the budget was based upon the war ending in July 1967. His crystal ball must have been pretty good. That is an impossible prediction to make, and it's very wrong to make planning estimates based on that type of an assumption over which the enemy has much control. It isn't just because of costs and money. It isn't that you waste more money because you delay making an important decision until you have to take emergency action and instead of airplanes costing three million dollars, they cost nine million dollars because you have to pay for double time and use emergency procedures and hire lots of people whom you otherwise would not have hired, all of that sort of stuff. It isn't that. That is relatively unimportant even though very expensive. What does happen is that you don't have that material when you need it.

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Now, let's take another example. This is an example a sophomore in high school should be able to solve. If a nation decides that it is necessary to exercise its military power, what subsidiary steps should be taken at the same time that decision is made? And a high school sophomore will give you a pretty good answer. You increase your rate of training; you increase your rate of production of the material that you might use; you increase your shipping capability, your aircraft capability, so that you've got the men and the material to carry out the operations and the means to get them there and the means with which they can fight. Okay.

What did we do? We decided that we would put armed units in South Vietnam three years ago, was it? Whenever it was, I've forgotten. Were any of those decisions made such as to increase our rate of training? No. A year and a half later that decision was made. Was there a decision made to increase the numbers of ammunition factories? No. Instead, the decisions were to cut down for each type of ammo to one factory. Big reductions were made. Later it was necessary to open on an emergency basis, these same factories and other factories which had been closed down. Did we say, "We'll probably have to use airplanes, and probably some of the airplanes will either be worn out or shot down or damaged. The rate of loss of aircraft will increase beyond that of peacetime operations, somehow or other, and so we ought to increase our production of F-4's?" No.

What happened? We didn't cut back, but four months ago he called all the large aircraft manufacturers together and said, "Boys, we're in real sad trouble. We've got to increase our rate of production of these aircrafts. What can you do to get aircraft produced fast?" And so they go into emergency procedures, three shifts a day, that sort of stuff. And again at tremendous cost, and it will be questionable if they get manufactured in time since it takes three to four years for these aircraft to come off the line, be tested and pilots trained. If there is another emergency in addition to Vietnam or if the rate of pilot loss increases in Vietnam, which it could do, we're going to be in a little trouble.

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And when you once reach a point in the curve where your supply of a thing plus your rate of production of that thing is about equal to your then immediate requirements, and

where your losses, for any reason, is greater than your rate of increase, then you're right on the edge. Then what happens is that you go over the red line, the danger line, you use material faster than it is replaced, and your loss rate increases at an accelerated rate because you've pushed tired pilots, you don't overhaul your aircraft because you don't have time to overhaul them. Your rate of losses go up and up and up and accelerates very rapidly, and pretty soon you're on a toboggan. This has happened over and over in war—ever since two cavemen got together and started using sling shots and one of them had his pile of rocks run out. This is not something new. It's something that's been going on for all the time of recorded history, and God knows how long before. These are the things, these are the lessons which we are learning now again, which were known before Christ was born.

Guerilla warfare, counterinsurgency: new names for very, very old operations, but something now said to be brand new. They aren't brand new. This was the way warfare started in the first place with that kind of war. Our own war of the Revolution was a guerilla war primarily, what we would call a guerilla war now, or counterinsurgency or what not. This has always been going on; it's the most familiar type of war there is. This is one of the things that's bad about youth, just general youth, not all young men, but in general. Youth does not believe in what has gone before. They want to throw the past off. They think it's going to be a different world now. And when youth gets in charge, this usually happens. They do throw the past off. Sometimes they're successful, but usually they are not in big organizations. Since I've retired, I've found that this is true even in industry very frequently.

Twice I've had to go into a company where a young man had a hell of a good idea, and he put it into effect, and the company damn near went broke. When I went back and read his original ideas, they were still good. The only thing was he discarded all safety features. All of the things that other people built up he threw away. And he could have made those ideas work, except he didn't have

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the experience or the judgment to realize that it takes a lot of factors to make things. This is how that Administration hit me at first, not the President.

O'CONNOR: I imagine the things you are talking about that were destroyed or that were thrown out when the new Administration came into office had a great deal to do with channels of communication and things like this, the passage of information.

BURKE: There were no channels of communication.

O'CONNOR: Well, you mean they were thrown out?

BURKE: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Can you be a little more specific on that, for example....

BURKE: Well, I had a White House telephone on my desk. The President would

call me on something which was Joint Chiefs' business. I was not Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer] was. But he called me and I would say, "Yes, Mr. President," and give him the best answers I could. Then I would call up the Chairman and tell him what the President had just asked me, and I'd say, "What did you tell him?" He said, "I never heard anything about it." It wasn't that the President was wrong in asking me for information, but sometimes he gave me orders to do something that was not my responsibility, or the Navy's, but some other Service. The President did not follow the established chain of command or communications. When I did get such orders, I called the man responsible and gave him the President's orders. If I hadn't called the proper official, he wouldn't have known. And I didn't have the organization, sometimes, to disseminate the information or to do some of the things that were necessary. In the military you exchange information like that; we check. This failure to use established channels or to ensure that people responsible for an activity were informed of orders involving that activity wasn't done willfully by

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the President, but it was done by a great many of his people, primarily to avoid "red tape" or set standard procedures—to do things differently.

O'CONNOR: Well, this is an instance of a channel of communication between your office or the Joint Chiefs of Staff office and the White House. Is it also true within the Pentagon?

BURKE: Yes, sure. It was then, but to a lesser extent. The measure of good organization—there's a lot of measures of good organizations—but one of the measures of a good organization is how much does it depend on a single individual? If it depends upon a single individual, the organization isn't good. Another measure is the procedures which are established to operate the organization: are they so that if there is a casualty to a procedure, is it automatically checked? Will the casualty repair itself? That means you have to have standard procedures; you have to have routines; you have to have things so that if a message doesn't get through there's an automatic correction, a little fellow that you never hear of checks it. Then you can do things. But when you destroy those the organization goes to pieces. Now in the military service it is harder to make procedural errors—destroy those the organization military services it is harder they have those checks.

O'CONNOR: Well, is that the same fault you were describing that you would attribute to Secretary McNamara, was also true of the first Secretary of the Navy, John Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.], under President Kennedy?

BURKE: No, no. I think John Connally...

O'CONNOR: How about Paul "Red" Fay [Paul B. Fay, Jr.], was it?

BURKE: No, no. I don't think Red Fay—as you and I know, he's a hell of a nice man—but he was interested in physical fitness. He didn't

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know what the Under Secretary of the Navy was when he came in, as he has probably told you. He knew just that much about the rest of the Navy. He never found out very much more than that. He's a nice individual and a very pleasant man. He never worked very hard and he never knew what was going on.

O'CONNOR: What was your feeling about this when he was appointed Under Secretary of the Navy? Wasn't there anything you could do about it?

BURKE: He was a political appointee.

O'CONNOR: I mean, isn't there anything you can do about this? Can you....

BURKE: Why? You don't—you have to work around him. Just like in a bee hive when there's a dead bee in a cell, they cover it over, and some worked around him. He had to be worked around. And he didn't mind that, probably because he could then do what he wanted to about his own interest, physical fitness.

O'CONNOR: How about John Connally?

BURKE: John Connally, no. John Connally was a good man. When he came in as Secretary, the Navy had been accused of cocooning their Secretaries, which meant that it operated the same way regardless of who the Secretaries were. Well, I thought this was a hell of a bad thing. This was said of all the services; it was not just the Navy. This was a poor reputation, so I decided that when the new Secretary came in, whoever he was, I would bring him in and work like hell with him for ten days or two weeks and break out everything I knew.

So I asked John Connally to live with me in my quarters, which he did. He got up when I got up at 6:30. He went down to the office at 7 o'clock with me. He just stayed with me all the time for ten days, two weeks, or whatever it was. And I took him on all of the trips that I was normally going on anyway, and when I talked with

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people, he was there. I told him the lowdown whenever we were in the car together. I talked to him all the time, for the whole time, explaining exactly what was happening, why I was doing what I was, what I thought should be done, everything else. He learned an awful lot. He also learned not only our strengths, the procedures and everything like that, he learned all of our weaknesses. I'm not so sure that's entirely good. You don't even tell, before you're

married, you don't even tell all of your weaknesses to your wife probably. But John Connally was a good Secretary. He learned fast; he was very interested.

Quite unfortunately, after he'd been in office a long period of three or four days, I realized that he did not intend to be Secretary of the Navy very long. We were training an interim appointee. And we were spending a hell of a lot of money and time and effort on somebody that didn't intend to stay there. But while he was there, or at least while I was there, he was very good. I have great respect for him. He learned good.

O'CONNOR: Well, before you left was your outlook any more hopeful? In other words, did you feel that the lesson that it takes a great deal of time to build up what you have destroyed, did you feel this lesson had been learned by Secretary McNamara or anybody else? In other words, were new channels being...

BURKE: Hadn't been learned yet.

O'CONNOR: You don't feel, then, that new channels were being put in to replace the old channels, that there was still a real lack of communication in dissemination of information?

BURKE: I *never* knew what the hell I was supposed to do all the time I was with the new Administration. This is why I retired; I refused to stay on any longer. I was asked to stay on for a fourth term by the new Administration. I had submitted my request for retirement before the election because I'd been in there a long time and so that there would be no political connotations to my retirement. But I was never so grateful for anything in my life as I was having done that, because I was completely

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and absolutely frustrated. There was nothing that I could accomplish, I felt. I was spinning my wheels. I would submit recommendations; I would explain and explain and explain, and nothing would happen. And what the hell, I could go out and grow roses or sugar cane or sit on the front porch and at least I could watch the sun come up in the morning under pleasant circumstances. But that job was nothing that I wanted to continue.

O'CONNOR: Was this opinion shared by other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

BURKE: I never would discuss it with the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at that time. I don't know what they thought because this was a personal thing, and when I'm on active duty I do the very best I can possibly do to carry out the wishes of the President and the people that are appointed over me, not their Goddamned underlings, but the people who were appointed over me. But I didn't want much to do with that new group. I didn't feel very proud of myself for being in that sort of an organization.

O'CONNOR: Would you feel this is also true of the men that McNamara brought in with him? I don't know whether you had much contact with them, but Charles Hitch [Charles J. Hitch], I'm thinking of, or Alain Enthoven [Alain C. Enthoven] or any other new young men. He's brought in a lot of brilliant young men.

BURKE: Sure, brilliant young men, and I think most of them have that same thought: they would make a big personal impact. Sometimes they had very good ideas, many of them very good. But, for example, cost effectiveness—cost effectiveness has been with us ever since I've been in the Navy. It's not something new; it's something that's been there forever and ever. There are good ways of doing it. And there are improvements that are continuously made, but not everything the predecessors had done was bad. Mr. Gates [Thomas S. Gates, Jr.] wasn't completely stupid, and Mr. McElroy [Neil H. McElroy] wasn't

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completely stupid, and Mr. Wilson [Charles E. Wilson] wasn't completely stupid nor all generations of people that had gone before. The world hadn't been waiting until this group of young people came in and suddenly discovered this magnificent thing of cost effectiveness, that you ought to determine what you need to do and how much it costs, and you ought to do it as cheaply as possible. That's not exactly new.

There are techniques that are being evolved as time goes on always, as you get better accounting methods, better procedures, better equipment, more standardized methods of manufacture, improving standards of performance that industry puts in; those things keep improving. But the Navy started this cost effectiveness business within the Navy long before I ever came in the Navy. That was one of the first courses I ever took as a graduate student. It was all right for them to not understand that when they first come in, but what distressed me is even when they found that out, it didn't change their attitude. They did not say, "Well, we would like to improve this method." No, that wasn't the technique. The technique was, "What has gone before is all wrong, and you must change it." "Well, the hell with it," people say. "Okay, you run it; I don't want any part of it."

And where does this lead your country? You try to explain, and its not understood. Lots of times with a beautiful brochure and with lots of promises, a concept is accepted, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the damned airplane's going to fly, no matter how many billions of dollars you put into it. The F-111 is something that started a long time after I left, but that's an example of what sounded very good in brochuremanship, and by stretching the truth a little bit and stating the magnificent things that are *going* to be developed, an expensive contract was let. Only it didn't quite turn out to be true. Or if those things were true, there were other factors that came in which affected the performance a great deal. Now they'll make the F-111 fly, and they'll make it operate, but it'll cost about ten times as much as it should have cost in the first instance.

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Now, I was partly responsible for the F-4H and I spent a long time on that airplane because I had to make the decision as to what kind of an airplane the Navy should go for. In those days, the Chief of Naval Operations had the authority to recommend that kind of a decision. I went out and I flew in a lot of airplanes and I shot a lot of missiles to see how much time there is to make up your mind and what man's reaction is and how does it feel in the environment in which the plane might be used. Because there was differences of opinion within the Navy as to what kind of an airplane the Navy should go for, I decided from my own experience that the performance should be put in the missile, not just the airplane. We would get maneuverability and a lot of other operational characteristics in the airplane. Then I took the concept to a couple of airplane manufacturers on a page or two, and I said, "Take a look at this. This is a fighter airplane. See how you would improve it within the present state of the art plus ten percent." You don't want something in there that people are dreaming about." And they did, and we changed it a little bit.

Then I called my own people together, and I said, "Gentlemen, this is the airplane we're going to buy, and these are the reasons for it, and we can get this airplane, but this is not the only airplane. The next best one is this concept here. I'm going to turn these over to two companies, so that if one company flops or there's something wrong that we can't anticipate here we'll have one good airplane anyway." As a net result we ordered the F-4H and the F-8U. We put about thirty million dollars into the F-BU as a standby. It's not as good a plane as the F-4H, but I didn't know that when they were in the paper studies.

And the F-4H has turned out to be a good plane. Why? Because we took the experience of the operating people and the designers who worked on the Goddamn thing and when that plane came off the line it was a wonderful airplane from the time the first one came out. And what airplane is flying in all of the services today? They want commonality and all such stuff. How did they get that? They got that because that F-4H airplane proved itself to the Air Force. Not that anybody forced it down the Air Force's throat or said, "This you must have." That airplane outperformed anything the Air Force had, so they wanted it. And it was, as airplanes go these days, it was cheap.

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Now, how did some of those good characteristics get in there? Take the question of overloading an airplane. All airplanes are always overloaded. This is what has happened to the F-111. They weren't going to overload that airplane but they did. It won't fly now, the Navy version, at least, because it's too heavy. I remember a long time ago when I was fighting in Guadalcanal when the F-4U was a new airplane. One came into Guadalcanal with a friend of mine piloting, and it came in flat, dull, no handling capability, sluggish as all got out. And the pilot got out—he was later killed—Gus Widhelm got out and I said, "Look...

O'CONNOR:           What was the man's name?

BURKE:                Widhelm [William John Widhelm]. And I said, "Gus, what the hell are you doing?" He said, "I'm a night fighter." I said, "Is that your airplane?" He said, "Yes, that's a wonderful airplane." And I said, "Well, that doesn't look very wonderful to me. When you came in you came in flat and

sluggish it didn't look like a very good fighter." He said, "That plane's full of whiskey. I've just been down to Espiritu, and that plane's got tons of whiskey in it. I got bottles of whiskey everywhere." I said, "How did that happen?" He said, "Well, they needed a plane for a cargo run and they don't have anything else, so I went down on a cargo run." And I said, "Well, how have you got it loaded?" Well, he had whiskey in every place except on the aileron wires. And I said, "You can't have very many cases in that fighter." He said, "I've got all I could buy with the money that my squadron collected, and it's all in that airplane. I don't think that I've broken a bottle of it. We haven't had a drink up here for months." Well, it turned out that he had a ton and a half, and that plane still flew. It was a fighter, and it was still maneuverable, and he didn't break a bottle.

Later on, a couple of months later, I became Chief of Staff to the Fast Carrier Task Force, and our F-4U's were just coming out, and they didn't have enough armament. It was a fighter, a gun-fighter. We didn't have missiles in those days. We needed some dive-bombers. And I suggested

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make the F-4U a dive-bomber, put some bomb stations on them. They said you can't put bomb stations on a fighter. I said, "You can on that one." And then I said, I knew a Gus Widhelm who could do it. "Where the hell is Gus? Bring him up here." So we brought him to the flag ship. I said, "Gus, put bomb stations on these fighters, and we'd like to have ten of them tried out tomorrow morning. See whether we can put bombs on them." We put a couple of thousand pounds of bombs on those fighters, and they were good; the plane could take it. It had a lot of other things wrong with it, but that they could take.

That same thing of overloading could happen to the F-4H, and so one of the things that I told McDonnell when we started this plane, "This plane's got to carry a ton of whiskey. After you've got all the rest of the airplane designed and everything else, you've got to be able to add another couple of tons on the plane and it must carry it." It can, and it did, and it is now the best fighter. This is putting in an element of uncertainty in design because you don't know all the answers when you start.

Things are going to change, and you don't know what the future holds in the design of airplanes, in the production of rabbits, or in agriculture or population explosions or the relationships among nations. You don't know what the answer's going to come out to be or what's going to happen tomorrow, and you can't preplan with exactitude. So you've got to foresee a possible contingency when you might not be able to foresee the specific contingency. These must be leeway for future developments—for change. This is not done in many things. We cut too close to the edge. We say, "This is going to be it. We will close all of these factories, they're excess." And then you have to open them six months later because something that was not in your plan happened. Many times it has been said you will not use a bayonet anymore, and yet we still use a bayonet. After World War II the statement was made, "There will be no more amphibious landings. That's all gone. Air power will take care of everything." All of these statements that were the war cries in the past have been repeated recently. Don't we ever learn?

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O'CONNOR: You said that you made a lot of recommendations when you got in there and found that they weren't being heeded. Would you say that this is true in general, that the civilians who came into the Pentagon did not pay sufficient attention to the military recommendations?

BURKE: No, I think they paid attention. I don't think they wanted to take the advice. I think even if it was good they wouldn't have accepted it.

O'CONNOR: Well, do you think there was much anti-military feeling among the civilians who came in?

BURKE: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Can you give any specific example of this sort of thing?

BURKE: Yes. Yes, I did—because I liked Mr. McNamara when he came in. I don't like what he does now because I think he has grown into feeling himself more superior to normal people than he actually is. He has no humility, but I liked him anyway. But I haven't seen him in years, so I don't know what he is now.

But I don't think I ever received a friendly word or a friendly gesture, in six months from any of the subordinates, either in the White House or in the Department of Defense. Never. And I got so, after a while, I was hoping that somebody would say, "Good Morning." Never. Instead of going into an office and find the secretary greeting you pleasantly, as we had been used to, she didn't have the least idea who you were. She didn't know or care. She had a job to do and that was that. Nothing else.

I wanted to know these new people coming in. I invited them to my house. They acted as if they were slumming. I invited them to my house for dinner, and they would be very late and not care about the inconvenience they caused the other guests. I invited one man who was well up in the government to my house for dinner at 8 o'clock, and when I got home about 7:30 to change clothes myself, I find him up in my dressing room with his wife, looking through the house. I suppose he wanted to look through the house to see

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how we lived. But you don't do that. He wouldn't have done that to anybody that he had any regard for; he just wouldn't have done it. So he was doing that because, either unconsciously of what he was doing or deliberately, to show that he didn't have much regard for me. You don't have to be kicked many times before you start getting the idea. Of course, I know that it could have been personal and not just the military. That thought has arisen. And it might be. But if it was, then that was no place for me either. Well, I'm sure this is not what you want.

O'CONNOR: Well, some of it is what I wanted. Sure, we're just as anxious to get your criticism of the Kennedy Administration as we are to get your

praise of it. No doubt about that. We're not here just to record tributes.

One of the problems that arose very early in the Administration that you were involved in, of course, was the Bay of Pigs. And before we get into the actual operation of the Bay of Pigs, if we do that at all, I wanted to ask you one of the things, one of the controversies that arose around this was whether or not John F. Kennedy had known during the campaign about the Bay of Pigs?

BURKE: During his campaign?

O'CONNOR: Yes. It was stated by Richard Nixon in a book after the election that John F. Kennedy had been briefed, and I thought that maybe you would know...

BURKE: I don't know, because the Joint Chiefs were not briefed at that time, on the Kennedy thing, on the...

O'CONNOR: The Bay of Pigs.

BURKE: No, the Bay of Pigs didn't come up until after the—not only after the election, but after the twentieth of January. There was no such thing as a consideration of that landing before. But the Joint Chiefs, now I don't know exactly when, but the Joint Chiefs found out the size of the training operation in Nicaragua and Guatemala sometime between the election—and I don't

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know the date, but you've got that, I'm sure—sometimes between the election and the Inauguration. I think it was about a month before, and I think it was in early January. I'm not real sure.

O'CONNOR: Well, you were appointed to the commission to investigate the Bay of Pigs after it....

BURKE: Yes.

O'CONNOR: How did you happen to be appointed to that commission; can you tell us?

BURKE: How the hell would I know? I didn't appoint myself. You're asking the wrong....

O'CONNOR: Who called you?

BURKE: What?

O'CONNOR: Who got in touch with you? Who told you you were on the...

BURKE: The President.

O'CONNOR: Well, can you tell us what you did, how the investigation was?

BURKE: No.

O'CONNOR: You mean because that's classified or top secret?

BURKE: No. Because I told the President I wouldn't discuss it, President Kennedy.

O'CONNOR: So you weren't involved in the commission to investigate?

BURKE: Of course I was involved in the commission to investigate, but at President Kennedy's request I promised President Kennedy along with everybody

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else on that investigation that I was not going to talk about the Bay of Pigs or the investigation.

O'CONNOR: Why was—why did you give that answer?

BURKE: Because I was asked by the President not to discuss either the Bay of Pigs or the subsequent investigation. He was the President. And so did all the rest of the people on that investigation.

O'CONNOR: I don't quite understand. I mean, did the President ask you if you were going to be on the investigating committee...

BURKE: No, no. No, no. After the investigating committee was over, the President called us all in and said, "Gentlemen, I hope you will not discuss this report or the Bay of Pigs or this whole affair." And we each said, "Yes, sir." And so I haven't.

O'CONNOR: I hope that will come out someday, all that, but...

BURKE: I don't think it will, not the truth, from what I've read.

O'CONNOR: Well, then you don't want to give any opinions at all, I take it, on the...

BURKE: No, not on the Bay of Pigs.

O'CONNOR: All right.

BURKE: Not on the Bay of Pigs. But I can say things about the general situation then.

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1; BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

There were no normal channels of communication, and so nobody ever knew who was doing what. The CIA was running the operation, and the Joint Chiefs were told over and over and over again, dozens of times, that this was not a military organization, "It is not a military operation;"

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that the military had nothing to do with this, "You will not become involved in this; the United States military will be kept out of this; you will not tell anybody in your service." This was when we wanted to staff it, "You will not permit it to be staffed." I never even told my Vice Chief about this operation; I was forbidden to. I told one other officer in the Navy about it, just before the operation was being conducted, after I insisted on it.

O'CONNOR: You're talking about being told this after the election...

BURKE: No, no. After the inauguration. This was in February, March, April 1961, all throughout the whole planning stage. That's one of the sad things, the complete lack of communication. Another thing was, was the misunderstanding of words, semantics. We in the military took words to have their dictionary meaning. That's not the way that the new group intended to have them. Those words had meanings different to them. For example, when the President would say, "Well, gentlemen, this is the way it is," he had made a decision, we thought. He hadn't intended to make a decision maybe; I don't think he did. Perhaps what he intended was that that's the way it looks now and let's go on and discuss it. But we would think, "It's all finished."

I found this out for the first time after the Bay of Pigs, that there was tremendous gap of understanding. I was discussing the Laotian situation with the President after the Bay of Pigs. I walked in after a National Security Council meeting, I suppose, or maybe some other meeting that we both attended, but anyway when I went into the President's office he said, "Admiral, I certainly do appreciate your support of this proposition." I've forgotten what the proposition was. I said, "Mr. President, I don't support that, I don't agree with it." He said, "You certainly do; you were in this meeting, weren't you?" I said, "Yes, sir, I was." He said, "But you let that go by and you didn't say anything?" But I said, "Mr. President, I was not asked to express an opinion on that." He said, "Well, when you sit there and let it go by without saying anything, I think that you approve it." I said, "All right." So the next

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day, or a couple of days later, the National Security Council had a discussion, the very first one, on what we should do about the stabilization of the franc or something like that. They had a plan, and just about the time they finished with that I said, "Mr. President, I object to that; I don't agree with this." And everybody in the meeting turned around because, obviously, I didn't know anything about it at all, and if I had been studying how to stabilize the franc or whatever the problem was, then I hadn't been tending to my own job. And the President said, "What is your opinion, Admiral?" I said, "I don't have any, but if the position of my ass determines my vote, and I don't know anything about this, I can't approve. Because I am here, and if my presence here signifies that I approve of this, then I want to know something about it. And I don't know anything about it." He got the idea. It wasn't that he did this deliberately; it was a difference in procedures. Now this happened in a good many times before, I imagine.

O'CONNOR: Well, this is really kind of incredible. You mean that you weren't, you didn't know about the Bay of Pigs operation before the new Presidency had taken office?

BURKE: No. There was no Bay of Pigs operation before. Not only did I not know about it, there was nobody in the whole world that knew about the Bay of Pigs. The operation was not decided until about March or February or something like that. There wasn't any Bay of Pigs operation even considered.

O'CONNOR: That's interesting, because I had been under the impression that the Joint Chiefs of Staff or that you, in particular, because it was a Naval operation, had...

BURKE: It was *not* a Naval operation. The Navy had not a Goddamn thing to do with it. We were specifically forbidden to have anything to do with it.

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The Navy had nothing whatever to do with that. The only thing was that in March or April during the operation, again because I had had a lot of experience in war and I knew things go wrong, I sent a force down there in case the operation went wrong and to pull the operation out of trouble if necessary. This was U.S. force, which I was forbidden to have anywhere near the operation. The Navy had nothing whatever to do with the actual operation, not a thing. It was stated over and over and over again that this is not a military operation; "this is not your operation, gentlemen. We ask your advice on this part, and this part only. Is this logistically sound? What do you think the chances are of this part being operationally sound?" That was all. We were not asked to go over it as a military plan. It was said it is not a military plan.

The first operation that we said would be acceptable was the Trinidad operation. This was before the Bay of Pigs was conceived, before there ever was such a thing thought of. The first thing that was submitted to us was the Trinidad operation, which was submitted to the Chiefs by the CIA at the President's request, I think, in February, after, considerably after

the Inauguration. Maybe it was March; I don't know. But it was February or March. The Joint Chiefs of Staff wrote a memorandum on that concept and said that it had, perhaps, about a fifty percent chance of success. It is dependent upon the support that the Cuban people give and to logistics support, the effectiveness of the air support, a whole lot of things, and we don't know anything about the logistics. Nothing was in the concept paper given to us about logistics. But we said from what little we do know about the logistics, they don't look so good. Well, then we were told that this operation could not go on. We asked, "Why couldn't it go on?" "Because the President thinks it looks too much like a military operation. And so you must change the place." This was not said directly to us. They didn't tell us that. They told CIA, who was in charge of the operation, and CIA told the Chiefs.

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And so later we got other plans that we had to report on, a couple plans, three, I think. And of the plans that were submitted, we chose the Bay of Pigs, that area, but stated that this has less chance of success than the original operation at Trinidad because it was in a less desirable area, close to Havana, closer to Castro's [Fidel Castro] airfields, and because it had been made not to have the appearance of a military operation by changing the methods of landing. Consequently, it didn't have either the appearance or the effectiveness of that kind of an operation either. So the concept of the Bay of Pigs did not exist before the Inauguration. Or if it did, I never heard of it.

O'CONNOR: And it was my impression, and I presume now that this is corrected, that the Navy had had to approve certain aspects, for example...

BURKE: The Navy had nothing to do with any part of that operation. I, as an individual, had nothing to do with it. The Navy approved nothing of that thing. My Vice Chief never knew about the Bay of Pigs. And I didn't approve it, either. What I did was I gave my personal judgment on that, but the Navy did not. I never had that concept staffed, and I was forbidden to staff it.

O'CONNOR: Well, this sounds like one of the problems you were talking about earlier, a lack of communication.

BURKE: Amateurs—complete or just the desire to change procedures. "It can't be done the way it was done." They were going to change it. And this happened. Now, I don't mean that change is by any means unique when an Administration changes, because I heard President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] say, "President Truman [Harry S. Truman], that guy Truman has taken every paper that he can take out of the White House, and there's nothing left here but the walls and the decorations of the White House. But as far as the way the White House operates, I'll be damned if I know." And when President Eisenhower comes in, what does he do? He has a new plan, too. But he's careful. He doesn't throw

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away the old one. This was the difference. When Truman took over from President Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] what does he do? He makes quite a few changes, fairly fast. This is human nature. So change isn't the unique part about this—the uniqueness of this is the destruction of everything old, not the desire to put something new in. And I don't know that they really intended to do that.

O'CONNOR: Okay, we can get to one other thing pretty quickly, and we can end this in a few more minutes, I think. You were also involved in the furor that occurred just after John Kennedy became President, shortly thereafter, involving a speech you were to make. It was corrected, apparently on White House orders, it was—some sections of it were cut out. Could you comment on that a little bit?

BURKE: Yes. Some sections were cut out—the whole damn speech was cut out, including the title. I was to be given the annual award by the business press at the Silver Quill Dinner. The Inauguration was on the 20th of January; I think I was to make the speech on the 24th. I wrote this speech largely myself, but I told my public relations man, the man that kept me out of trouble occasionally...

O'CONNOR: Who was that?

BURKE: Wilhide, Buck Wilhide, you will probably want to check that with him. I said, "Let's don't get this cleared with the old Administration, because after I give this speech the new Administration will say they don't agree with it. Let's wait to get it cleared by the new people because I think that what I can say here will help the new President." This was particularly true after that Inauguration speech—so I really worked on that speech. And I changed a lot of it as a result of that Inauguration speech because I thought it could really help the President to beat hell. It was a really good speech.

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I was stating the state of the world from a military point of view—what might happen in Berlin; what might happen in Asia, and all that sort of stuff—and described what we've got to be prepared to do. The idea being that if I said that, the President would say that's one of his military people, and, of course, he could add he disagreed. He could use that speech as a sounding board, and then later he could disavow it if he wanted to. I was disavowable; if he said it, he couldn't change it. That sort of business. It was a very valuable speech, I thought.

So I told Buck to take the speech over and get it cleared. Now, as it happened, not very many people in the Navy knew about it, because I wrote it myself and there was no need of sending the thing around. It was not a technical speech. So Buck took it over, and I don't know where he took it first—you'll have to ask him on that—but I think he probably took it down to the Department of Defense, the Public Relations Department. Anyway, he came back the next day, I guess the next day, and he said, "Jesus, you're in trouble. They aren't

going to let that go.” I said, “Well, change it. Words; everybody wants to change somebody else’s speech; you change the words. He said, “It’s not a question of words this time. You can’t give any part of it.” I said, “Okay, have you got it in writing? And are you sure you got it from authority?” He said, “No, I’m not so sure.” I said, “Well, go to the proper office and make sure it is to be killed, and then I will write another speech and it will be on some innocuous thing”—the new speech I wrote was the worst speech I ever gave—“I’ll write another speech, and you take it down, and don’t you tell anybody anything about this. Nobody, not a soul, should know that this has ever been done or ever happened.” And I said, “After I write another speech and you take it down and submit it in the same channels and see whether that one’s all right or not.” And I had four days to write the speech. You don’t write a speech to a national organization like that over night.

He took the speech down, and he got it cleared, but he apparently had asked questions down there [DOD public relations office] and said that I didn’t object to what had happened; I was writing another speech; if the President wants a new speech, okay. I did not know what the President

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had in mind. Maybe I said something he wanted to say, which is what I had hoped. He kept a copy of the speech, or somebody did. But I never said anything; Buck never said anything. That new speech went through like a breeze—it should have, because it was on flowers. I gave that speech again later on and I got a very nice award for it. Over there. See that pot of petunias?

O’CONNOR: Yes, I do.

BURKE: Well, that’s because whenever I got a speech censured from then on, I gave a speech on the growing of petunias, which was very hard to censure, but it had a hell of a lot of more effect than some of the things that were not quite so subtly said. But anyway, this speech got by the censors. I gave it. I got polite applause from the Silver Quill people. They must have been expecting to hear a pretty good speech because I thought I made fairly good speeches, and that time they got an awful one.

I still didn’t say anything. Within two or three days the President said, “I hope you understand, Burke, why I couldn’t release that speech.” And I said, “Well, Mr. President, if you don’t want it released, that’s your business.” I said, “I don’t understand why, but it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t really matter.” But I had made up my own mind, though, that I was through speech making. I said, “I don’t like to make speeches anyway. If you can’t give a good one, you don’t want to give any.” So he said, “Well.” He said, “You know, you were treading on a lot of things that were really in the province of the State Department, international relations and things, perhaps, I should say.” And I said, “Well, yes, that’s true, Mr. President.” He said, “I haven’t made up my mind yet on many of these points.” He said, “I didn’t want you to say it.” I said, “That’s all right.” He knew about it, in other words; that was the only point of it.

About three weeks later, or sometime later, the incident hit the press. I called Buck in, and I said, "Buck, did you tell anybody about this at all?" He said, "I swear to God, I haven't talked to anybody about it." He said, "I haven't

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even told my wife. Nobody knows about this but the people I talked to and you." And I said, "Well, I hadn't told anybody." "My wife has been chiding me for making such a lousy speech, and I haven't even told her that your good speech was not given." And I said, "You find out how the hell this was released." Well, he found out. It was released by whoever came in as public relations man for the Secretary...

O'CONNOR: Arthur Sylvester?

BURKE: Sylvester. Sylvester, that's the man. Sylvester had released it, not the speech, but comments on it. And so I said, "Buck, go down and tell him and go over to the White House and get cleared exactly what happened on this thing because I don't want to stir any mess up here because this can have ramifications." So Buck did. He went down and told Sylvester, "I found out you released these comments." And then he went over to the White House, to whoever it was that he took the first speech, and came to the conclusion the White House had nothing to do with the comments in the news.

Well, the sad part about it, the really sad part about that speech is the things that I predicted in the original speech would probably happen, happened. The Berlin situation arose; the Cuban situation came about; the Southeast Asia troubles came about; all of these things, these trouble spots that I had described as possible, happened. I think the President took a good deal of his Berlin speech from that original speech. Sylvester had released it. I never said anything about that, even after the press asked me. I said, "If you want to know something about this affair, find the man that released the dope in the first place." And they did. Because I upset their schedule of events when I didn't talk about it and I didn't complain about it, the only way they could use it as an example was to release it themselves. That didn't sit very well. I didn't realize that until sometimes afterwards. There were other ramifications that I found out after I retired, which leads me to believe that it was not accidental.

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O'CONNOR: What do you mean by that?

BURKE: That it was not accidental that my first speech was clipped. It wouldn't have mattered what I would have said in my first speech. I could have given my speech on petunias, and that would have been cut, too. And they would have given some excuse to the President. But these things tie in together.

Now I know that perhaps I'm a little super-sensitive, but I haven't been very sensitive in my career, as you know, in the past. I fought like hell with a good many of my seniors,

some of whom I've come to love. When I went as Chief of Staff to Admiral Mitscher [Marc Andrew Mitscher] he hated my guts at first and I liked him exactly the same amount, but I found he was one of the most wonderful men I've ever known in my life, and I would have done anything for that old man. MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur] and I fought like hell, and I'm running the annual dinner this year in his memory. Why? Because I have respect for him. He was a pompous, self-conceited, self-assertive bastard, but he ran a nation so well that, for the first time in the world, a nation was ruled by a conqueror and the conquered nation loved him. Why? Because he was just. He had a lot of other bad features, but he was just and he was fair. And he was also a good military man, meaning he knew tactics and strategy.

I've had difficulty when I was taken off the promotion list for Rear Admiral by Truman, and there was no promotions in the Navy for quite a few months because I was taken off, for I was in trouble, quite serious trouble. I liked Truman. I think Truman was a hell of a good President. I don't have any resentment against him. Some of his people, yes, but as soon as Truman found out he was wrong, he sent for me. When I came back from Korea and, after having found out that the Communists had copies of our orders before we did, I was sent for by the President. Mr. President does something about it, and he really does. He investigated, and he found out that it came from the British, and he did something. So it isn't that you have to like somebody all the time.

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Through the years you learn there are very few people in public office who aren't pretty good people. Nearly all of them are trying to do a job that they think is for the good of the country, and the weaknesses of many of our public officials is that they think a lot of other people who are not trying to do for the good of the country. And they get so that they feel that only their opinion is correct. But still aside from an occasional man like Mr. Powell [Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.], most of the congressmen are wonderful, very honest individuals.

And a great many of these things have happened in the new Administration like this, will happen in any new Administration. The trouble is that there was too much destruction of what had been before in this one. And it was done, I think, completely unknowingly by the President. And by now, I think, nobody questions what Mr. McNamara does. Nobody argues with him and says you are absolutely wrong and fights to the death for it. And really fights, not just make a statement. That can be very bad for a man in a position of power.

I had to take the Chairman over to see the President several times, the first time after I had been appointed for about three days. As you may not know, I was selected young for the job of CNO [Chief of Naval Operations]. I talk against putting young into jobs too soon, and yet I was promoted all throughout my career, usually against my own good judgment and against my will, and I got advantage of all the young promotions, and I think it's wrong because you don't get the experience that you should have gotten. But although I was appointed young, as CNO by the Secretary of Defense or the President or the Secretary of the Navy, I don't know exactly who had the most responsibility for it. I had to take both the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of Defense to see the President three days after I was given the office because I thought they were wrong. I thought I was all finished right then. They had taken me over in their car, but they wouldn't even give me a ride back. I had to go

send for one. But after a couple of months it was all right again because I had respect for them, they had just made a wrong decision.

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And the President didn't like me for a long time, either, but after a while he sent for me because I would tell him what I thought was the truth. And sometimes it hurt. I wasn't always right; I know that. It wasn't that he was just looking for a complete answer; he wanted somebody that would tell him what they thought was really true, that had had some experience with the problem. This is what people in power need.

This is the danger of a dictator. It isn't that a dictator when he first comes into his initial power structure is striving only for personal power. Dictators always do good things for their country at first. Mussolini [Benito Mussolini] did some magnificent things for Italy for about three years. But what happened after three or four years with Hitler [Adolf Hitler] and Mussolini and Peron [Juan Peron] and all of the other dictators? Nine times out of ten what happens is that they get "yes" advice. The people surrounding them become corrupt, or they become "yes" men, or they want to use their position close to the throne for their own personal interest. And by personal interest, I don't mean money. I mean—sometimes it's position of power; sometimes it's having a driver and a car; and sometimes it's being asked to all the beautiful parties and hearing the bugles blow and, "Look at that wonderful man and his beautiful wife" as they descend the stairs, and all of that. That's what they want and get, and they start misusing the power of the old man. Sometimes he knows about it; sometimes he doesn't. But nobody tells him the truth; nobody crosses him.

O'CONNOR: Was that same feeling that you could go to the President, President Kennedy, and, you know, say what you thought was right and that this is what he wanted or.... You said this was true of President Truman, for example. Or President Eisenhower. You could go to them and...

BURKE: Yes, I went to President Kennedy a couple of times. Take Laos.

O'CONNOR: I was going to ask you about Laos.

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BURKE: I felt that in Laos—this was before Souvanna Phoumi [Souvanna Phouma], no, yes, I guess it was Phoumi—when Phoumi was a senior military man in Laos.

O'CONNOR: That's Phoumi Nosavan.

BURKE: Yes, Phoumi Nosavan. He was the senior man, and we had been supporting him. And he was in sort of a tough way, and the Laotians, as do all Southeast Asians, have peculiar methods of doing business. They appear to be sort of lazy and lackadaisical. They're different than us.

But I thought that it was important that Southeast Asia not go Communist. And I have a belief, a conviction, that if you want to support a country, you have to support an individual or a group of individuals in that country, and you have to accept them for about what they are. You try to support the best individual that you know but you don't find foreigners with our customs or mores. There are very few people running around the earth who are really perfect, and a lot of them have clay feet and a lot of those feet are pretty big. This is particularly true with people who were brought up on a different set of—under a different code than we're brought up.

And so Phoumi had obviously been accepted before; we had been supporting him for some years as being the best man there; and my point was it is important that Southeast Asia remain free. It was important, not only to the Southeast Asians, but the rest of the world. It was important to the United States, because if Southeast Asia goes under Communist domination then their power increases, and eventually the whole world would become communist, and so forth. Then it is important that the world know that we do support the freedom of Southeast Asia and we're willing to do something about it. It is also important that we support the individuals who will support our ideas, not that they are subservient to us, but people who generally believe in the same general things that we do and are willing, also, to do something about it.

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Phoumi has been the man who had been on our side; therefore, we ought to support Phoumi. And we ought to put people with him, and when Phoumi does something that we don't like, we tell him about it, not delicately but we tell him frankly and so forth. We don't tell him, "this you must do." We don't heckle him all the time. But we say, "Joe, we don't like that." And we don't threaten to cut off his little finger or withhold something, because as long as we support him, we've got to support him. He can't fight or carry on the things that he's got to do if we keep withdrawing support all the time and stop and go. It takes some pretty big forgiveness at times. But you also try to correct the things that you think should be corrected and improve a lot of other things.

Another argument was that if the United States is eventually going to resist the encroaching Communism we have to have a point someplace where we resist, because it always gets more difficult when resistance is defined. It's deferred not like a girl's virtue, but if a girl once lets a hand get above her knee she's about to get in some sort of trouble, perhaps. This is true with everything. The camel gets his nose under the tent. It's harder to stand later than it is earlier. The trouble with early decisions is that you may make the wrong one, but nine times out of ten, the earlier you take action, if it is a correct action, the less it costs to take that action.

Well, in any case, I believed that, with the state of things as they were, we should do something about Phoumi. We should do one of two things: we should either say we're through with Laos and, consequently, Southeast Asia; or, "Mr. Phoumi, we're going to support you," and tell him exactly how we're going to support him, such as, "Up to this point, and this is what we understand you want to do ahead of time; this is what we want you to do; and we're going to fight like hell," which is what I thought we ought to do.

So I took that idea over to the President, I guess I took it to the National Security Council or someplace where he presided, anyway, to the President. He didn't think much of it. I went over to see him later, privately, after clearing it with the Joint Chiefs, not clearing it, but telling the Joint Chiefs, "I don't think the President really got the

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point of this and I'm going back." Okay. I went back and thought I had convinced him. The President himself gave a pretty good speech on Laos on a national television hook up. I think he used my notes. And then a few days later he walked back the cat and changed his mind. Obviously other people had gotten to him who didn't believe that was the correct thing for the United States to do. So I went over to see him again. I said, "Mr. President, on those new changes, I think you're wrong." He said, "No, I think I was wrong in the first place when I accepted your idea. He said, "You over-persuaded me," or something like that, and then we had a little discussion. And I said, "Mr. President, I'd like to make a few remarks about this situation. I think if you don't stand in Laos you're going to have to stand someplace else. And where the hell you going to stand? Is it going to be Laos? If it's not Laos, is it going to be South Vietnam? If it's not South Vietnam, is it going to be Thailand? And if it's not Thailand, is it going to be the Philippines? And then Taiwan? And then Japan? Or then Australia? Where do we stand? This thing will grow, and it grows upon their own victories." And he said, "No, I think you're wrong." And I said, "Mr. President, I'm sure myself that I'm not wrong, because this is a repetition of history, this is what history has—this is what's happened throughout the ages. This is what happened in the days of Genghis Khan and this is what happened in the Roman Empire, in Athens, and all throughout all of history. This is what's happened with Hitler, with Mussolini. What would have happened had the world stopped Mussolini?" All of these arguments.... Then World War II could have been stopped before it started. All of these things from the past. And I'm sure this is a repetition of the same old story. Well, he said he didn't think so. But he said, "What I will do," he said, "I would like to give you an opportunity to speak here tomorrow or the next day or sometime when we have the Congressional leaders in, and we'll discuss this matter of Laos." So I went over, I was invited over.

The President very kindly gave me this opportunity to speak about Laos, and my speech was, the basis of it was, "If we don't stand here, where do we stand?" That was the gist of it. Then nobody agreed with me, except President Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson], who was Vice President then, partially agreed with me. And he said he thought I had something, but that was

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because he spoke first, perhaps. I don't know. Anyway, I've been grateful to him ever since. But nobody else agreed with me: Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative, nobody. And so the President said, "Well, Admiral, I think you have the general idea." And I said, "Mr. President, I'd like to make a few more remarks." I made three speeches that day trying to get somebody to stand, somebody to say this is going to cost us like hell in the future and that it is going to be harder to stand in the future, but I couldn't convince anybody.

I went over to see some of the senators and congressmen afterwards—one of them was Bridges [H. Styles Bridges]—I said, “Goddamnit, I know very well, Styles, that you believe what I said. Why in God’s name didn’t you pipe up?” And he said, “Because a senator does not take a position so early in a proposal; it is not a senator’s prerogative to give judgment on a nebulous idea before it’s been processed properly. Otherwise there would be the chaos of hundreds of different plans.” Well, I could understand it, but not why he did it.

I lost that battle, and I lost it completely. I thought afterwards about it, and I thought, “There’s one chance in a million. I think that a lot of people are going to die in this country sometime in the future if this thing is allowed to go by.” And so I went back. I wrote a memorandum to the President, and you just don’t send a memorandum over to the President: you take it over. And I got thrown out. I mean, I left the memorandum, and the President said, “This is settled.”

Yes, you could see President Kennedy, but it was very difficult for him to make a decision and stick to it, and I don’t know why. This Laotian thing, part of the point of that rambling story is because the decision came unstuck. He made one speech to a television audience; I thought it was a beautiful speech; I agreed with it. But three days later that decision was changed. Now something happened to him in between. Not the same group of people were in the meetings on Laos, or at least I wasn’t there, but some other group of people was called in. The original group of people were not called back and told, “Gentlemen, we made one hell of a big mistake the other day in accepting this, the idea that the Chief of Naval Operations proposed. He was just as wrong as hell.” That didn’t happen. That’s not a question

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of getting all possible views on a problem which is sound, but it’s a question of how to use an organization. It’s a question of getting an organization so that the organization functions in a known manner instead of random individuals functioning regardless of organization.

O’CONNOR: Well, the question of making a stand in Laos was brought up—the Joint Chiefs of Staff did meet with the President on this particular...

BURKE: Sure, many times. Not many times, several times at least.

O’CONNOR: Well, was there much agreement on the part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as to whether or not a stand should be...

BURKE: No. Well, there was agreement that we ought to stand in Laos. There was disagreement as to what it would take to do it. I thought it would take less if you go in hard, fast, and quickly, and really fight and convince the enemy that we were in there to stay. When that is done you can usually do it with less force. I don’t know who said what, but in general I was probably thinking that way more than any of my associates, except, perhaps, Lemnitzer.

O’CONNOR: Well, was the question of nuclear weapons in Laos ever brought up?

BURKE: Sure, sure. That comes up on everything. You don't know for sure, but you probably wouldn't have to use nuclear weapons. In fact, you can't ever preclude the possibility of using nuclear weapons because if you make that a hard and fast rule, the enemy is going to play that card right up next to the limit and you might as well not have them because the enemy will blackmail you by stating that any move you make will lead to the danger and nuclear war. It's the same story; your chances of using

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nuclear weapons are damn near in reverse ratio to your will to use them. If you're willing to use them, you probably won't have to. If you're not willing to use them, you may have to. That's a hell of a thing to say, but it's true, I think. Not exactly, of course; there are a lot of other factors. But in general, if you're fearful of something, tremendously fearful, particularly when it's fear of another organization or another group of people, they sense that fear, if they don't know about it, and they deliberately play on that fear. Then after a while you get in the position where you are desperate, and you have to do the very thing that you were so fearful of doing. This is what Lenin [Vladimir Ilyich Lenin] said; to that extent he's correct. It's what he was depending on—fear.

O'CONNOR: Okay. One other question about this speech that we were talking about a few minutes ago. The reason given publicly for the speech having been censored was that it might interfere with the negotiations that were involving getting the RB-47 fliers out. You didn't agree with that at all?

BURKE: It didn't have anything to do with it. It didn't have anything to do with it at all.

O'CONNOR: Then why do you think that speech was censored? Because...

BURKE: To bring Burke to heel.

O'CONNOR: Essentially, that's what you're saying.

BURKE: That's as clearly as I can put it, I think. But I don't think the President cut it for that reason. I think he was given a lot of other reasons.

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O'CONNOR: Do you think Sylvester did it? You think he's...

BURKE: I don't know who did it. I don't know. I suppose he did, because I don't think McNamara would have done it.

O'CONNOR: Okay, do you have any other comments you'd like to make on the Presidency or anybody else?

BURKE: No, no, no.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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