

Arthur Sylvester Oral History Interview—JFK #2, 12/23/1974
Administrative Information

Creator: Arthur Sylvester

Interviewer: Lawrence H. Suid

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Arthur Sylvester (1901-1979) was the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs between 1961 and 1967. This interview focuses on the importance and responsibilities of a public affairs department, Sylvester's reasons for opposing the use of servicemen in Hollywood films, and the various opponents to Sylvester's reforms, among other issues.

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Date:

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Arthur Sylvester—JFK #2
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Oral History Interview

with

ARTHUR SYLVESTER

December 23, 1974

By Lawrence H. Suid

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SUID: Mr. Baruch mentioned a meeting you had with Washington film representatives soon after you came into office. Do you recall it?

SYLVESTER: Yes. They all came over to butter me up.

SUID: Do you recall any details about the meeting?

SYLVESTER: No. They just came over. It was a butter-up meeting, the same sort of meeting if you and I were in their position and you had a new Assistant Secretary and you were a little suspicious that he might louse you up, you would go over early and try to find out what he was, what's he thinking. It was an expeditionary meeting. I put it that way. It didn't amount to a hoot, the sort of thing, if you were running their office, you would do.

SUID: Robin Moore told me he went in to see you about "The Green Berets." He said you were opposed to the book.

SYLVESTER: That's right.

SUID: He said you were unhappy with some of the information he included.

SYLVESTER: That was right. I cannot remember today exactly what it was. The people with whom he had been out there told me that they had treated him on an "off the record" basis. Why was I unhappy? I would only be unhappy if somebody who knew the background material, with whom Moore had dealt, was unhappy and came to me. That would be my job. I can't tell you now. I would mislead you by trying to tell you exactly what it was.

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But, there was material in there which they felt he had gotten while with them on an "off the record" basis, which had been clearly indicated. And, he had then gone out, refused to be bound by his word, and dealt with material they felt was intelligence material that would be valuable if the other side knew that we knew. It came down to that.

SUID: Your reaction to him was because people had told you what he had done?

SYLVESTER: That is correct. Right. Then, he came in and we went over these things and my reaction then was my reaction to him as a result of meeting and his attitude toward what we were talking about. It was something in which I was then and still am inclined to believe that he couldn't have gotten in the place unless there had been some arrangement. I think he went in and just loused them up.

SUID: He admitted to having gone to Vietnam under the semi-false pretenses.

SYLVESTER: I think he did.

SUID: He said he had been given a secret clearance, you took it away, but he didn't tell that to anyone over there.

SYLVESTER: With all due respect, he wasn't cleared for secret information at any time, for anything. You have to say to yourself, why would he be cleared for secret information. What he meant, I think, was that going as a newsman, you or I going as a newsman, you have to have accreditation cards. It is an acknowledgement on our part that we will not use information, if we are in areas which we know or have been told are secret, we will not use that material unless it is cleared. In that sense, that's the only reason it is an accreditation cards, so that in wartime, if you want to cover the front, and investigation has been made of you by the FBI and every damn agency there is in the government to ensure that you are a perfectly reasonable person and are not going to hand out information to the enemy and you can go immediately. That's all the accreditation card is. And that's all he could possibly have. A lot of fellows, and not he alone, would build this up into something special. So this is what I think he is doing.

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SUID: Did he have an accreditation card?

SYLVESTER: I can't tell you. He probably did. But I can't tell you. That wouldn't be hard for him to get.

SUID: He talked about having a card which was taken away. So he felt he had no obligation to clear things after he saw them.

SYLVESTER: It sounds exactly like him. I don't remember the details. It sounds exactly the way he reacted when I talked to him. There's always a twist in there. It's taken away. He doesn't know why. Therefore, he's cleared of any responsibility. Well, you can do that if you want to.

SUID: After he came back and discussed things with you, he started to work out details on the film. Do you remember anything of his efforts to have the movie made? Wolper had the rights originally. Moore said there was pressure put on him not to make the film.

SYLVESTER: I think when we got to the book, it was in print. We never saw the book in manuscript. They handed it to us. Therefore, theoretically, in his mind, he fulfilled his obligations to have it cleared because there was nothing in it that would bother them -- he said. So we couldn't do anything about it.

Now, when he comes back with the movie, we can. The hell with you. You're going to play that game. This is when I'm going to be rough, buddy. We aren't going to have anything to do with it. We didn't, I don't believe.

SUID: Not while you were there.

SYLVESTER: That's right. I don't know what happened afterwards. But, not while I was there.

SUID: He said he couldn't get cooperation while you were there.

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SYLVESTER: That is correct.

SUID: John Wayne then got interest. But even he couldn't get cooperation until after you left.

SYLVESTER: That is correct, February, 1967. It comes back now. Chum, you screwed us on this one. It's my turn now.

SUID: Turning to the issue of whether films helping recruiting....

SYLVESTER: I was interested in the material you had from others who said it did.

SUID: I put down both sides. Question is whether the issue can be resolved.

SYLVESTER: I don't think it can. Let me take that back. You can't unless you want to spend six or eight or twelve months looking at recruitment figures and checking them all out, month by month against events that were taking place and against a list of pictures. Even then, I don't think you could prove anything. But it's a great exercise if you don't have anything else to do.

In the note I sent you, I said I had read all four volumes of *Dick Prescott at West Point* and all four volumes of *Dan Dalzell at Annapolis*. I wanted to go to both places (and I didn't go to either fortunately) after I read the books. I said that in connection with the idea that maybe it's possible that somebody was influenced by looking at pictures. It may be. But there is no statistical evidence that they can show you that is convincing to me and I don't think it would be convincing to you or any other person. But it is a great argument for doing what they wanted to do. It was a justification.

SUID: You can deal with the justification, whether or not it has a basis in fact.

SYLVESTER: That's right.

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SUID: I think it is safe to say that war films will reinforce an inclination toward the military if you have any.

SYLVESTER: That is correct.

SUID: If your parents have raised you by saying that war is bad, you could see military films with no positive effect.

SYLVESTER: That is correct.

SUID: In the first interview, you had said Hollywood wanted to make war films because they were profitable. Why were war films in fact profitable?

SYLVESTER: I think you have to relate these films to the period in which they were made. I doubt that they would be profitable today. I don't say any wouldn't. But, some of the pictures that were profitable then -- in the periods leading up to the war, during the war, after the war -- [were profitable] because the group psychology was entirely different than it is today. That would be one of the explanations. In so far as the theater people or any creative person putting things on, they

sense what the group psychology or part of the group they can capitalize on [is interested in]. With the right story and with the right man or woman who has the right impact on large masses of people [they'll be successful].

SUID: War films seem to go in cycles.

SYLVESTER: I would think so.

SUID: I do have to ask why war films are profitable.

SYLVESTER: Sure you do. That takes you into the whole creative business, why

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is one book, why is a *Valley of the Dolls*, profitable while somebody else's isn't? What we're talking about is how do you seize upon and exploit mass movements and emotions. I think that's the answer as opposed to the artist who has something basic to his own integrity he wants to say and he believes it should be said. He has to say it regardless of when or how. Some poor stupid publisher might publish it and might make a fortune by mistake.

SUID: A couple of questions on "The Longest Day." It's the focus of the last section of my paper.

SYLVESTER: I did say in my letter that Lauris Norstad was so wild he called up and demanded I be fired. He got fired before I did, but not over that. [Norstad and McNamara in Europe.]

Back to "The Longest Day," one of the stories [in the newspapers] said Zanuck was a friend of Norstad. I made a bad error by picking that up without checking it myself and repeating it. This set Norstad up. I think that technically he was probably right. So he screamed and hollered. I sent him a note saying I had put out a statement saying that I did not know whether he was a friend [of Zanuck's].

McNamara said, now you must apologize to Norstad. I said sure. I'm not going to apologize to Norstad no matter what happened, job or anything else, particularly after I was told he called up McNamara and demanded he fire me. I had a job before I came here and I can get another one. McNamara said, don't reassure me. It doesn't make any difference to me.

The thing was very simple to my mind. It was a failure to understand the domestic political scene. Here's the Administration calling up the reserve and we're having stories in every paper all around the country about hardships including the one I told you about the follow out in Missouri. And, this half-wit is sending men out of Berlin which is supposed to be the danger point to take part in a movie. You can argue all you want. But the simple fact was that that's death in Congress and it was. You don't have to have a grave to know that.

Furthermore, he had no business doing it. Good judgment alone. As I said to you and you've got it down in the paper, I signed [the approval for cooperation]. They used that correctly and legally and every other way because the Assistant Secretary of Defense put his name on it, approved it and there it is. It wasn't signed to

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bring down a battle group, etc. But that was the heart of it. That was the real heart of it. We had had the Bay of Pigs, God knows. In the British System, the government would have fallen. We had a few other things. McNamara was already taking on some of the stupid guys in the Services. And then you have this business with Congress on our necks. That was the heart of it right there.

SUID: I think this is the way I had it.

SYLVESTER: You've got it. It's all right.

SUID: The Paar thing seemed to be the last straw.

SYLVESTER: The story you have in there about Paar is not the story I know. But I don't question it because I don't pretend to know all of it. Paar showed up there, apparently got clearance from the European Theater, which they had no right to give. But you have to understand that we were only beginning to assert the authority that was inherent in our office. That authority had not been asserted before because my predecessor had had to live with two or three different Secretaries of Defense, none of whom had picked him as their man. Furthermore, he had no basic status because he had to send papers up to the Secretary and they were intercepted. Some of them never got to the Secretary. I found them there. They were went back and there were all sorts of bastards in between, putting their two cents worth in.

Well, obviously I didn't live that way. If I wanted to go to McNamara, I went to McNamara. That's the only way it can be run. Any rate, it took them a little while to realize that Sylvester is not talking through his hat. No sense in going to his boss because his boss is behind them all the way. No sense in trying to drive a wedge between them because that isn't going to work. So gradually they began to respect the office and gradually as I got good people, good military people in there, it became a place to get to. That was the difference here, you see.

Again, it brings out the business of cooperation and it expands and it goes to why I insisted on making them, somewhich which they loathed and despised, tell what they wanted. That's the whole purpose of [the new regulations]. [No longer would they simply say]. "Send another brigade. Send another brigade."

SUID: This is what the next chapter will deal with. Paar was simply the first cause.

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SYLVESTER: That was independent of “The Longest Day.” Paar didn’t come to us. He apparently went to the European Theater. They should have checked with us. But they hadn’t learned yet where the authority lay because under the only system, they were gods unto themselves.

It wasn’t that I loved authority, wanted authority, but you had to protect these people. Part of that job was to protect them against themselves. My job was not to be in a conflict with them. It was to support them and protect them against a lot of crap that has nothing to do with their professional capacity or work.

The whole Paar thing, what did it do? It loused everything us over nothing. But it loused them up in the most terrific and devastating style in the Congress, politically because for God’s sake every one of those Congressmen hear from home. They’re not going to take that. Well that was the Paar thing.

And so when the story broke, and a reporter asked for comment, the Congress was in an uproar. The only way I could see, right away, to do (because I could do it, the President wouldn’t be involved, the Secretary wouldn’t be involved, if anyone had to be shot, I could be shot, I could take that) was to say if the story was true, it was a horrible performance. Well, that infuriated them [the military]. But I intended it should. It shut up the Congress. It satisfied them. Sylvester’s doing something. What the hell is he doing? He’s making a statement, right? But, it was the right statement. He’s going to stop this. It calmed all that terrible furor.

SUID: Paar stirred things up. Your statement stopped the controversy over Paar. But then the connection was made with “The Longest Day” in the newspaper.

SYLVESTER: It was.

SUID: They were completely separate events, but the connection was made.

SYLVESTER: But it’s there. What happened then, apparently was that General Clark jumped on somebody up there in Berlin. He apparently jumped on the wrong guy. Some fellow up there took the fall for it all and everybody in the Army and the military felt that he shouldn’t have

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gotten hit with it. And so there was great weeping and wailing over the sentence.

SUID: In the chapter, I quote the results. He is exonerated because he hadn’t done anything wrong enough to be punished.

Your statement about the incident on October 4 doesn't sound like you. It sounded like other people justifying cooperation. It seemed that you still hadn't quite gotten the handle on it in light of everything you have told me.

SYLVESTER: Exactly right. That is correct. You put your finger on it and pointed out what had happened. There are a couple of ways to do what I tried to do.

You could go right in there and bang! But (a) it's never been my way either as a city editor or anything else. I first try to cooperate with people. And we were working together. We weren't enemies on this thing. (b) There are enough problems that the President had and the Secretary had in the Department anyway without adding to them. (c) There are a lot of entrenched interests here. (d) I knew very well that the motion picture interests weren't going to stop with me. They would go right to the White House.

So, I wanted to move on very firm ground. One other thing you ought to know about. I had a very, very poor office when I took over. Personnel was lousy despite what Murray Snyder said about how wonderful they all were. He didn't know. He didn't work down with them. If we bit off more than we could chew, (we were looking for unification of the military information services as Senator Russell asked us to do at the confirmation hearings.) [We would have gotten nothing done]. Until you are prepared to take it over which Forestal directed his assistants to do and they took it over and it fell apart and all went back to the military reinforced, [you should not try]. If you're going to do it again, you better be damn well sure that you've got a good solid concrete structure. I could only built it by gradually getting good people, good military people. You get respect there -- and the basis of accomplishment [is respect] so that there isn't any argument.

So I moved slowly and I was surprised in your piece that it took from 1961 to 1964. I would have done it quicker, but I would have fallen on my damn face because there weren't people in there and those guys [that were there] would screw you up every time. The military was fighting this like dogs.

[-9-]

SUID: I have talked to people about the 1949 to 1951 period when unification was first attempted.

SYLVESTER: That's right. And it failed then. I heard about that crap. I was aware of that. But I wasn't going to fail. I wasn't going to fail. But I knew well enough that just walking in with guys I had there, I couldn't do it. They were all third raters. Not everyone. We did not have enough good people. I don't mean numbers. I mean quality. The military people, when some fellow couldn't cut it, they put him in public affairs. The career people, the civil service guys, once you get in there, you had to murder them [the get rid of them.]

SUID: The next chapter will cover the period from 1961 to 1964 and the changes you initiated. But of course, after you left, the Department was hit with "The Green Berets" and "Tora! Tora! Tora!"

SYLVESTER: Phil Goulding said and I don't know if it's true or not, that he was overruled by Paul Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense. I pointed out that Paul was former Secretary of the Navy. They got bitten on it. How many fellows were killed there?

SUID: Two civilians were killed.

SYLVESTER: You have the GAO study on it?

SUID: Yes.

SYLVESTER: It is devastating in my book. [About Lennartson -- off the record story.]

SUID: I have a couple of your letters given to me by Ken Clark. I need your approval.

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SYLVESTER: [Letter of June 30, 1962 to Senator Hubert Humphrey.] See right away, they go to Senator Humphrey. In June of 1962, our Office still had a long way to go to do the job.

SUID: You've really just started to re-work the regulations and the film industry is already worried.

SYLVESTER: This is the most important thing when I think of "Tora! Tora! Tora!" the endangering of servicemen's lives. [Paragraph 3] I'd be goddamned if I was going to have to write a letter to somebody's parents, or sweetheart, or wife, or child that their loved one had been killed making a motion picture that I authorized and which had nothing to do with the Service.

SUID: This argument was used by the Public Affairs Office to oppose "Tora! Tora! Tora!" The Navy wanted to assist and fought for it.

SYLVESTER: Paul Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense overruled Public Affairs.

SUID: Right. The Navy took its case to Nitze and he overruled Public Affairs.

SYLVESTER: Back of that may be the fact that I overruled Nitze on a couple of things. It was his chance to overrule our Office.

SUID: Public Affairs used the argument in this letter.

SYLVESTER: It was the right argument. McNamara understood this right away. The next point [Paragraph 4], operational readiness. That's an absolutely impregnable position as you know. We would not cooperate with any film that disturbed the readiness posture. That's impregnable and I didn't originate that. They all had that in from the very beginning. Nobody could not justify that. But they got around that by saying that [help] was a normal exercise. That was crap. They

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were never normal. They don't exercise on the beach. Normal! For God Sake!

See, nobody can fight with these reasons [Page 2]. You just can't make a case against them. They're not all mine. The first one [a] is routine. You always say that. The letter is okay. [Letter to Charles Boren, October 12, 1963] This is in response to the Motion Picture Association's reaction to the August 12, 1963 meeting. This is what we said we'd incorporate.

SUID: Zanuk said in one letter about "The Longest Day," that there was a 14 second technical problem you insisted you correct. Do you remember it?

SYLVESTER: No, I don't. You must remember that when these pictures are looked at, all the Services are looking at them. They usually bring in some representative of their intelligence section.

Then, it was my job to either accept or reject their suggestions. And having accepted them, I (when I say "I" I mean the Assistant Secretary) have the responsibility to fight the case. So this must be one of those things. I have no recollection.

So many of these objections, and that is what I tried to tell these silly bastards in the beginning, you're going to get into this thing now and then you're going to have to bring it in for review. Why don't you go out and make this damn picture without coming to us. If you are going to have to bring it in for review, you'll raise hell because the thing the military is going to question you about is going to drive you up the wall. I know because I've been in on one or two of the screenings and I understand how you feel. That's one of the problems in review.

SUID: Changing the subject again, did you go to your Office before you were confirmed on January 23, 1961.

SYLVESTER: Oh, yes. There was a period of indoctrination before Murray Synder left. And that was one of the things that alerted me to the hell of a situation they were in over there. There was only one good briefing.

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SUID: But you were there before you were confirmed?

SYLVESTER: That is correct.

SUID: There was nothing about the motion picture end of things asked you during your confirmation hearings.

SYLVESTER: No.

SUID: One of the points I have tried to make is that motion pictures were not a major part of your concerns as Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. There is a question about the exact date "The Longest Day" was approved. You indicated during the last interview that you had it was the 7th or 8th.

SYLVESTER: I had hardly got my behind on the chair, actually, before they came up with it.

SUID: In regard to the telegram from General Norstad, do you have any idea if it came before or after your approval?

SYLVESTER: No, I don't.

SUID: Do you think, if it had come before approval, it would have had anything to do with your decision?

SYLVESTER: No, it wouldn't have had any influence at all. Here I am years afterwards saying that. I think I am honest enough with myself to say no. It would not have affected me.

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SUID: You had just come into office. They said approval was needed. And you signed it. That was the process?

SYLVESTER: That's right. I also said to you, I was not excusing myself. I put my name on it and therefore I should have known [what I was doing]. I didn't. I know myself exactly what I did. I had just gotten there. There was great pressure for it. I had no reason not to approve it.

SUID: You were doing a normal thing.

SYLVESTER: And it will come up and bite you by doing a normal thing without knowing what the hell you're doing.

SUID: Once you approved it, you had nothing more to do with the film until the problems in September?

SYLVESTER: I don't recall anything. I don't think I did. No. No, because all the work I would have normally been involved in subsequently, in other pictures, had been done and had been done by Murray or whoever was doing it, a Don Baruch. What it did need was this signature of the Assistant Secretary.

Now, I had 47 things more important than that to do. At least, I thought so. And, I would have simply been holding it up in much the same way [as the fellow Eisenhower appointed Assistant Secretary of the Interior in 1953]. After his appointment was announced, he sent a telegram to the Interior Department to hold up all telegrams until he got there. He wanted none to go out under his name unless he signed them. What he didn't know what that thousands of them went out routinely, which were truly routine, to keep business going. And they can really screw you up. They held them all up.

SUID: Bureaucracy!

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SYLVESTER: As a reporter, I knew this story. Also, it would have been wrong for me to because this would suggest right away that I had no confidence in Baruch. I had no reason not to have confidence in him. That came.

SUID: Baruch himself told me that once approval was given and sent off, he never knew what was going on.

SYLVESTER: That is correct. That's the point.

SUID: I think the real change in all this is that the top now knew.

SYLVESTER: That is correct. And also, I brought in every time a project officer went out, I brought him in to talk to him.

SUID: When Norstad would not cut down on the number of troops promised in October, McNamara finally sent out a telegram ordering him to do so. Was that your telegram over McNamara's name or his?

SYLVESTER: No. That was McNamara. I never sent anything over McNamara's name.

SUID: Then he got involved with the controversy?

SYLVESTER: That is right. Oh yes because Norstad called him. He demanded that I be fired. That wasn't the only call.

SUID: Norstad wasn't going to change no matter what you did without a direct order from McNamara?

SYLVESTER: That's right. He got them. You see, he was completely out of touch. Politically minded, interested he was, but he didn't have any gift for it in this things. McNamara saw the newspapers and the uproar.

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SUID: They had it over Paar.

SYLVESTER: They had it over Paar. But this was part of the same thing. This was against the background of calling up the reserves.

SUID: This is the connection I made.

SYLVESTER: Of course it was. That is the important connection. Goddamn it. Your son is called up. Your husband is called up. And, they're sending a brigade down to take part in motion pictures. What are you going to do? You are going to scream. You'll say, these damn bastards don't know what the hell they're doing. And they don't.

SUID: Wilson screamed for one day. Then nothing. Politicians milk political mileage out of an incident and then forget it.

SYLVESTER: Oh yes. Bob Bilson. That's his district. He's a creature of the military on one hand and the motion pictures on the other. And, he's a phony from the beginning in the sense that he's smart, like a rat. He makes a big play like that and says pay no attention. Yes, I'm not a bit surprised. He got it both ways.

SUID: Only reaction to changes was by Senator Engle in 1963. I will be seeing Murray Schumach about his articles. I will ask where he got his information.

SYLVESTER: That was a personal attack [remarks in last interview] which I should not make against this man in public. I don't care what you ask him. The record is that he attacked me in the paper for doing this. That is on the record. What I said to you, I cannot prove. But it is my belief. He never called or found out about it. Only somebody that was working with the industry could say what he said without finding out why.

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SUID: In regard to the new regulations, who drafted tem?

SYLVESTER: Baruch would be in on it. Norm Hach was in on it. They all had a wack at

it because it was common property. The head of the Security Review was in on it. He was a very knowledgeable guy and knew a great deal about it. Nils Lennartsen was in on it. The actual writing was by the two Colonels, my military aides.

SUID: In regard to Preminger and "In Harm's Way," he apparently went to the White House at one point trying to get cooperation. He did have assistance in Hawaii and a technical advisor to whom you talked, Capt. Blake Booth. Obviously, Preminger's going around you didn't work.

SYLVESTER: No. I don't think it did. It may have. But, I don't believe we refused to cooperate. We would not give him the ships. I think that is correct.

SUID: I think you said he wanted too much in the way of assistance. But in fact, he did get a lot of help in Hawaii.

SYLVESTER: That is correct. I have no doubt about that. We always tried to do that, give them something to keep them happy. But he went to the White House to get all the things.

SUID: Under you, the services' offices in Los Angeles were put under one unified command, but Baruch said that as soon as you left, they went their separate ways again.

SYLVESTER: I'm not surprised.

SUID: Under you, the senior officer out there was in charge.

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SYLVESTER: Yes, we did. That was the first step. These things can only be accomplished if they're carried on by the next guy. If they're not, forget it. Competition. So then, the movie industry can play one off against the other for their advantage.

SUID: The James Bond films did get cooperation while you were in Office although they were not in any way connected to the military.

SYLVESTER: I wouldn't be surprised.

SUID: But you did sign these things?

SYLVESTER: I believe I signed every one of them. I don't pretend for one second that I looked into every one. I just signed them.

SUID: My point is that this was really a minor part of your job.

SYLVESTER: Yes. It was one of about a thousand things I had to do. But I thought it was a damn important part of myself. It was a hell of a lot of fun while the fight was on.

SUID: On "Gathering of Eagles" which was made while the fight was on, Baruch says the list of requirements they had to submit was so detailed that he filed it under "Bible." Bartlett said he didn't give a damn about the policy. It shows that the local commander could still get away with murder. I don't know how you change things unless you continue to sit on them.

SYLVESTER: I think that's it. I found that you get hold of some aspect of the job that is wrong. Hell, if you get into details, you know what is going on. If you get into something that opens up, you follow it down and the whole flower opens up and you begin to see what the hell is going on.

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You can write all the directives in the world and you can make the changes, but they can still screw you. However, it is a dangerous business on their hands. They are always betting that at the worst you are there four years. More likely you'll be there only two. They're there a lifetime. They've seen others come and go and you're going to go too and so they'll outsit you.

SUID: On "The Longest Day," it seems to be a combination of things that brought on the explosion: the Berlin Crisis, Zanuck reaching for a little bit too much, and your being concerned where another Assistant Secretary might now have been.

SYLVESTER: No, Murray believed in it. Murray believed it did help recruiting because he had not looked. Murray was a very patriotic fellow. I think I am. But Murray tended to be less critically minded, to raise less questions than I did. He was a very sweet guy. When he was in the White House, he was number two to Jim Haggerty. He was very helpful. But, Jim got rid of him and where did he send him? To Defense. And when you go there with that as a basis, you're lost. If you go there not as first choice of the Secretary and if the Secretary really doesn't give a damn, you're double lost. And then, if there's anyone between you and the Secretary, forget it.

Murray had great veneration and admiration (as I do) for the military people, but for some of the things that I think were not their strength rather than for the things that are their strength. And, he had less of a feeling that you've got to protect them. Our field is one of the things we do know. Our job basically was to prevent a "Tora! Tora! Tora!", to prevent an investigation by Congress, to prevent the sort of thing that CBS did ["Selling of the

Pentagon”.] That’s basically what you are there to do. At the same time, you are trying to tell the story to the American people of how their money is being spent.

SUID: That is Patti’s question. Should the Defense Department and/or the Services have a public affairs capacity?

SYLVESTER: Oh yes! Why? Let us say if only for negative reasons. You want to find out something. How the hell do you do it? If you don’t have a Public Affairs Office that is on the level, you can’t do it. If you have a right to know, right of access, you would be in a million times worse position without a good strong public information office because [the military] would never tell you anything.

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Now, the other side of it is to show the public that there is all sorts of information that ought to be gotten out. There are really only two fields that are classified, intelligence and new weapons. These are the only two. The rest may be embarrassing, you may not want to hand it out right away. But there are only two you can make a strong case for.

SUID: What about the other side of the argument. If the military really does its job conscientiously, efficiently, do they still need a full-blown public relations department? Will not the evidence speak for itself if ideally they were doing their job?

SYLVESTER: I am not aware of any such ideal world. The second thing is, I think, you can make an excellent case that there has been too much of it. I blame my profession. A large number of news people went into the military early. Some were covering it before World War II, some were interested, some were just smart, some were in the reserves. They got commissions. A good number were not your first grade reporters, or even your second grade. They might be your third grade reporter. By third grade, I don’t mean incompetent. Fairly routine, but still pretty good.

Well, they decided to stay in when they began to see how much more money they were going to get than they would if they came back on the papers in 1946. When they went in, they might have been getting \$75 a week. By this time, they were lieutenant colonials and they got a hell of a lot more than as civilians. I think they corrupted the military because they showed it how to use the newspapers and compete service-wise doing the sort of thing that you’re raising the question “do they need it?” They justified this in their own minds as I see it because they never would have had a standing in the military because they were never operational officers. This again is why good public relations operations should have operational officers; they have flown, they have commanded in the field, etc., or commanded a ship or what not. Then, when he’s handling the public affairs, the rest of the service will respect him. At the present time, they don’t respect public affairs people. Some officers do.

SUID: The Navy Public Affairs people often do seem to be line officers, at least

in the 1950's.

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SYLVESTER: They're still doing it. They're still sending them to Washington as Chief of Naval Information. They don't know from left field. They haven't any idea what they're doing.

SUID: If you decide cooperation is valid...

SYLVESTER: It's only valid in my judgment if the United States government is getting something for it.

SUID: ... then you cannot in fact bill them for the costs since there is no way to really calculate costs.

SYLVESTER: That's why the GAO study [on "Tora! Tora! Tora!"] is so interesting. They do bill the company. Did you notice that?

SUID: But they don't bill for the full amount.

SYLVESTER: No. I'm not saying it gets it all. Even if you get that much you have something you never had before, really. Making Zanuck cough up that much caused him to bitch about it because it was that much.

SUID: On "Green Berets," Wayne was billed for about \$16,000. Robin Moore says he was billed for everything but the gas. Soldiers worked on their own time. That was new in contrast to "The Longest Day."

SYLVESTER: Oh no! They always do it on their own time. That's part of the gimmick. They always do it on their own time. I'm being ironic. This was part of the argument why it was all right. They do it on their own time.

SUID: But on "The Longest Day," the men were not paid because they were on "active" duty.

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SYLVESTER: On "The Longest Day," he got more. He got them on our time as well. It's always on our time. That's a phony distinction. You're in the service of the United States. When are you on your own time? You're not. You're being paid for your vacations. But that argument is what has been sold from the beginning. They're on their own time on their days off. But, you're being paid by the government.

SUID: From the soldier's point of view, he was better off after you than before you. For "The Longest Day," he got nothing. For "The Green Berets," he got paid double, by the United States and by John Wayne. So there was a change.

SYLVESTER: We don't deduct their pay as if they were off the payroll. There's a normal routine exercise. That's the other gimmick. What's wrong with that? I just have my cameras there. You're going by and I just take a picture of it. Go down and see what really happens.

SUID: Exercises of course just happen to be scheduled.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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