

David E. McGiffert Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 12/29/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

David E. McGiffert (1927-2005) was the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs from 1962 to 1965, the Undersecretary of the Army from 1965 to 1969, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs from 1977-1981. This interview focuses on the conflict between the civilians and the military in the Defense Department, the TFX contract hearings, and the inner workings of the Defense Department during the Kennedy administration, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

With

DAVID E. McGIFFERT

Washington, D.C.
December 29, 1970

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Mr. McGiffert, let me begin by asking you about the circumstances of your appointment. You were appointed to the post of Special Assistant, or Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs. And I take it that was in 1962. Is that correct? The exact date, do you recall?

McGIFFERT: Yes, I was appointed Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs in, as I remember it, the early summer of 1962. I was already in the Defense Department having come over in August of '61 as special assistant to Norman Paul, who was the first Assistant to the Secretary for Legislative Affairs after the Kennedy Administration and then moved on to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, and I took his place.

MOSS: How did you come to join the Defense Department in August of '61? You had been, I understand, with this firm, Covington & Burling, and had had some experience, at the University of Wisconsin, as a lecturer. Did you get involved in the Wisconsin campaign at all, or anything of that sort in the '60 campaign?

McGIFFERT: No, no. I had some very minimal involvement in the campaign, but not because of Wisconsin. Basically, I suppose, I had what I would

colloquially call the “Kennedy itch.” And I was interested in going into the government because I thought very highly of President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] from what I had seen and heard during the campaign and the very early days of the administration. I had no particular connection with people highly placed in the administration. And I let it be known that I was available and, actually, was looking in the direction of the State Department or one of the agencies at the State Department, and having no great success in that line. And one day, really out of the blue, Norm Paul, who I didn’t know, called me, and I talked with him. And I really never thought much about the Defense Department, but the more I learned about Secretary McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], the more attractive that part of the government seemed to be. So eventually I agreed to go over there.

MOSS: Do you know by what process your name had gotten around to Paul?

McGIFFERT: No, I really don’t.

MOSS: Okay. Had you talked over the whole business with people like, say, Burke Marshall, who had been here at this firm?

McGIFFERT: I don’t recollect whether I had or not.

MOSS: Okay. Let me ask you, then, about the job as you were going into it. How was it explained to you by Norman Paul? What were the kinds of things that you found yourself expected to do? And did you have any reservations about the whole thing?

McGIFFERT: Well, I frankly don’t remember anymore how Norm described the job to me. Obviously, he must have described it in a sufficiently attractive fashion to make me interested. I suppose it was a hard decision because I think that being a special assistant puts you very much at the mercy of your immediate boss. And if he’s good, then it’s a good job. If he’s not good, then it isn’t a good job. I had to determine with respect to somebody whom I had never known before, Norm Paul, what I thought the balance of that equation was. And, in retrospect, I think I made the right.... I’m sure I made the right decision. I decided he would be a good man to work for and that he was also the kind of person who would probably acquire, in one way or another, more responsibility as time went on, and that as he acquired more responsibility, his special assistant would acquire more responsibility.

MOSS: So what was the job as you found it, as you walked into it? What were the things that were concerning the office at that time?

McGIFFERT: In August, in the first month, I was really given two problems. That happened to be just the time when the president had decided to shift Civil Defense over to the Defense Department. And, as I remember it, there were some hearings going on on that subject. My first job was to try to learn something

about the problem and go down and cover the hearings and try to bring back some sense of what was going on and where we ought to be going with respect to congressional attitudes on the subject.

The other problem was the problem of congressional travel, a very delicate problem which, I'm sure, is still with us. There was then, and far as I know.... [*Interruption*]

MOSS:you mean the use of military....

McGIFFERT: Military aircraft by members of Congress on official business. And this is in concept, I think, a perfectly legitimate arrangement. Like anything else, it's potentially subject to abuse.

MOSS: And Jack Anderson gets a lot of mileage out of it in his column, of course.

McGIFFERT: That's right. And so the question was, is it, in fact, being abused. And I took a trip. I went on one of these trips just to get some understanding of what they were like and what happened when people got overseas, and so forth and so on.

MOSS: Where was the interest in finding this out? Was it at McNamara's level, or was it...?

McGIFFERT: I think it was at McNamara's level. Yes, I'm a little cloudy on that, but I think it was probably McNamara who wanted to be sure that to the extent that the Defense Department was involved in this, that it was done in the proper way with the proper safeguards. Now all those things, or those two things, rapidly were shoved aside by the first great congressional investigative crisis of the Kennedy Administration as the Defense Department was concerned, which was the so-called "muzzling-of-the-military hearings."

MOSS: Uh huh--right.

McGIFFERT: And I suppose that I spent most of the first six or eight months together with Joe Califano [Joseph A. Califano, Jr.], who was Cy Vance's [Cyrus R. Vance] special assistant--Cy was then General Counsel--working on the "muzzling hearings." And the "muzzling hearings," of course, arose out of Senator Fulbright's [J. William Fulbright] charges that the military were indoctrinating the public in ways that were inappropriate, and Senator Thurmond's [Strom Thurmond] countercharges that the Defense Department was censoring the views of military people.

I think that McNamara saw this, and I think correctly, as a challenge to civilian control of the military establishment. If the top management of the department could not be assured that once a decision was made it would be followed without an attempt, through public speeches, to sabotage it, that would represent a diminution of real civilian control of the policy. While I think that was the fundamental issue, the hearings, of course, were fought out

on a large variety of issues: troop information, centralized review by the Defense and State Departments of policy statements and public speeches by both civilian and military officials, so forth and so on....

MOSS: Do you recall if there's anything that is of importance that really did not get covered in the hearings? One of the things we try to do in these oral history interviews is to identify things that can't be found elsewhere.

Would you say that the hearings represent the sum and substance of the controversy, or is there something more to be said on it?

McGIFFERT: Well, I think they.... I think you can get most of what went on right out of the hearings. The problem is that, as I say, there was such a tremendous-- they covered such a tremendous spectrum of activities. We had executive privilege raised for the first time, as far as I can remember, in the Kennedy Administration. We asserted executive privilege with respect to whether we would be forced to identify which of the so-called reviewers of speeches in the Pentagon actually blue-penciled any particular speech because McNamara took the position that that was his business, that the internal administration of the department could not effectively go forward if people down the line were subjected to harassment when they were trying to do their jobs, and that he'd take responsibility for any deletions that people thought had been incorrect.

Then we had the problem with Adam Yarmolinsky and the charges raised against Adam. We had General Walker [Edwin A. Walker] and the whole Walker business. As you're probably aware, the hearings which started out as a tremendously controversial kind of thing, a lot of press interest, gradually, over time, withered away, and really withered away very rapidly after General Walker's appearance, because he really turned out to be a much better witness against himself than for the views of those who wished to support him.

MOSS: What do you recall of the attitude of people like Senator Thurmond and Senator Stennis [John Stennis] as the hearings progressed?

McGIFFERT: I thought that Senator Stennis became increasingly disenchanted with the hearings, but being the gentleman and ex-judge that he is, he remained very careful to make sure that everybody had their day in court. He, as well as others on the committee, except for Senator Thurmond, became more and more noticeable by their absence from the hearings until at the end there was nobody there, really, but Senator Thurmond. Senator Thurmond, I thought, was dogged. I don't think that he really had, in many cases, command of his material, and therefore, was somewhat less effective than he might have otherwise been. He relied heavily on Harry Dent [Harry S. Dent] and Fred Buzhardt [J. Fred Buzhardt] to provide the staff work, and, I think, often didn't have the time to adequately digest what they were giving him. But, I must say, he carried it right through, all the way through, as I remember it; right into the beautiful spring days of 1961 we were still going at it.

MOSS: You mean of 1962?

McGIFFERT: Nineteen sixty-two, I'm sorry. Yes.

MOSS: The report came out in October, I think, of '62. Was there anything in this period that gave you any anxious moments? Were there any points where you all were caught off base? Any point at which, perhaps, McNamara became impatient with what was going on.

McGIFFERT: Well, I, you know, I suppose McNamara, quite rightly, was impatient with the whole proceeding. I'm sure he was terribly disturbed by the attempt to harass junior officials. I'm sure he was very disturbed about the attacks on Adam Yarmolinsky. And, it's very clear that he took the whole matter extremely seriously because he had Joe and me working full time for a long time on the problem. There was an entire month near the beginning when I think Joe and I averaged about three hours' sleep a night for an entire month.

MOSS: Okay. So what sort of things were taking up your time? What were the things that you were doing?

McGIFFERT: Well, we were trying to, first of all, gather the information from throughout the Defense Department that would enable us to accurately deal with the questions that were being raised, just as any good lawyer would. We had to gather all, for example, the speeches that had been reviewed for the last three or four years, whatever it was. We had to get all the troop information material that each of the military services was using. We had to go over all the so-called national strategy seminars and other similar meetings that Senator Fulbright had said, seemed to him, to be being used in an improper way to propagandize a particular point of view. So basically it was, number one, the gathering and synthesis of the appropriate, or of the relevant, factual information.

Then the drafting of testimony based on that. Given the variety of issues, that was just an enormous job. We had to deal with all of General Walker's blue program, or whatever he called it. We had to get all that material from Germany. I think we had the issue of the *Overseas Weekly* and the banning of it from the newsstands, just a tremendous amount of and variety of stuff. We were basically the workhorses, brought all this together.

MOSS: How did McNamara keep on top of what you were doing? Had regular reports going to him, or what, staff meetings?

McGIFFERT: I don't really remember that. He made Cy Vance his project manager. I don't believe we gave McNamara periodic written reports. Cy talked to him continually on the matter and, occasionally, Joe or I would join that meeting, but it was handled on a relatively informal kind of basis.

MOSS: Tell me a little bit about the man McNamara. How did he operate in a meeting like that, in an informal meeting where you and others were doing

your stuff for him, telling him what was going on and looking for decisions and that kind of thing?

McGIFFERT: Well, he operates very much the same in all these kinds of things. He tries to find out what the issue is. He will set aside a certain amount of time to deal with it, fifteen minutes, let's say. He will listen, and then he'll make a decision. He's remarkable in making a decision. It's usually a pretty good decision, but there's no fooling around; he gets right to the point.

MOSS: No talking around the point, explore the limits of it and that sort of thing; he's pretty well decided....

McGIFFERT: No, you talk around it. It depends on the issue. If it's a fresh issue, you talk around it. If it's not a fresh issue, of course, the need for talking around it would be much less.

MOSS: Okay. Once the "muzzling the military" things are out of the way, what's the next principal thing that you get into? Or was there something else going along...?

McGIFFERT: No. The "muzzling of the military" for my nine months as a special assistant was my main preoccupation. Then we had a relatively uneventful five or six months after I became the assistant to the secretary and succeeded Norm Paul [Norman Lee Paul]. Well, relatively uneventful only in the sense that we didn't have any new muzzling type of hearings. We had to finish up that year's legislative program, get the money bills through. Whether we had a big MAP [Military Assistance Program] problem that year, I don't remember. In September of that year we have....

MOSS: By MAP you mean Military Assistance....

McGIFFERT: Military Assistance Program.

MOSS: Right.

McGIFFERT: In September of that year we had some kind of a flap, and I don't remember what it was anymore. All I remember was that Mr. Stennis, either for the Preparedness Committee or the full Senate Armed Services Committee, was concerned about something and wanted Mr. McNamara to come down and personally testify. And I reported this to Mr. McNamara, and he said, "I don't want to go. Get me out of it." And this was sort of my first personal crisis in trying to do that sort of thing, and Senator Stennis was very nice to me. I went down and saw him and said--this came along just at the time of Cuba, although the issue in this wasn't that--and said, "Look, really, it would be better if you could accept a lower-level person." And he said, okay, much

to my surprise. So that first operation of that kind worked out all right.

MOSS: And you don't remember the point of...?

McGIFFERT: I don't remember what it was. We did have Cuba in September and October. And I was not deeply involved in that.

MOSS: You had both Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] and....

McGIFFERT: We had Keating, and I remember one of my jobs was to keep track of what Keating was saying.

MOSS: Do you have any idea of where he was getting his information?

McGIFFERT: No. No, I used to be asked that question all the time. No. The answer is no. But we did have Keating, and then we had the whole question of should the Defense Department, or other agencies of the government, have known something sooner, or indeed, when did they know something? And I don't remember the sequence anymore, but it seems to me there was something on the 21st of September which some people said, in retrospect, as indeed an indication, albeit an ambiguous indication, in the photographs, of something. But that became a subject of great controversy, and I can no longer remember the exact sequence.

MOSS: I know there was some intermittent cloud cover and things of that sort got in the way.

McGIFFERT: Anyway, there was congressional contact with respect to that kind of problem, when it took place. Whether it was all later on after the crisis had passed, I just don't remember anymore.

MOSS: Okay. Let me go back to something you said earlier. You were talking about the money bills. How involved would your office get in the annual budget business? Who had the con on this? Who was the...?

McGIFFERT: We had the liaison responsibility for the authorization bill, meaning the responsibility to work with the Armed Services Committees. That involved internally the preparation of the so-called "back-up" books for Mr. McNamara--being about eight big, fat, black binders--which he would always complain contained too much material. And indeed they did, but it was a very difficult problem to winnow out the important from the less important, particularly because every staff agency likes to write at length about their particular subject. And my office simply didn't have the manpower to edit all those things down in manageable form. So the problem was you either put them in or you leave them out entirely.

Henry Glass of the Comptroller's Office was in charge of writing the posture statement,

and we would coordinate with him. We were responsible for the liaison with the committee in the sense of setting up the schedule, having preliminary discussions about witnesses and time and trying to figure out some of the oddball questions that might be asked. And then we'd have to carry that whole process through on the procedural level until, sometime in the spring or summer, the bill would be passed. The comparable procedure responsibility for the appropriations bill had been traditionally located in the comptroller's office, and retired General Bobby Moore [Robert S. Moore] was the contact with the Appropriations Committee.

McNamara, right from the start, didn't like that setup and said first to Norm and then to me, "Let's consolidate. There's no reason to have separate organizations." We were never able to do that because one of the two Appropriations Committees wanted Bobby Moore to remain as the liaison individual and wanted that individual to remain in the comptroller's office because the committee was used to being able just to pick up the telephone and call Bobby, or somebody else in the comptroller's office, on technical points, and they were fearful that any reorganization would sever, to some degree, that channel. And no matter how much we told them that that wasn't the intention, they were unwilling to really believe that that wouldn't happen, intended or not. So we never really bit the bullet on that one, and we never made the change.

So we ended up with this anomalous situation of Bobby doing the liaison. I would go with McNamara to the Appropriations Committee hearings in the same way I'd go with him to all the other hearings we went to, but I'd always have to go to Bobby to find out when McNamara was supposed to go. A silly situation, which, as I say, we never fixed. We also had responsibility for the other legislative matters like MAP, as well as various smaller pieces of legislation, particularly personnel legislation and so forth. What we usually did with the smaller legislation would be to assign the responsibility to one of the military departments and say, "Army, this is your baby. You get this one." "Navy, this is your baby."

MOSS: I was going to ask you how much coordination was there between your office and the legislative affairs people in the armed service branches?

McGIFFERT: I established--I can't remember whether they're bi-weekly or monthly--regular meetings, and we did it at lunch with the heads of the military departmental liaison offices. We also dealt by phone all the time, and towards the end of my tenure in that job--and I think this may fall beyond the Kennedy years--we started to think about whether we were organized properly as between my office and the military departmental offices. And generally, our conclusion was that the principal places where you can run into trouble is not with legislative matters because, by and large, everybody has the same interest within the department in getting that legislation through. But this was less so in matters of investigation, in response to congressional investigation, and it was much more important, therefore, that my office have a very tight hold in terms of formal clearances and so forth over the entire legislative liaison effort of the department, including the military departments, where an investigation was involved, than where legislation was involved.

MOSS: All right. Let me pick on an exception for a moment, something like, let's say, Curt LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] going down and testifying for the RS-70....

McGIFFERT: On the RS-70. Sure, you had things like that, but relatively speaking, they were rare. You probably have something like that today with the Navy's tremendous push to get more ship money than the present administration wants to give them. And we had it then in the whole issue of nuclear power for warships. The Navy and McNamara simply disagreed on the subject. So that does happen. Nobody can ever tell how much around-the-corner, under-the-table contact there is between the advocates of something like the RS-70 and their supporters in the Congress. You do know, I think, what the senior officials of the, in this case, the Air Force are saying; they have to get their testimony reviewed like everybody else, their speeches. We did have to deal with the problem--it may've been with respect to the RS-70--with respect to what is a legitimate response to questions. And I think Cy Vance finally put out a piece of paper on it that in essence said, "Sure, you answer any question they ask you in accordance with your own beliefs, but don't go around volunteering when you're not asked."

MOSS: All right. Another area in which there's some controversy, and I want to find out how much this was a legislative problem at that time, was the TFX thing.

McGIFFERT: Well, that was the next big investigation. It started in December of '62 and arose because Senator Jackson [Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson] went to Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan] and asked Senator McClellan to look into the matter after the TFX award had gone to General Dynamics rather than to Boeing, Boeing being located in Senator Jackson's state. As you're well aware from the public record, Senator McClellan sent us a letter around the 12th of December saying, "Would you hold up any progress payments under the award"--the award technically had already been made--"until we can look into this?" McNamara was out of town at the time. Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric] and I discussed this. I recommended and he decided that he would recommend to Mr. McNamara that we respond negatively to that request, that we could see no end to having to hold up the funding of what was considered to be a needed development if we once agreed to hold it up at all.

And so I drafted, and I guess Ros Gilpatric edited, the letter that went back to Senator McClellan. Ros took it out to the airport and met McNamara, who was coming in from somewhere. Ros talked to him about it, and McNamara agreed, and that letter went out. That's what started the whole thing, or at least that's what helped it along, because I think McClellan was somewhat disturbed that we didn't agree to his request.

He then sent over Jerry Alderman [Jerome S. Alderman] and Bob Dunne [Robert D. Dunne] from his staff, the staff of the Government Operations Investigating Committee. And they talked--this must've been between Christmas and New Year's in '62--with McNamara and Gilpatric and Zuckert [Eugene M. Zuckert], the other senior officials involved. They, of course, didn't know anything about the matter, and so we provided them with a lot of

material, and I guess they became convinced that they had a hold of something that was bigger than they had thought.

Off they went. And we had what became a very difficult and, in any ways, bitter hearing. We made what turned out to be a tactical mistake right at the beginning. They wanted to start hearing very quickly, and we decided that it would be better to let them call the witnesses they wanted to call first, and have Mr. McNamara then come on, and that, he, Mr. McNamara, could do a more intelligent job if he could see what others had said. Well, that was a mistake because the net result was that these adverse witnesses got the big press play, and we never could catch up with it, from the point of view of the press. And then, of course, we got involved with all the disputes about Gilpatric and Sylvester [Arthur Sylvester] saying things to the press and Gilpatric's alleged representation of General Dynamics when he was in private law practice and all these other peripheral things.

MOSS: And then, of course, banking interests, as I believe were in....

McGIFFERT: Interests, sure, and all that. All that stuff. We had a committee that was pretty well split, and, as a result, never issued a report. I noticed they just recently issued a report. The composition of the committee has substantially changed now. There were some very fundamental issues potentially involved, but at least in that portion of the hearings--and I'm not familiar with the later hearings they had in 1970--in that portion of the hearings they rally never focused on what I would consider the fundamental issues.... [Interruption]

MOSS: Yeah, go ahead.

McGIFFERT: You asked about how we organized for TFX. At this point I think that Cy Vance had moved on to be Secretary of the Army, and that we had no General Counsel. So that I really became the project manager, or tried to fill the project manager's role that Cy had filled in the "muzzling hearings," which was a somewhat different role than I normally filled up to then, although it became a role I filled again later on in other matters.

MOSS: Okay. How did you get people together on this thing? I think people like Harold Brown and John Rubel in the R&D [Research & Development] area, Enthoven [__?__] in his systems analysis business, the different service

R&D people who were supposedly having their input, the Joint Chiefs, who had their say?

McGIFFERT: Are you talking about TFX now?

MOSS: Yeah, yeah.

McGIFFERT: I don't have a very precise recollection about it. We did...

MOSS: Were you lining up technical arguments? I think that's what I'm after.

McGIFFERT: Yes, of course, we had to synthesize all the basic documents. And we did form red and blue teams, as I remember it. I don't remember whether red and blue were the designations, but anyway, one team played the role of the opposition to the decision, and one team played the role of the supporters in an attempt, by this sort of internal adversary process, to illuminate what our substantive and tactical problems with respect to the investigation might be. I think perhaps that was a little overdone, but I think it had some....

MOSS: There was one fellow, now I forget his name, who was on one of these teams who more or less went over to the committee, didn't he?

McGIFFERT: Yes, I guess that's right. I've forgotten now who that was.

MOSS: I was wondering....

McGIFFERT: It seems to me Jack Stempler [Jack L. Stempler] was on one of the teams, and Fred Payne [Fred R. Payne] may've been on one of the teams. He was in DDR&E [Department of Defense Research & Engineering], but I'm not positive.

MOSS: Neither one of those rings a bell with me. You said a little earlier that the whole thing never really grappled with some of the fundamental issues that were involved, or that could've been involved. Could you identify those and talk about them a little?

McGIFFERT: Part of this is with the benefit of hindsight, I suppose, and part of it isn't. The committee basically focused on the narrow issue of Boeing versus General Dynamics, that is, the choice among contractors. It never focused in that period, to any significant extent, on the question of whether it was feasible, and, if feasible, wiser to have a common airplane between the Navy and the Air Force for somewhat differing missions. This was the fundamental procurement decision, to try to have a common airplane with, hopefully, a billion dollars' worth of savings.

MOSS: And as I understood it, that was the real pointed issue between McNamara and the service chiefs, that they didn't believe it could be done.

McGIFFERT: That was a decision made in '61. I'm not personally familiar with that decision-making process, but I'm sure it was controversial. But who said what, I really don't know.

MOSS: And so they, the committee, never came to grips with this.

McGIFFERT: No, the committee never came to grips with that in that phase of the hearings. Now they may have done so subsequently with the benefit of hindsight. The other issue, and as far as I know even in subsequent hearings the committee has never grappled with it, is whether the performance objectives, stated by the Services, were gold-plated, were too high in relation to the projected threat and/or in relation to the state of the art over the time period of the TFX development. Because I personally have always that that, if there was a mistake made with respect to TFX, it was not in the decision to try for a common airplane. It was not in the decision to select General Dynamics. It lay in the attempt to go too far too fast. It lay in the performance objectives of the airplane.

MOSS: And you put this at the door of the Services rather than the companies?

McGIFFERT: I put this.... Well, that's a very hard question. You never know how much.... There's an interaction here.

MOSS: Yeah. You get the Services saying to the companies, "Go ahead and push that state of the art as far as you can along these lines, and tell us what you can give us."

McGIFFERT: There's an interaction here, and it is, you know, not a devious sort of thing at all really. It's simply in the nature of the developmental process that the developers, the R&D people, tend to be more sanguine about a development than most anybody else. You see this within the.... You see it everywhere, in government officials as well as officials in private industry. Development people are not particularly interested in cost, that's somebody else's problem. And senior officials, both in industry, I'm sure in industry and certainly in government, have to contend with this problem. One of their jobs is to try to introduce the realism of the customer into the development process. So I suspect that the TFX objectives may have been overstated, and that basically we may have been trying to build the wrong airplane.

MOSS: What do you recall about McNamara's feelings about the committee launching into these hearings and raising the whole issue? Do you recall any occasions on which he expressed himself to you directly?

McGIFFERT: Well, he was [Interruption] extremely, rather, he became increasingly concerned. My recollection, and it's a matter of impression, was that he was not particularly concerned at the outset. And I can only surmise that he felt he'd made the right decision, and he had adequate support for it, and the whole thing would die an early death. And then, I think, as some of the papers, of which perhaps he was unaware, from down lower in the chain began to surface, and as the committee began quite clearly to take a prosecutorial approach rather than a more judicial approach--the type of approach which is typical for this particular committee from my experience--he became increasingly concerned. He recognized, as I said before, that we had made a tactical error in

not having him go down right away and lay out his side of the matter. And so there came a point where he said, "I want to go. How can I get myself down there?"

MOSS: Okay. You say that there were two things, one being the surfacing of papers that he, perhaps, had not seen before. Is this critical of his decision-making process? Is this the kind of thing that would be likely to happen in the way he operated, that some things--because he liked quick, clean, objective discussions--that some things might get lost in the shuffle that would bobby trap him later, or what?

McGIFFERT: Well, no, I don't think so. These are documents like the evaluation team's scoring. The evaluation team's scoring was very close. The evaluation team's report said, "The Boeing version has an operational advantage. The General Dynamics version has an advantage in commonality of parts and in reliability and in the understanding of the costs involved." What the committee did was to focus on that part of the report that stressed the operational advantage, that it would fly a little faster or ferry a little longer. This was ballooned up so that members of the press were saying, "McNamara has chosen to buy the second best airplane." That was a somewhat distorted, in his view and in my view, too, version of what, in fact, the evaluation papers did show. It wouldn't have done him any good....

MOSS: Okay. So he was becoming concerned at the distortion that was being made of this thing rather than becoming concerned because they were things that he didn't realize were involved.

McGIFFERT: Sure. Yes, I think so, yeah.

MOSS: Now, on the second thing, how did he react to the kind of prosecutorial attitude of the committee? How does he react to that kind of an approach?

McGIFFERT: He reacted by making a blue team and a red team. "I'm going to have my own defense counsel, in effect, and I'm going to become an adversary, too."

MOSS: He's going to have his war games to play it out before he--to rehearse it, in effect--before he plays it out on the Hill. And how effective do you think that was? How satisfied to you think he was with the way that worked out?

McGIFFERT: Well, I think we all have to be dissatisfied with the outcome of it. I think probably we have to say we did the best we could, but having said that....

MOSS: Did it have any inherent drawbacks that appreciated afterwards?

McGIFFERT: What?

MOSS: The sort of role playing and practicing before you go up there?

McGIFFERT: Oh, I don't think it has any inherent drawbacks. It's limited to what it's supposed to do. I think, as I said before, I think perhaps we overdid it. By that I only mean that perhaps we spent too much time on it.

MOSS: One of the criticisms that's been leveled at McNamara is that he was not sufficiently aware of, or perhaps, appreciative of, the bargaining nature of the political system, that he was very strong on his systems analysis, on his cost-effectiveness, and this sort of thing, but this isn't the way the real world of Washington works. It is a political world, it is a compromise world. How do you react to that criticism of the man?

McGIFFERT: It think that it would be true to say that McNamara was very resistant to any compromise that he thought was unjustified. Now....

MOSS: That's a loaded answer.

McGIFFERT: Yeah, but by that I mean that he did not like to do anything that didn't have a rational basis.

BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I

McGIFFERT: He would be willing to compromise if there was a good reason for it, and, occasionally, although he didn't like it, he was forced to compromise. On some base closures, for example, the political heat became too great.

MOSS: Yeah, I was going to bring it up.

McGIFFERT: We'll come to that after awhile. McNamara's approach to Congress was, I suppose, not the usual approach because he was not a glad-hander and he was not a ready compromiser. Basically, he dealt with the Congress by overwhelming it with the facts; and if you go back and look at McNamara's record with Congress, you'll see that there're very few things that he wanted that he didn't get. Now, in the course of this, he suffered. He made some very good friends and made some very powerful enemies, and suffered yearly articles about how bad his congressional relations were. But as a practical matter, he got almost everything he wanted.

MOSS: Okay. He got most of what he wanted. Did you get any feedback from the Hill complaining about this man?

McGIFFERT: Oh, sure.

MOSS: And then who were the complainers and of what did they complain?

McGIFFERT: Most of the problem was in the House. The Senate produced very little flak, at least in the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Appropriations Committee. The House Armed Services Committee was a very difficult body to deal with after Mr. Vinson [Carl Vinson] left. Before Mr. Vinson left, not so much so because I think Mr. Vinson and Mr. McNamara had a high degree of mutual respect; and although they tangled on some things, it was never on a personal basis.

Seething under Mr. Vinson, though, was a feeling held by some, or at least reported to be held by some, that McNamara was arrogant and so forth and so on. And this was said to be felt by Mendel Rivers [L. Mendel Rivers], Eddie Hébert [F. Edward Hébert], Porter Hardy, primarily. Also within the committee were some very, very strong McNamara supporters, unfortunately more junior, for example, Sam Stratton [Samuel S. Stratton].

And so there was a good deal of, sort of subterranean flak in the Vinson years from these fellows. So I would go up every January, at the beginning of a new session, and go around and see every member, and just let them unburden themselves. And I would say eighty percent of them had no particular animosity at all toward McNamara. In fact, I would say, if anything, they were rather glad to see somebody come and see them.

MOSS: You identify Rivers, Hébert, and Hardy, though, as particularly strong.

McGIFFERT: And Bill Bray [William G. Bray] on the Republican side.

MOSS: And what were their--besides thinking of him as being arrogant and challenging their prerogatives, I suppose--what specific complaints do you recall that they had?

McGIFFERT: Well, my time scale is a little mixed up here. Rivers....

MOSS: We're talking in generalities here.

McGIFFERT: Yeah, Rivers generally wanted more ships and planes than McNamara. Hébert, of course, was concerned about the National Guard. Bill Bray just basically got out of the wrong side of bed. Porter Hardy just generally liked to stick needles. Porter was, actually, in my opinion, a great fellow; but, although I didn't agree with him on most subjects, I liked him as a person.

MOSS: Plus you....

McGIFFERT: You've got to understand Porter in his role as congressman; that is, that he was bound and determined to create controversy. It wasn't any fun for him unless he had an issue.

MOSS: He was playing gadfly for the sake of gadfly.

McGIFFERT: Yeah, yeah, basically, basically.

MOSS: I think just for the record we ought to point out that Mendel Rivers died yesterday. Hébert is now....

McGIFFERT: Hébert is now the chairman, will now be the chairman. Well, Mr. Rivers's time in the chairmanship is a very interesting one, but it's beyond the time period we're talking about, I guess. I might add, with respect to the visits that I used to make in January, that I used to get Mr. McNamara to go and make visits, too, in January, not to everybody, but to somewhere between ten and twenty of the leading people.

MOSS: Subcommittee chairmen and so on?

McGIFFERT: Subcommittee chairmen and supporters, senior people plus supporters in the lower ranks. He didn't like to do this very much because it is awfully time-consuming, these fellows like to talk and so forth. It is time-consuming, and he just never really, I think, could get used to the idea that perhaps it was worth spending that amount of time. So I used to have to work pretty hard to get him to do it, but he'd do it eventually. And then we would get these fellows over for lunch from time to time, which was relatively easy if the individual involved was a guy who he felt would talk responsibly or rationally on a subject, and very difficult if the individual involved was someone who he thought would go off on byways.

MOSS: Who were the people in Congress he seemed to admire?

McGIFFERT: Well, I think he thought highly of Mr. Vinson and--I'm guessing now--Phil Hart [Philip Hart]. I think he thought highly of Senator Russell [Richard B. Russell, Jr.]. I think he thought highly of George Mahon. I'm thinking now only of the senior people. I think he thought highly of Scoop Jackson and Senator Inouye [Daniel K. Inouye]. I'm sure I could think of a lot more. Give me a little time.

MOSS: And what sort of attributes would you say these were that...?

McGIFFERT: Well, all of them had the capacity to discuss a subject on a two-way basis. They not only had something to say about it, but they were also willing to listen, and willing to accept disagreement, if that was what emerged, without rancor. They were also far more persuasive in getting McNamara to change his mind just because they were these kinds of people. He thought that they thought through the problems.

MOSS: Okay. Two topics you touched on in passing; one, the base closing question, the other the National Guard Reserve business--again, both explosive subjects, congressional liaison.

McGIFFERT: The National Guard Reserve was mostly a post-Kennedy problem as I remember it. I don't remember quite when the first proposal was made.

MOSS: It would've been fairly early, following the Berlin call-up and the discovery that the Reserve and National Guard units were unprepared and that sort of thing.

McGIFFERT: Well, it went through several stages, as you remember. First stage, I guess, was this establishment of the large number of Guard units, the paper divisions of the Guard. And I never really had much to do with it in those years. It wasn't until around '65 when the whole question of merger became very difficult. And Eddie Hébert chose to treat the issue as a question of congressional prerogative, not only congressional prerogative vis-a-vis the Defense Department, but also the Armed Services Committee, prerogative vis-a-vis the Appropriations committees.

MOSS: And it got all tangled up in that sort of a thing.

McGIFFERT: But, as I say, my personal contact with it was mostly beyond the period we're talking about. Base closures we had every year. I can't remember.... Well, there was one when Normal Paul was Assistant to the Secretary for Legislative Affairs. There must've been one in, probably, April of '62, that may've been the first one, and then we had them quite regularly. They did pose a terrible problem. They posed procedural problems because of the need to prevent leaks. They posed very difficult congressional problems because congressmen were naturally interested, in some cases at least, in not having the base closed; but even more importantly in many cases, they did not want to learn about it from the newspapers. And yet how could you give a substantial amount of advanced information without running the risk that the whole thing would be politically sabotaged?

MOSS: Okay. So how do you time something like this between your office and Sylvester's office?

McGIFFERT: We learned every time. We did it a little differently every time, and I can't distinguish one from another anymore. There was the one which included closure of shipyards. And in that one, McNamara and I went down, oh, three or four days ahead of time and told the people from Massachusetts that we're going to close Boston Navy Yard. That whole thing ended up in the White House, and we didn't close Boston Navy Yard.

MOSS: It seems to me Brooklyn wound up being closed.

McGIFFERT: Brooklyn, yes. Probably, it was the next time, having been burned that previous time, that we kept the lead time down, I suppose, to something

like three or four hours. And indeed, we went even further; we didn't even tell the White House when it was going to close. Now, McNamara may have told whichever president was in office, I don't know. But I do know I was under instructions not to tell the legislative people in the White House, even though Claude Desautels, one of those people, was just all over me. He knew something was coming. And I wasn't about to give him the list.

MOSS: Let me ask you a little bit about your relationship with the whole Larry O'Brien [Lawrence O'Brien] crowd. How well, how did you get along with that group. And what did they...?

McGIFFERT: Well, we really had very little to do with each other. We had a weekly....

MOSS: That's what I wondered.

McGIFFERT: We had a weekly report, as every other agency did, to Larry.

MOSS: Were there any points at which they carried the ball for you and that kind of thing?

McGIFFERT: Very, very seldom. Defense problems, in those days, aside from these major investigations, were nothing like they are today. The problem in those days was primarily to keep the congressmen giving you more money than you wanted, rather than to try to get money they wouldn't give you.

MOSS: Did they ever get in your way?

McGIFFERT: No.

MOSS: I've heard complaints that the whole business of congressional liaison was something overdone, duplicated, you know, treading on each other's heels running in and out of congressional offices.

McGIFFERT: No, they didn't get in our way, except in one respect, and that was the prior congressional notification of a contract awards which was an abomination, and which I was glad to see the last session of Congress eliminated. It was something that existed in the Kennedy years. For all I know, it was instituted by the Kennedy White House. I don't know what happened in the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] years. This created a hell of a lot of bad feeling, and, in my judgment, left the impression that there was a political aspect to defense contract awards, which was quite untrue. But the fact that congressmen were announcing them may have left that impression with the general public.

I just thought it was a bunch of crap, but we could not get it stopped. We had to tell the White House. Every day we had to list the pending contract awards. We had to tell the

White House at around ten o'clock, and we'd go public at three. Art Sylvester would put it out at three, and meanwhile the White House would inform whomever they wanted to inform on the Hill. And that fellow would call his local office or something.

MOSS: What sort of attempts did you make to get this cut off? How did you try to stop Larry O'Brien or whoever about it? What was the reaction?

McGIFFERT: Well, the reaction was no.

MOSS: There was no justification or rationale?

McGIFFERT: Whether McNamara or Vance ever took it up with the president, I don't know. It was taken up with Larry; whether Larry took it up with the president, I don't know. Anyway, one way or the other, the answer was no. And so that continued, and that was a burr under our saddle because we, of course, kept being accused of having lead the information. Margaret Chase Smith was one senator who gave us a terrible time on this, just terrible.

MOSS: Because she wasn't getting the information.

McGIFFERT: She, as a Republican, wasn't getting it in advance. And I believe she knew all the time that the White House was doing it, but she chose to direct her complaints to the Defense Department. So we were in a position of defending something we hadn't done, and, at the same time, not admitting that the White House was indeed....

MOSS: Let me go back to something we've mentioned earlier, and that's the area of Civil Defense. They'd just come over to the Defense Department. It's my understanding that Yarmolinsky had some involvement in this before Stewart Pittman came on board.

McGIFFERT: Right.

MOSS: And that after a first sort of rush of enthusiasm about the whole thing, which things were overdone a bit, it cooled off quite rapidly, and the Congress dropped the appropriations level and so on. To what do you attribute this? Was it a lack of planning or a lack of, a real lack of interest, a lack of need, or what? How did this sort of go from boom to bust?

McGIFFERT: I would say a very substantial lack of interest almost everywhere on the Hill, in the department, in the public.

MOSS: Alright, now, to what would you attribute this decline in interest? Is it a real...? Is it justifiable or is there a real case to be made for an all-out civil

defense effort, and who were making the cases pro and con?

McGIFFERT: There's a case to be made for.... No, let me back up. Let's talk about a civil defense effort in terms of fallout shelters, not blast shelters. Blast shelters were never seriously considered, too expensive; but fallout shelters were not a terribly expensive thing in relation to the total Defense budget. And there was, and may still be, a good case for saying, if you are going to spend money on strategic defense, the first money you ought to spend is on civil defense. And McNamara, in fact, for two or three years used that argument to fend off the advocates of the ABM--the advocates of the ABM as a city defense weapon.

Now, what the situation today is, I don't know because, obviously, the program is being kept going on sort of a standby basis, just enough feeding to keep it alive. But, you know, it's curious; I can't answer your question as to why there's such a lack of interest. I think maybe if you go back and ask yourself as a citizen how you feel about it, you may have the answer.

MOSS: Did you get a sense that there were any particular groups that were frustrated at the decline in interest, or any particular people? I think....

McGIFFERT: Civil Defense?

MOSS: Yeah, Governor Rockefeller's [Nelson A. Rockefeller], for instance, initial enthusiasm for it.

McGIFFERT: I don't know. I had very little to do with it. Obviously, Stu Pittman was disturbed, and he was disturbed about what he considered, as I remember it, a lack of sufficient attention being paid to the problem.

MOSS: Well, I think that just about covers the areas that I have outlined here. Do you have anything else that you think ought to be added?

McGIFFERT: I'm trying to think how I would phrase an overview of the department's legislative relationships in the three years or so we're talking about. Obviously, as we've already covered in the discussion, there were some extremely controversial matters. On the other hand, I think it's probably important not to be seduced, or misled, by later events because I think it's fair to say that in those years McNamara and the Defense Department had very substantial support in the Congress. I can think of several reasons for that; one, the whole drive of Defense organizational legislation for the previous fifteen years had been to try to solve the problem of diffusion and inter-service rivalry that plagued the military establishment by an increasing centralization of authority....

MOSS: Culminating in the 1958 act.

McGIFFERT: Culminating in the 1958 act, and that you had in McNamara a fellow who was willing to use those powers. That, I think, was looked upon with relief by most people in that period because it was only later, when so many oxen had been gored, that more controversy surrounded him. Also, you've got to remember this was a period of rising defense budgets, so that there was not the kind of squabbling over the scarce dollar that might otherwise have occurred. And we also, at that time, had, I think, responsible chairmen of the major committees with which we were concerned, who were also people with whom the top officials of the department found they were able to communicate reasonably well. So that the only.... [Interruption]

MOSS: Okay. Did you want to finish that thought?

McGIFFERT: Are you on again?

MOSS: Yeah.

McGIFFERT: Yeah. We came through the "muzzling" hearings in good shape, in fact, in a sense, stronger than we went in because, I think, they served to consolidate the position of these relatively new senior civilians in the department. So I think that the one significant unfortunate blip in what otherwise seems to me a reasonably harmonious and successful three years of relationships with the Congress was TFX.

MOSS: Let me ask one last question, and that is, that other than the changes brought about by the course of events, do you see any substantial difference between the Defense Department, particularly its legislative liaison, under Kennedy and under Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]?

McGIFFERT: I don't see any differences that are accounted for by a change of president, no. I think there was an evolving change in the Legislative Affairs Office which gradually brought somewhat more centralized control in this area as in many other areas. We never went so far as Art Sylvester did in public affairs, and I don't think we should have or that that should be done today. There was that evolving, gradual change, but I don't think change of presidency made any difference.

MOSS: Okay, fine. Thank you very much indeed.

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