Livingston T. Merchant Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 5/28/1965
Administrative Information

Creator: Livingston T. Merchant
Interviewer: Philander P. Claxton Jr.
Date of Interview: May 28, 1965
Place of Interview: Washington D.C.
Length: 194 pages

Biographical Note
Livingston T. Merchant (1903-1976) was the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs from 1958 to 1961 and the Ambassador to Canada from 1961 to 1962. This interview focuses on the United States' relations with Canada during the Kennedy administration and the attempt to negotiate a Multilateral Force, among other topics.

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Livingston T. Merchant, recorded interview by Philander P. Claxton, May 28, 1965 (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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By Livingston T. Merchant

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Livingston T. Merchant– JFK #1
Table of Contents

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Document Type	Correspondents or Title	Date	Restriction
	Pages Containing Closed Portions		
OH	Page 45	05/28/1965	**A**
OH	Page 17	05/28/1965	**A**
OH	Page 30	05/28/1965	**A**
OH	Page 49	05/28/1965	**A**
OH	Page 52 - 55	05/28/1965	**A**
OH	Page 57	05/28/1965	**A**
OH	Page 91	05/28/1965	**A**

Updated: 07/11/2017

File Location:
John F. Kennedy Oral History Project
Livingston T. Merchant, Interview #1, May 28, 1965

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SECRET

Oral History Interview

with

LIVINGSTON T. MERCHANT

Spring, 1965
Department of State
By Philander P. Claxton, Jr.

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MR. CLAXTON: So future generations will know the outline of the interview, perhaps I ought to say at the beginning that, if you agree, we might divide it into six periods, some of which may be rather full and some of which may be thin. The first period, before January 1961, when the President came into office; and the second period, after the Inauguration and including the visit of

SECRET

Prime Minister [John G.] Diefenbaker before you actually took office in Canada; the third, your period in Canada and your relations with the President during that time; fourth, your assignment as his special representative in the Afghanistan-Pakistan dispute; a fifth period, after Canada, but before you went into the [Multilateral (Nuclear) Force] MLF activity; and sixth, the MLF activity, itself.

Let's go back, as the beginning, to the first period -- that is, before January 1961. Are there any thoughts that come to your mind of your relationship with the President in that period either as a Senator or as a candidate perhaps?

MR. MERCHANT: My relationship with the President or my acquaintance with him prior to his taking office as President was a casual one. I saw him on a number of occasions on the Hill. He was a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, before which I appeared on a number of occasions; and during the years that the President was in the Senate, I sat next to him at one or two luncheons. I also met him at a few dinners and had a pleasant but certainly slight acquaintance with him, and little more.

He outstandingly impressed me, apart from his vigor and attractiveness as a human being, I would say, with his wide-ranging interest. I think it was characteristic of him

to question anyone who had any experience on any particular topic which interested him, and his range of interests, of course, was enormous. He was an excellent questioner and an excellent listener. I had the feeling in that period that he was a man of youth with great intellectual gifts, who was anxious to learn.

I remember particularly one luncheon when I sat next to him in Vice President Nixon's office. It was a small luncheon given, I believe, for the Prime Minister of New Zealand. The President and I must have talked for nearly an hour before, during, and after the luncheon. We covered a whole range of subjects from Algeria to the Far

East. He was asking questions and he was listening with a minimum of expressing his own views or dominating the conversation. So that, really, is the extent of my acquaintance with the late President prior to his assumption of office as President. As I have indicated, it was a pleasant one for me, an impressive one but little more than casual and intermittent.

MR. CLAXTON: During this period, when you were Under Secretary of State, did you appear before the Committee at any time, the Foreign Relations Committee, while he was on it? Was there any discussion, testimony, matters reflecting his views?

MR. MERCHANT: I'd have to go back and check the record. I've no clear recollection

of any particular exchange or interchange with Senator Kennedy; but over a period of ten years I was a fairly frequent visitor before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and, without being able to specify them, I remember at least several occasions when he was present and active and interested in the subject on which I was testifying.

MR. CLAXTON: Suppose, then, we leave that period for the moment at least and move into the time after the President was elected President and was coming into office -- when you were transferred from the position of Under Secretary of State to return as Ambassador to Canada. Do you recall the events leading up to that change of assignment so far as they involved

the President? Was there a communication to you from the President or a communication perhaps through the Secretary involving this change of position? How, in short, was your relationship with the President in the new assignment?

MR. MERCHANT: I had no direct conversation or interchange with the President in that period. I had had reported to me highly complimentary remarks that he was asserted to have made concerning my service and his respect for me; and, in particular, in discussing my next assignment, Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, stated quite precisely the extent to which the President valued my ability to help in the field of foreign affairs and his desire that

I should continue in some responsible post, despite the change of administration. It did not fit in with already-determined plans for the hierarchy of the State Department for me to remain in the position I was then in. Dean Rusk could not have been more thoughtful or considerate or flattering in his discussion with me of possible posts. I was finally, to my great pleasure and satisfaction, named by President Kennedy as Ambassador to Canada for a second tour of duty. My recollection is that it was the first ambassadorial appointment announced and that my confirmation by the Senate was the first ambassadorial confirmation in President Kennedy's administration.

The first time that I actually talked with the President after his inauguration was in connection with Mr. Diefenbaker's visit to Washington. Mr. Diefenbaker was then Prime Minister of Canada. He was the first official foreign visitor that the President received after he took office. The visit was in February. My recollection is that I participated in one small briefing session with the President prior to the arrival of Mr. Diefenbaker. Then I was present during the discussions and the luncheon in that brief, one-day visit by the Canadian Prime Minister. I might speak for a moment on that meeting. I had the feeling that Mr. Diefenbaker and President Kennedy got along extremely

well together. Mr. Diefenbaker came to Washington with a great respect for the President as a man and, if I may say so, also as a politician. I have every reason to believe, from what he said at the time and what he said subsequently, both privately to me and publicly, that the Prime Minister felt it had been a most satisfactory first meeting. The ground covered was wide-ranging even though the topics necessarily were dealt with briefly, owing to limitations of time: disarmament, the question of nuclear weapons, the Congo, the situation in Laos, problems of joint defense production sharing by Canada and the United States, and then one relatively minor but, from the Prime Minister's

point of view, politically, extremely delicate and troubling item which related to the possible or expected application of Foreign Assets Control regulations to the subsidiary in Canada of an American oil company which was contemplating bunkering a ship -- I believe it may have been a Chinese -- chartered ship. I think, on reflection, it was a Canadian vessel transporting wheat from the west coast of Canada to Communist China. The ship was engaging in trade which, under our national policy, we did not desire to facilitate in any way. Mr. Diefenbaker felt this was a matter of urgency which might become public knowledge and controversial in Canada. He was anxious to avoid

this, as was the President. With great promptness an accommodation was worked out, under which, in sum, as I recall, the President gave the Prime Minister assurance that, if the Canadian government quietly asked this Canadian subsidiary of an American oil company to fulfill the bunkering requirement, the parent company would not be subject to the application of the penalties of the Foreign Assets Control regime.

MR. CLAXTON: I gather that the President acted immediately, promising the Prime Minister that he would try to dispose of this matter -- or at least find out the problem involved from our point of view during lunch time.

MR. MERCHANT: That's true. Yes, as I recall he asked [Frederick G.] Fred Dutton as we broke up to go into luncheon if he would investigate immediately what the situation was, what the facts were, what the legal problem was, with a view to finding a practical and prompt solution.

MR. CLAXTON: This should have had a very good effect on Mr. Diefenbaker.

MR. MERCHANT: It did, indeed. When I arrived about a month later in Canada to take up my mission in Ottawa, Mr. Diefenbaker, on the first occasion that I saw him and subsequently, referred with admiration to the President and expressed his satisfaction with the personal relationship which he felt had been established

at that meeting in Washington. He was also complimented and even flattered by the fact that he was the first head of government of any foreign country to call on the President and discuss business with him in Washington.

MR. CLAXTON: I believe that it was at this meeting that Mr. Diefenbaker, himself, made the offer or extended the invitation to the President to come to Canada as soon as he could.

MR. MERCHANT: That's true; and the President accepted with the understanding that the exact date would be left to detailed working out of their respective schedules; and the acceptance of this invitation, subject to the arrival at a suitable date, was announced by Mr. Diefenbaker,

I believe, in the House of Commons immediately after his return from Washington.

MR. CLAXTON: Yes, I noticed in the files that in his report to the House of Commons on the meeting he read the communique and announced that he had invited the President to come and that this invitation had been accepted.

MR. MERCHANT: Right. In that same report to the House he described his meeting with President Kennedy as revealing and exhilarating.

MR. CLAXTON: Two very fine and appropriate words. Looking at the communique for a moment, which was released by the President and Prime Minister after their meeting, do you find in this

anything which reflects on or suggests any further discussion between the two men as you attended the discussions? And, secondly, do you recall any follow-up in which the President participated -- follow-up concerning the matters which were listed in the communique?

MR. MERCHANT: I am reminded by the text of the communique that disarmament was quite clearly at the top of the Prime Minister's mind and virtually the sole subject in which Howard [C.] Green, the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada, who was present, was interested. There was a very considerable emphasis in the Canadian Government's views as expressed by those two men to the

President on the absolute essentiality of progressing in the field of disarmament. There was also, I think, revealed, though not as clearly as came out in the May visit of the President to Ottawa three months or so later, the highly skittish attitude of the Canadian Government with respect to any connection with or participation in nuclear armaments. This bore directly, of course, [redacted] which had been under discussion in the normal channels for many months. This emerged as a

problem in Mr. Diefenbaker's mind but was not excessively stressed in the discussion except, as I indicated, by Howard Green's almost total preoccupation with the topic.

MR. CLAXTON: Do you recall the President's reaction to what Mr. Green had to say stressing disarmament -- what was the President's feeling about disarmament, about the control of nuclear weapons, about the possible creation of nuclear-free or disarmament zones, as in Africa, or in this reduction or control of nuclear weapons in this hemisphere?

MR. MERCHANT: I would have to go back and refresh my memory from whatever documentary record there is. I have no particular detailed recollection of what the

President said. I was left with a very clear impression that he was deeply and vitally interested in disarmament, provided progress could be made in company with appropriate safeguards; and he left the impression of sincerity and deep interest and preoccupation with this problem.

MR. CLAXTON: Was this the sort of degree of apparent sincerity that carried over to these two men who were, of course, very deeply concerned from the standpoint of their own population?

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, that's what I meant. The impression was left on the two of them that the President was genuinely interested and would do whatever he felt was within the limits of prudence that would advance

the cause of disarmament. The President was a pretty tough-minded man, and -- I'm again relying on general impression rather than necessarily reliable recollection -- I think it came through to the Canadians at that meeting that the President was going to be prudent and cautious in arriving at any agreements which were not properly attended by adequate inspection and other safeguards. Mr. Green, in particular, consistently, I think, applied a double standard to the United States and to the Soviet Union. He philosophically almost started from this point of view -- I don't think this does injustice to Howard Green's viewpoint, which

was based on deep sincerity and conviction -- but I think Mr. Green's underlying assessment was that the Soviets are so suspicious by nature, so tough, and so stubborn in negotiation that in order to arrive at agreements with the Soviet Union in disarmament and in other fields, the major concessions have to be made by the United States and that the most important thing, really -- though I don't think he ever logically arrived at this ultimate point in his reasoning -- was to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union which would relax tensions. I think he set this object unconsciously above the actual terms of an agreement, overlooking the heightened

risks which the process of reaching agreement by unilateral concession would produce for the United States, for Canada and for the rest of the free world.

MR. CLAXTON: How did the President respond to this line of thought?

MR. MERCHANT: As I have indicated, I'm not attempting to recall a particular interchange at that time. I was rather giving the underlying philosophy of Howard Green which was influential with Prime Minister Diefenbaker and the fundamental attitude of the President which was hardheaded and clear in his understanding of the nature of the Soviet Union and its purposes and methods. This, according to my

recollection, came out in nuances in this first interchange on the question of disarmament without in any way, however, impairing the impression that the Canadians carried away -- that here was a man honestly devoted to searching out every feasible road to disarmament or the control of armaments.

MR. CLAXTON: The communique shows one other subject that I would think would be interesting that was new at the time and in a new field, and that is the anticipated meetings between members of the United States Congress and of the Canadian Parliament. This sort of thing which, I guess, had been developed in the Interparliamentary Union and which has now spread

with similar meetings between the United States and other NATO Parliamentarians was then a new development in this field. Do you recall any views or comments or attitudes that the President expressed on this kind of subject?

MR. MERCHANT: No, I don't. My recollection may be wrong but I think the joint parliamentary group had been established several years before the President came into office.

MR. CLAXTON: I see. And the matter referred to here was just another meeting which was coming up. Is that right?

MR. MERCHANT: Yes.

MR. CLAXTON: Both of these men were, of course, tremendous politicians -- each in his own country and each in his own

way. Were there any sidelights or highlights of politics reflecting the President's and Mr. Diefenbaker's views which came up either seriously or in banter during the meeting?

MR. MERCHANT: Oh, I think there was some banter with the Prime Minister complimenting the President on his election and the skill he had shown in campaigning. I don't remember whether the Prime Minister recalled to the President at that time what he was very fond of recalling to me -- and I use the word "recall" advisedly -- that he had himself in his 1957 campaign for office, invented in a speech in Toronto the slogan or phrase, the "new frontier." The President, in jocular spirit,

reminded Mr. Diefenbaker, in this February exchange, that his margin was thin, little more than 100,000 votes. But Diefenbaker had been enormously impressed by the campaign that the President had so skillfully waged and by his extraordinary talent as a politician, in the best sense of the word.

MR. CLAXTON: Suppose, then, we leave the Diefenbaker visit for the time being, unless something occurs to you later, and move now to your own departure from Washington to pick up your responsibilities as Ambassador to Canada. I understand from the written record that before you left, you did have an interview with the President, not only to take farewell,

but in which the President went seriously into some of the most important matters which would affect your mission in Canada. For example, the memorandum shows that the President had in mind the bunkering problem, which Mr. Diefenbaker had brought up and which you mentioned previously, and raised the question, showing that he was still interested in it, of what had happened on this problem.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, that is true. As another example of the President's extraordinary memory for detail, I told him that a formula had been worked out between the Department of State and the Treasury Department and that I believed that it was on Secretary

Rusk's desk at the moment. I expressed the opinion that, in my view, the formula would meet the Canadian problem. The President was happy to hear that. We went on and discussed a number of problems in the relations between Canada and the United States; and the President showed extraordinary knowledge of the range of problems, the specific troubled areas, and even the detail of some of them. We then went on and discussed the plans, which had not been fully drawn up, for his visit later in spring to Ottawa and, in view of the pressures pouring in on him, indicated his hopes that it would be relatively informal and sufficiently concentrated so

that he would not have to be away from Washington for an unduly extended period of time. I left, needless to say, encouraged by the President's interest in Canada and in my mission there.

MR. CLAXTON: I would imagine that, from the standpoint of insight into the President's interest and activities and participation, that the major event was, of course, his visit to Canada later that year. But leaving that aside for the moment and dealing with the general, perhaps routine, but major problems of your mission to Canada, do you recall relationships, directions from, perhaps reflected through the Secretary or elsewhere in the

Department, of views of the President of any of the several very large matters that were then going on in the United States-Canadian relationship? Take, for example, the problem of [redacted] storage which had come up, I gather, in Mr. Diefenbaker's visit and on which the President had spoken to you or raised with you, in fact, in your interview on departure. Were there further reflections of the President's views of this very ticklish and delicate matter?

MR. MERCHANT: Not that I can recall offhand -- the record would reveal it, I suppose. I have not attempted to do any research for this interview, but I believe my memory is reliable

in saying that at some point or points during the continuing discussions and negotiations on nuclear storage, my instructions from the Secretary of State indicated that the President had participated in or expressed certain views on this subject. This may well have been true of other problems that I dealt with as Ambassador in that period, but I don't offhand recall them.

MR. CLAXTON: Not in such matters as the President's very distinct interest in drawing Canada into a greater participation in inter-American affairs, for example. Nothing beyond your basic instructions that you recall?

MR. MERCHANT: No.

MR. CLAXTON: Well, suppose then we move into the next active and major participation of the President in Canadian affairs, in the visit which he made in May, the invitation for which Mr. Diefenbaker had offered during his visit to Washington, which the President had accepted. Did you meet with the President before this visit? Did you go back and engage in any planning or any other personal, written contacts in planning for this?

MR. MERCHANT: A Presidential visit to one of our embassies abroad is an enormously complicated matter. I had been through it before, and this was helpful, but it requires weeks and weeks of the most detailed negotiations between the officials of the

two governments on matters that I don't suppose the President is even aware are required for advance preparations. This was the process in which my Deputy Chief of Mission in the Embassy, Mr. Armstrong, and I were heavily involved -- in discussions and interchanges with Washington and with the Canadians. This is a separate story in itself, and I'm sure it has been told elsewhere. The public and the principals, themselves, are really totally unaware of the detailed planning of each minute of the movement or position of not only the principals but those in attendance or those participating in particular ceremonies.

MR. CLAXTON: Yes. I gather from looking at the file document of the President's trip to Ottawa, dated just before the trip, and referred to as a new index, about fifty pages long, taking up in the most intimate detail each step and each minute, even, I believe, in describing what kind of cigars the President likes. I often wonder what would happen if there were no cigars of this kind available in the country to which he's going.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, well, that's a case in point. It reminds me of President Eisenhower's visit to Canada in July of 1958; and one learns from the White House staff every slightest whim and taste of the President from what kind of eggs he likes for breakfast and how long

they should be scrambled or whether they should be fried on both sides, on down to if the President takes a drink before dinner and what is his choice. In the case of President Eisenhower, I learned that it was Chivas Regal whiskey, which is unavailable in Canada. I finally had to send an officer to Buffalo to acquire a bottle of Chivas Regal. I had a somewhat similar experience -- which is the point of this story -- with President Kennedy's cigars. I learned what his particular brand was, his enjoyment of them; and with great difficulty and at great personal expense, I obtained in New York in ample time a box of his favorite cigars. When he first came back to

the residence with me alone, after one of our meetings with the Canadians, I opened a box and handed it to him. He took one and lit it and then said, "This is my brand of cigars." I said, "Yes sir, it is." He said, "Well, you get this box back to the White House just as soon as I've left. Don't you hang onto it." He had not done me the credit of believing that I had independently found the box and thought that I had raided his own, personal supplies.

MR. CLAXTON: He assumed that the staff had supplied them on the way, which might be a better routine.

MR. MERCHANT: But to answer your first question, I came down to Washington a day or two before the President traveled to Canada and rode up on the aircraft with him and Mrs. Kennedy and

went over the final draft of his speech on our flight up. One amusing, human insight was that he asked me in all seriousness if Jackie couldn't read the paragraph which had been inserted in French. It is standard practice for an English-speaking statesman addressing the Joint Parliament of Canada -- both houses of Parliament -- to have a passage in French. I explained to him -- and he indicated disappointment at my reply -- that Mrs. Kennedy would be sitting in the balcony, and he would be in the well of the House and that it would not be in accordance with Parliamentary practice for Mrs. Kennedy to arise at the appropriate point and speak the French lines.

He spent, I think, the last fifteen minutes of our ride into the Uplands Airport, outside of Ottawa, having Mrs. Kennedy coach him and correct and practice his pronunciation of this very brief passage, which finally stayed in the text of his speech.

MR. CLAXTON: I see from the text this was still very much on his mind because he said, "I am somewhat encouraged to say a few words in French. . ." This was at the airport. ". . . from having had a chance to listen to the Prime Minister. An unfortunate division of labor that my wife, who speaks so well, should sit there without saying a word, while I get up and talk."

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, that was his response to his official welcome at the airport.

MR. CLAXTON: And he went on to the one sentence in French. He did a good deal better by the French Canadians in his response at the airport, apparently, than his set speech in the Parliament, where there were only six words in French.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, he cut down a paragraph which we had put in the early drafts of his speech in French. He cut it down to one sentence.

MR. CLAXTON: Yes, there it is.

MR. MERCHANT: Since we've got a considerable ground to cover, Phil, I don't think we need attempt to duplicate the substantive discussion, do you?

MR. CLAXTON: No, not at all.

MR. MERCHANT: Which is all documented and available elsewhere.

MR. CLAXTON: It's all documented. The important thing is the background or the highlights of it. You spoke of working on the speech, his major address to the Parliament, as you went up. Do you recall any points which struck him particularly or matters which would give future historians a background on that important address?

MR. MERCHANT: No, I don't. My recollection is that he made only one, minor change in the speech on the airplane. It had had been through several earlier drafts; and he had worked over it long and hard himself. No, I don't think I've anything of historical interest on that point.

MR. CLAXTON: In the meetings in Canada, with the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet and staff, what strikes you at this distance of the President's attitude, the points which he stressed, his relationships with the Canadians, the feel which he gave the Canadians?

MR. MERCHANT: To answer that reliably, I'd have to go back and read the record on it and really refresh my mind. As sidelight impressions which may not come through from the reporting documents, I would say that the points which seemed to me to be uppermost in the President's mind for discussion were -- and I don't name them, necessarily, in order of importance -- first, a desire to see

the Canadian Government more heavily interested and involved in hemispheric affairs: the possibility of actual membership in the Organization of American States and otherwise, through economic assistance, through political representation, diplomatic representation and, in general, a broadened interest in this area. I'll say a word on that. The question of Canada joining the OAS had been under public discussion and within the confines of the Diefenbaker Cabinet it had been under serious consideration. It was a rather ticklish subject primarily, I think, because the Canadians, while on one hand feeling a duty to involve themselves more

deeply in Western Hemisphere matters, had an underlying apprehension that they would risk disturbing their relations with the United States or, alternatively, with Latin America and the rest of the world by actually joining the OAS. Their reasoning on this was -- which I believe was faulty -- that either they would support the United States' position on any issue of substance and controversy with Latin American countries, in which case they would damage their image with the Latin American countries and contribute to foreign propaganda to the effect that they were a satellite of the United States; or, alternatively,

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they would disagree with the United States in a forum where all the other members were the Latin Americans and, by that very fact of disagreement on any subject, disturb the United States and disturb the tranquillity or such serenity as exists in their relations with us. They thought, also, that it would expose them excessively to arm-twisting by the United States to gain their support. And the then current difference in interpretation of the Castro Government's purpose and character in Cuba and difference in attitudes toward it, as between the Canadian and the Washington attitude, gave point to this underlying apprehension of the Canadians. Mr. Diefenbaker,

as I recall, made this basic point that either they'd disagree with the United States and be in trouble with Washington, or they'd agree with the United States and be charged with being a satellite elsewhere. The President, I thought, as I recall, rather humorously brushed aside this Canadian objection and said, "I don't think we'll disagree too often. It well may be -- in fact, I'd almost be prepared to say -- that if Canada and the United States were to disagree on some problem in this arena, the odds would be extremely good that Canada would be right, and we'd be prepared to come around to its point of view." But there was

quite a discussion of OAS and Canadian participation in hemispheric matters. Diefenbaker also pointed out what is frequently overlooked in this country -- that there are traditional, commercial, historic, as well as Commonwealth -- or, in the earlier days, Empire -- connections between Canada and what were the British colonies, in the Caribbean. Canada was increasingly engaged in technical assistance programs in that area. This was a subject which, as I say, was discussed at some length. And those points of view were revealed. This subject tied into a second question, which was also discussed at some length. That was the hoped for increased extent

of Canadian contributions to the economic support and development of the less developed regions of the world. In principle, Mr. Diefenbaker, and his cabinet were sympathetic to this, though here again, they tended to emphasize their participation in the Colombo Plan and their priority interest in the less developed members of the British Commonwealth rather than the generality of undeveloped countries around the world.

The next subject -- and this was probably the real. . .

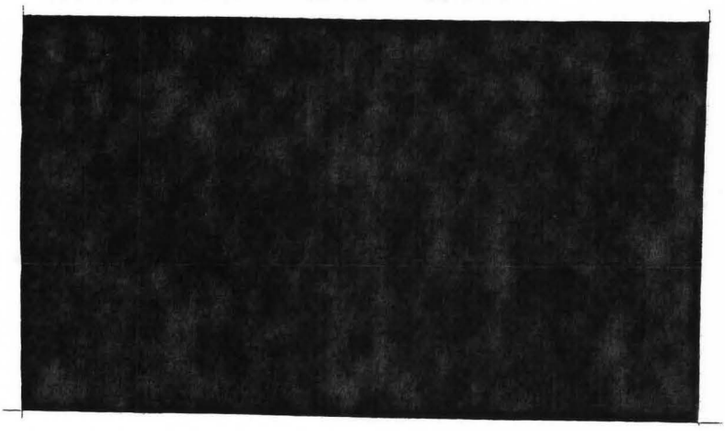
MR. CLAXTON: Let me just interrupt there. I heard at one point that Mr. Diefenbaker took a somewhat negative attitude on aid, saying that there

was a good deal to be done in Canada. We often hear this line of argument in the United States. Did this come up, and did the President comment on this point?

MR. MERCHANT: Well, I'm sure it did because the Diefenbaker Government had been cutting down what had been a higher previous level of foreign aid. The Diefenbaker Government, in many ways, was a strongly nationalistic government. One of the Prime Minister's pet projects and dreams was the development of the North in Canada; and he was well aware of the extent of the federal funds which had to be put into, what we call, I suppose, social investment for the further development of the

more outlying regions of Canada. So, certainly, the Prime Minister was not as forthcoming as the President had hoped, though my recollection -- my impression -- is that there was agreement in principle but no particular indication of intent to do very much more in dollars. . . .

The third thing that sticks in my mind as occupying a good deal of time of the President's meeting with Mr. Diefenbaker and his senior advisors was the question of the



That was a triangular deal which had been under discussion between the two governments, whereby Canada would take on the expense of, as I recall, operating the Pine Tree Radar Warning Line, which runs through the heart of Canada and on which, I believe, we had, up to that point, shared, on a 50/50 basis, the expense of operation. Canada would take on the total expense of operating this radar line. The United States would transfer -- this is the second leg of the triangle -- to Canada, from its active inventory of United States Air Force fighter or interceptor planes, sixty-six -- I think that's the number of aircraft which was involved -- sixty-

six Voodoos, which would, in effect, would be the replacement for the CF-100, which, about two years earlier, the Canadians had been forced to abandon, even though they had invested between half a billion and a billion dollars in its earlier state of design and manufacture. As a consequence, the Royal Canadian Air Force needed a modern interceptor. Sixty-six were to be transferred from our active squadrons at our own Air Force bases in the United States. The third leg of the triangle was a proposed arrangement, under which, the United States would make a substantial contract with an aircraft manufacturing company in Montreal for the manufacture, with

the Canadian Government, of a substantial number of F-104-G's, I think was the designation. This was an advanced, all-weather fighter. The output was to go to continental members of NATO for the defense of the NATO area.

This triangular arrangement, had obvious domestic, political difficulties for President Kennedy -- in letting of a contract to a Canadian aircraft manufacturer at a time when our own aircraft manufacturing industry was depressed in the United States -- and also entailed transferring out of our active Air Force inventory sixty-six Voodoos, which were then [redacted] air-to-air rockets or

missiles, and moving them to bases in Canada under the control of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the absence of an agreement whereby they could have available in an emergency [redacted] This was obviously equivalent to a net reduction in the effectiveness of the defense of the continent by reason of the absence of an agreement which would enable these weapons [redacted]

Diefenbaker had certain political problems involved in this package, too. Taking, by transfer, the Voodoos re-awakened all the bitter, political memories of the abandonment of the Canadian Arrow,

the F-100; and, also, the assumption, at a time when he was having difficulty with his budget, of the added expense of taking on our share of the operating costs of the Pine Tree Line. He made a very strong plea to the President that any connection between this triangular deal of Voodoos, Pine Tree Line, and the purchase of F-104-G's, with [redacted] severed. He said that it was not, in his judgment, politically feasible, to settle satisfactorily [redacted] and that it would be totally unacceptable to the government and to the Canadian people to have as a condition of the package triangular deal the acceptance

by Canada [redacted]
Diefenbaker went on to say that this acceptance was something that he believed was ultimately necessary in our common interest. But he called for -- as I recall -- or he had on his desk a folder of correspondence on the subject of nuclear weapons which had come in from the public over the past few days or weeks. He opened it and rifled through it and referred to the fact that his mail was running ten to one against Canada being involved in any way with nuclear weapons. I remember that President Kennedy reacted to this exactly as President Eisenhower had reacted to Diefenbaker's raising the same point in a different connection --

on a different subject -- three years earlier, by expostulating that one in the position of responsibility for governing a country could not have one's decisions made by the numerical ratio, pro and con, of letters from the public, where the writers were not in a position to have full possession of the facts.

President Kennedy made quite an impassioned but good-natured plea to Mr. Diefenbaker to reflect on his responsibilities for leadership, which involved many times doing unpopular things because they were necessary and right. The gist of Mr. Diefenbaker's response was that it was not that he was unwilling to

face this issue but that the timing was wrong and that Canadian public opinion would have to undergo a period of further education on the question. This was a process which he undertook to start in the months immediately ahead with the hopeful result that in the fall or some not too distant time, it would be politically feasible for Canada to agree to arrangements under which [redacted]

MR. CLAXTON: So that he was willing to take up the cudgels of leadership which the President. . . .

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. Then, by hindsight -- looking back -- I think that one of the primary elements in President

Kennedy's later disillusionment with Mr. Diefenbaker and in the deterioration of their personal relationship arose from his experience in the months immediately following this discussion in Ottawa with the Prime Minister. It arose from his belief that Mr. Diefenbaker had not, in fact, fulfilled what the President took to be a personal commitment made to him actively and forcefully to take up the cudgels with public opinion to force this issue through.

MR. CLAXTON: Do you think that this was more significant to their deterioration of relationship than such other matters as, say, foreign aid or the Inter-American affairs business?

MR. MERCHANT: Oh, yes; oh, yes. This question of nuclear weapons was far and away the most active, controversial, bitter subject of discussion in the Canadian press and intellectual, academic circles, and in the Parliament.

MR. CLAXTON: While that part of the discussion dealt with nuclear armaments, there was also a discussion of nuclear arms control and the test ban, I believe. Did the President reflect his views in this discussion, as you recall, on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't have any clear recollection on that part.

MR. CLAXTON: Turning to another subject, the problem of Laos also arose, which

was, then, a matter of much public discussion and much concern to the government.

MR. MERCHANT: Oh, yes. The Canadians, of course, were very active and felt themselves very deeply involved in the situation in Laos, by reason of their membership on the International Control Commission, set up under the 1954 Geneva Agreements. Canada was one of the three members. So, the Canadians felt that they had a responsibility, and involvement, and an access to direct knowledge by reason of the fact that Canadian officers and officials were assigned to Laos, attached to this Commission. There were other subjects which came up. The Columbia River Treaty was mentioned; the Congo, as I recall;

and I think there was some further discussion of disarmament. It was a pretty thorough-going gallop around the course.

MR. CLAXTON: Did the President express any particular attitude of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, suggestion regarding the performance of the Canadians on the Commission?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't recall any detailed discussion on that. I have no recollection of what the President said. The record would show that, I'm sure.

MR. CLAXTON: There's one other important subject I wanted to ask you about just before you left. But before we get to that, a side matter. As I recall, it was during a tree-planting exercise in Ottawa when the President strained his back, which had further

effects. Do you recall that episode or any attitude, expression of the President at the time?

MR. MERCHANT: No. As a matter of fact, I've forgotten what prevented me from being present at the exercise. I imagine it was connected with the visit and, probably, business back at the Embassy. But I was not present at the tree-planting ceremony, which was a rather personal, little ceremony with the President and the Governor General participating in it. It was a continuation of a tradition which was first established, I believe, by the preceding Governor General, that each distinguished visitor -- Head of Government or Chief of State -- who stayed under

that roof would plant a small tree on the grounds in commemoration of his visit. What did -- in retrospect -- impress me was that, despite the pain which it later became apparent the President was suffering, he never mentioned it to me nor, to my knowledge, to anyone in his party. There were only two things at the time that led me to wonder if he was in pain or discomfort and if his old back injury was troubling him. The first was that coming out of the Houses of Parliament on an occasion after the tree-planting episode, I noticed the President went down the stairs a little bit sidewise -- obviously not freely moving down the steps. And I wondered about that. The other

thing was, that at the dinner which he gave for the Governor General at our Embassy the last night, the President seemed, if not preoccupied, at least anxious to leave at the earliest moment that protocol permitted. And he did so.

I might mention one other incident which, I'm sure, doesn't appear in any official record of that dinner. It concerned me at the time and, by hindsight, I think it was the first fly in the amber of the relationship from Mr. Diefenbaker's point of view. That was, on the guest list -- and this is a matter of course under Canadian protocol for such a dinner -- the Leader of the Opposition and his wife appeared.

MR. CLAXTON: This was Mike Pearson.

MR. MERCHANT: This was Mike Pearson. Unless my memory plays me false, this was the first time that the President had ever personally met him.

(This track ends in the middle of Mr. Merchant's last statement.)

TRACK # 2

MR. CLAXTON: You were just referring to the episode of the first meeting of the President with Mr. Mike Pearson, the Leader of the Opposition, at the dinner at the Embassy at which Mr. Diefenbaker was present.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. I was frankly surprised that the President had never encountered Mike Pearson before. He knew him, of course, well by reputation; and it was quite clear that the President

found Mike Pearson a most engaging and attractive personality. The little sidelight that I was going to recount related to that part of the evening when the ladies had withdrawn after dinner. By the President's request, coffee and cigars were served at the dining room table and the men regrouped around the President. Mr. Diefenbaker was on one side of the President and Mr. Pearson on the other. The rest of us were grouped in semi-circular fashion sequentially around the President. I might mention parenthetically that Mr. Diefenbaker did not have particularly warm or close personal relations with Mr. Pearson and, I think, he was

SECRET

conscious and regretful over the fact that he did not possess the reputation in international circles that Mr. Pearson had gained from his many years of activity on the world scene. In any event -- almost as soon as we settled down to general conversation -- the President turned to Mr. Pearson and asked him a question. Within thirty seconds, he and Mr. Pearson were engaged in an intimate, far-ranging, private conversation, during the course of which the President had literally half-turned his back on the Prime Minister, sitting on his other side and totally excluded him from this tete-a-tete, despite one or two early efforts of Mr. Diefenbaker

to participate in the conversation. This was punctuated by my more frequent and increasingly desperate efforts to turn the discussion to a general conversation and, in particular, to involve Mr. Diefenbaker in some form of triangular dialogue, in order to cut short what had turned into an extended, private conversation between Mr. Pearson and President Kennedy. From Mr. Diefenbaker's facial expression -- his face is mobile -- it was quite clear that he took much amiss what he regarded as almost a personal slight by reason of the President's attention being so concentrated on his political rival, the Leader of the Opposition. And, in a sense, what made it even more embarrassing to me --

I may have been hypersensitive, and I may be attributing too much significance to this social episode -- what compounded the difficulty was that the conversation went on and on and on to the extent that when the President finally acceded to my suggestion that we join the ladies, the feminine atmosphere in the room was several degrees below zero. After a relatively brief further stay by the President with the other guests, the Governor General and his Lady made their farewell and exit, immediately followed by the Prime Minister and Mrs. Diefenbaker. The President asked me when he could go. I had told him earlier that, though he was technically host of the

MR. MERCHANT: I believe it was that day. It may have been the preceding afternoon.

MR. CLAXTON: Did you have the impression when he was, certainly, not responsive to your efforts to get Mr. Diefenbaker back in the conversation that he was conscious of what you were doing, or was he totally unconscious and simply immersed in an interesting conversation with a new personality?

MR. MERCHANT: Well, I think it was that. I think he was totally occupied and engaged in a very interesting, lively conversation with a man whom he'd, no doubt, wanted to meet, knew well by reputation, and found extremely attractive, as well as knowledgeable. I think he was oblivious. I don't

think it even occurred to him then or later that his behavior, unconsciously, had been such to cause a very vain man, Mr. Diefenbaker, to feel that he had been slighted.

MR. CLAXTON: It's very interesting that such are the effects of little things on a country.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. But I, myself, have the feeling that there was a bit of a change in Mr. Diefenbaker's personal attitude toward Mr. Kennedy following that visit. I should mention, also, -- I don't think I did -- just in the interest of getting something of the background, that other subjects than the three that I mentioned as the highlights were discussed in the business meeting between the

Prime Minister and the President. These included the question of the tariff negotiations at Geneva, the Cuban situation, and the Berlin situation, which, of course, at that time was in a very difficult and dangerous state.

MR. CLAXTON: I wonder if the coolness or the change of Mr. Diefenbaker at that dinner could have been related in any way to the famous, lost memorandum, which developed later, if this had come to his attention by that time. Perhaps you would tell me about your meeting with Mr. Diefenbaker just before you were leaving Canada, when the matter arose. How did that all come about?

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. Though it's not clear -- at least, I have no knowledge as to exactly when Mr. Diefenbaker first saw the famous, lost document. And it's that episode which we'll turn to now. It occurred just about -- almost to the day, I think -- a year after the President's visit to Canada -- a visit which, incidentally, insofar as the public and the Parliament and the Cabinet as a whole were concerned, proved a great success. The President and Mrs. Kennedy captured the hearts of Canadians. The public turnout everytime they moved from one place to another was really extraordinary. The enthusiasm of the crowds was something that I had never witnessed before. So, in summing up the visit,

I would say that in May '61, it was an enormous success. It made a great contribution to Canadian-United States relations and secured in the heart and mind of the Canadian public the position of the President as a warm, attractive human being of great intellectual gifts and great force of leadership.

MR. CLAXTON: How did the President himself respond to this extremely warm welcome? Was he impressed by it, moved by it?

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, he was. He was. Of course, the Canadians are not accustomed to turn out for a glimpse of great personalities to the same degree that the American public is. Even the visits of the Queen, which I witnessed in Canada, have produced smaller crowds

than one would have expected. And you must remember that the President had come from a triumphant election campaign, with enormous crowds. I think he was impressed by the warmth and friendliness of the crowds and their demonstrativeness; but until I made the point, I don't think that he was aware of what, in Canadian terms, was a great outpouring of the Canadian citizenry in response to his and Mrs. Kennedy's presence there. Incidentally -- I suppose this is something that all experienced politicians acquire as a habit -- it was the first time that I had noted what seemed to be a habit or mannerism of the President in responding to waves and cheers as

the car moved between lines of people on the street. He was whispering under his breath at each one he waved to a little greeting -- sort of, "Hi, there; glad to see you." Another wave, another wave. "Nice of you to come out. Hi! How are you?" You couldn't hear this if you were more than two feet away from him. But consciously or unconsciously, I think, it added a personal touch to the gesture of waving -- you might say -- which I think was communicable to the people.

MR. CLAXTON: In the sense that the people would see his face and lips moving, they would have the realization that he was saying something, even though they obviously couldn't hear it.

There was no use in his shouting because it couldn't be heard anyway.

MR. MERCHANT: Exactly.

MR. CLAXTON: Very interesting.

MR. MERCHANT: This was not a habit that President Eisenhower had. As I say, I was sort of amused, interested, and startled when I heard the President talking under his breath as he communicated with these crowds.

MR. CLAXTON: Well, since the relationship between the United States and Canada is so much a matter of psychology, I take it that your feeling is that the President's personality and own warmth were really valuable at that time.

MR. MERCHANT: Oh, enormously valuable, enormously

valuable. We had, then, many difficult problems still at issue with Canada. We had a government in Canada which was highly nationalistic. Into the two campaigns and election to office in 1957 and 1958 in some of the writings overt anti-American overtones had crept. It was not a period of total ease in the relations between the two governments. The contributions that President Kennedy made by that visit was a very real and important one.

To go now to the famous, lost document, I think I have to logically jump to May of 1962 when I paid my farewell call on the Prime Minister. He was in the middle of a campaign; and it was necessary to catch him

between campaign whistle-stops. I finally obtained my appointment with him, which was at his official residence, not at his office and which, was to my thought, a purely courtesy farewell visit which would occupy fifteen minutes or so.

To my dumbfounded amazement, after a few personal remarks and expressions of regret over my impending departure as Ambassador, the Prime Minister launched into a vehement and violent and highly emotional criticism of the President for having seen Mr. Pearson privately a few weeks earlier on the occasion of Mr. Pearson's attendance at a White House dinner, given for all the Nobel Prize winners of the

Western Hemisphere. This was a large dinner. I thought it was a magnificent concept. Mr. Diefenbaker was informed by arrangement through me in advance of the announcement of the issuance of the invitation to Mr. Pearson to attend the dinner and quite clearly had no objection to it -- regarded this as a natural and, in fact, as a compliment to Canada as a whole. The President had arranged to see Mr. Pearson in his private quarters in the White House for a short space of time before the dinner. In a press conference in Washington before he left the city, Mr. Pearson referred to that fact that he had had this private discussion or talk in the White

with the President.

I will remind you that the Canadian campaign was being waged. It was a very bitter one. The thrust of the Prime Minister's violent, emotional complaint was that some of the Liberal candidates were politically capitalizing on this private talk between Mr. Pearson and President Kennedy in Washington as evidence that Pearson was the only Canadian whom the President considered worthwhile to consult on international affairs. The Prime Minister was extraordinarily upset over this. He then told me that he had in his possession a document which he thought he could not avoid utilizing in the campaign to prove

that he and he alone could prevent the United States from dominating Canada. He said he had no choice but to meet this Liberal party line -- as he described it -- on who was best able to manage Canadian relations with the United States head-on. He said that he had -- locked up in his private safe ever since a very few days after the President was in Ottawa -- the original memorandum from Mr. [W.W.] Rostow to the President entitled "Objectives of the President's Visit to Ottawa." The Prime Minister said this memorandum says (1) push the Canadians into joining the OAS, (2) push the Canadians to do this, (3) push the Canadians to do that. The Prime

Minister said that this seemed to him an authoritative expression of the intent by the United States to push Canada around. He said that he was talking to me about this privately on the basis of the personal trust and frankness which had existed between us and so forth. It was a tirade which I let partially run its course before interrupting. I was totally taken aback by what the Prime Minister was saying. I found it difficult to interrupt him, though later in our conversation I found him willing to listen relatively quietly to points I made.

I told him, first of all, that I had no idea what document he was

talking about; and I quizzed him as to how this document came into his possession. He said that he was not clear on that, but his understanding was that a member of the President's party had given it to some official of External Affairs. You must remember, I was uncertain then as to whether this was a spurious document.

MR. CLAXTON: Whether it really existed.

MR. MERCHANT: Or whether, in fact, it existed. I told him that it seemed to me inconceivable -- in my position as Ambassador -- in fact I was completely certain that if anyone in the President's party had given any piece of paper to an official of External Affairs or anyone else

in the Government, I would have been aware of it, and I would be familiar with its contents. I said, "No such document, to my knowledge, exists." And he said, "Well, I'm not quite sure just how it did come into our possession." I then said that I could not, in fact, understand what he was doing. If, in fact, this document was as he described it, it was clearly a personal and confidential paper, a private paper, of the President of the United States, a guest of his in Canada, written not as an official piece of paper, but as he described it, a personal memorandum from a member of the President's personal staff -- not from the Secretary of State, not

from anyone else with responsibility other than to the President in what essentially was a personal capacity.

I said that the fact that he had had this document in his possession for a year -- if this was made public -- would never be understood by the American public. It would set up a reaction in the United States which would do great harm to Canada's interests and to our relations here. I said that he had a heavy responsibility -- as our ally if he injected into a domestic election an issue which would be so divisive. It seemed to me too irresponsible for contemplation. I repeated that people would ask how the Prime

Minister came into possession of this internal, private document addressed to the President and why it had not been immediately returned.

I then recapitulated the circumstances of Mr. Pearson's invita- to the Nobel Prize dinner and the fact that the President had accorded him, as a courtesy, a few minutes in his private quarters before meeting the other guests. I assured him that there was no intent on the part of the President or anybody else to intervene, as the Prime Minister had characterized it, in the Canadian election or Canadian internal affairs. I found that the Prime Minister quieted down, that the emotional storm seemed to

subside, and that he seemed responsive to my arguments -- to be receding from his expressed intention of revealing the document publicly.

MR. CLAXTON: But he gave no such assurance.

MR. MERCHANT: But he gave no such assurance. To say that I was shocked as I left him is to describe it mildly. It was an incident which, quite obviously, if it could be closed on terms I assumed acceptable to the President -- namely non-use of the document and its prompt return with an apology -- then it was in the common interest of both countries that the incident not be made public property.

I debated what to do. I went to the Embassy early the next morning and dictated a long letter,

with certain recommendations, to the Acting Secretary, George Ball, in Washington and asked him to discuss its contents promptly with the President. I then arranged for a trusted member of my staff in the Embassy personally to hand-carry it by air to Mr. Ball. I received within two or three days -- and I should interject here that my date of departure from Ottawa had already been announced and was drawing near -- from George Ball, two messages, one of which gave the text of Walt Rostow's memorandum, which it seemed to me was unobjectionable. Parenthetically, I had been fearful that, if such a memorandum did, in fact, exist, it might list, among the positions on which the Canadians

should be pressed, the highly delicate question of [redacted] storage. This item did not appear in the memorandum. The telegram also, as I recall the message, stated that no copy had been given to anyone, that it had been a check list for the President to use to remind himself of some of the points to insure he covered them in his talk with Mr. Diefenbaker. And, again, it's my recollection that the loss of the document had not been noted. My report obviously came as a total surprise to the President.

MR. CLAXTON: Did it use the word, "push?" If so, as Mr. Diefenbaker said, in what sense?

MR. MERCHANT: It used the word, "push" the Canadians to join the OAS. It was a very

compressed, colloquially phrased memorandum. I made the point -- I guess it was in my second interview on the subject with Diefenbaker -- I made the point that I failed to understand, apart from all the other elements in the situation, his violent reaction to the use of that particular verb. I said, "The British use 'press' as we use 'push.' In colloquial terms it is a synonym for 'attempt to persuade; seek to persuade.'"

MR. CLAXTON: Or "urge."

MR. MERCHANT: Or "urge a particular course." And I said, "Such advice is unexceptionable." I said, "If I were to go through private memoranda from your personal staff as to points to raise with other foreign

statesmen at particular times, Mr. Diefenbaker, I'm sure I could find dozens which, by your standards, applied to this particular memorandum, are equally objectionable." And he said, "No. If I ever had an adviser who told me to 'push' another country around, I would fire him."

In any event, my instructions told me to delay my return to Washington until I had an opportunity to see the Prime Minister again. This I had foreseen and considered the only hopeful way of dealing with the situation. I was further instructed to inform him that I was personally reluctant to report to Washington anything that could be construed as a threat by him to publish a private communication, and

to warn him that this would cast a shadow over public attitudes between the two countries and create difficulties in the future in personal relations between the Prime Minister and the President.

I was told to reiterate the point that I had made in my first discussion to the effect that it would be impossible for any friend of Canada in the United States to explain the publication of this document if he pursued the course he had told me he was contemplating.

I had other detailed instructions elaborating on the nature of the President's private visit with Mr. Pearson and the circumstances of it, and was told to assure Mr. Diefenbaker

again that there was no intention by anyone -- least of all by President Kennedy -- to interfere in any way with the Canadian elections. Immediately upon receipt of these instructions for which I had been waiting, I sought another appointment with the Prime Minister. He was out of town on his campaign train and I had to wait until he returned to Ottawa on May 12th. The message which I sent him through his personal assistant was one of the need -- on a grave matter -- urgently to see him at the earliest possible moment. I offered to travel anyplace to meet his convenience to expedite the meeting.

I met him; he was warm, charming, friendly, exhilarated by the progress of his campaign, and a different man from what he was on the last occasion I had seen him. I told him I had delayed my departure to see him again; that I was unwilling to make an official report on our talk for the consequences, if my last talk with him became known, were too difficult to contemplate. I told him also I had obtained a copy of Mr. Rostow's memorandum; that I found it unexceptionable. I emphasized what he would do to himself and to Canada before the American people if he took the action which he had threatened. I asked that he abandon any such thought.

SECRET

The Prime Minister listened to me without interruption, calmly, and then told me that in light of our first talk on the subject, on May 4th, he had considered the matter further, and in light of what I had then said, he had now abandoned any present intention of using the memorandum in his campaign or in any way referring to it. He said that there were only three members of his Cabinet who were aware of its existence. He made what I thought was a rather jocular -- and indeed in bad taste -- statement that, if at some later point in the campaign, developments forced him to change his mind, he would personally telephone me in Washington to tell me -- as "a friend" -- forty-eight hours before

he used the document. He then reiterated that he had discarded any thought or intention of using it. That in substance was the end of the episode.

I discussed the matter when I returned to Washington, of course, with the President. I found him understandably astounded and indignant at what one could only construe as a species of blackmail. The President asked me in the following month or so to consider what, if any, further step might be taken to close out the incident finally and acceptably to him. In July I sent to the President a recommendation -- rather, a memorandum or a commentary on my further thoughts on the subject --

in which, in effect, I concluded that there was little, if anything, constructive that I could foresee to do to put a finish to the episode. I did recommend that the President continue to maintain an attitude of personal coolness to Mr. Diefenbaker and take no initiative to restore a more normal personal relationship. I have heard nothing further on the matter. That in summary -- without any attempt to go into any great detail -- is the story of this bizarre incident.

There is one footnote, however. By, I believe, a leak from the White House -- presumably authorized by the President -- one or two trusted newspaper correspondents,

including one Canadian posted in Washington, were given the essential facts of the story. It is now pretty well in the public domain, not in any detail, and not only through newspaper publicity following those initial stories, which started, I think, in June after the election in Canada had been completed, but it is imbedded in, I think, two books by Canadians on current Canadian history. Not with total accuracy, and not in all completeness. I myself have never discussed it with a Canadian or American newspaperman other than when questioned and to correct obvious errors in fact. One book is by Peter Newan the title of which I forget. I never saw him before publication. Afterwards I

pointed out to him one or two details which I regarded to be in error. The other Canadian correspondent I talked to in Washington in 1963 on the same basis was Max Freedman. . . . I forget the name of another Canadian book on the subject.

MR. CLAXTON: In your second interview with Mr. Diefenbaker, wasn't he -- I would have thought he would have been, tell me if I'm correct -- impressed by your recalling to him the actual demeanor and attitude and conduct of the President in the visit to Canada. Surely the President did not quote "push" for, or appear or attempt to "push" Mr. Diefenbaker in any improper sense. He was merely arguing and "pressing,"

endeavoring to persuade to do the sort of thing which was a matter of common discussion. Did you bring this fact up?

MR. MERCHANT: Oh, yes.

MR. CLAXTON: Was he impressed by this, as you recall?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't know. By his own statement in my second discussion with him, he was impressed, so he said, by the totality of my argument. He was in such an excited frame of mind the first time that it was hard to estimate which particular argument or arguments were having an impact on him at the moment of dicussion.

MR. CLAXTON: One final question on your service in association with the President as his Ambassador to Canada. Was

there anything further in your meeting with him when you returned from Canada that you recall that ought to be recorded now?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't think so. When I saw him in May or June 1962, it was a very informal interview in the President's office. He was having his hair cut, and the barber -- who I'm sure had been security cleared -- was in attendance through most of it. This inhibited me a little bit, probably unnecessarily, in going into any real detail on anything sensitive such as the nuclear question. I gave, as I recall, a general review of the more important open problems an issues at the time of my departure. I found that the

President's knowledge of our relationship with Canada and the details of it impressive, as it had impressed me on other occasions. I found his interest very lively. He was an impressive man.

MR. CLAXTON: This is fine. You must go for your appointment, and this gets us down through a major period of your association. That leaves two items: one, the brief relationship of the Afghanistan-Pakistan mission, and then the longer relationship of the Multilateral Force, and a couple of other side points. Perhaps we can take these up then at a later time.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. One other particular item, Phil, you didn't mention that reverts

to Mr. Diefenbaker, which was the private mission the President sent me on just before he made his Cuba missile crisis speech.

MR. CLAXTON: Oh yes. I forgot that. Have you time to go into that now, or should we wait? No? All right.

(end of Tape I)

TAPE II:

MR. CLAXTON: Mr. Ambassador, suppose we resume, then, the second portion of this discussion of your association with the President and recollection of his interests, activities, and attitudes with the third item in your relationship. This was the Afghanistan-Pakistan mission in 1961, when you were asked by the President -- brought down from Canada, as I recall -- to go to Afghanistan and Pakistan on a special mission. Would you perhaps begin with the call from the President? How did this come to you and what did he have to say?

MR. MERCHANT: This arose as I was returning from a leave in Florida in the fall of

1961 en route back to Ottawa. I was planning to stop for just a day or two in Washington. As I opened the front door on arrival at our home, the phone was ringing. It was George Ball to say that the President desired that I take on a particular negotiating assignment which would be short term and would entail being the President's personal representative in his offer of his good offices between the Afghanistan government and the government of Pakistan, with a view to reaching a solution to what was then a complete closure of the border between the two countries. I left on a few days' notice for Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the understanding that I would not spend

more than three weeks or so at the most out there. I had been preceded by personal letters from the President -- naming me as his representative -- to President Ayub and the King of Afghanistan, both of whom had accepted the offer of good offices. Notwithstanding that fact, I did not, prior to my departure, actually see the President. I received my instructions from him orally through Secretary Rusk and Under Secretary Ball. My reporting during this period of intensive negotiation in the two countries was to the President through the Secretary of State, and my instructions in response to my reports and recommendations from the field came from the President, again,

through the Secretary. The upshot of it was that I was out there something less than a month. I was able, I think, to achieve some progress in softening the position of both governments, but I was not successful in obtaining agreement on a formula or any accommodation which would result in a reopening of the transit trade -- the border trade -- between the two countries. I think I did lay some of the groundwork on which the next mediator or individual offering his good offices in the dispute -- the Shah of Iran -- did succeed some months later in obtaining arrangements under which the border was reopened.

I made my report when I returned

from Pakistan and Afghanistan to the Secretary. I did not actually see the President in this connection. Dean Rusk told me that the President had followed it with great interest and close attention. This was a special assignment. I was serving then in Ottawa and the reason I stayed only a limited time on the assignment was due to the need for me to return to my post.

MR. CLAXTON: Returning then from that assignment to your fourth period of association with the President -- your retirement period before you came back into the MLF activity. The record shows a letter to you from the President on April 9th, on the occasion of your retirement, and then a call on

the President on May 25th. What transpired during that call?

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. I received a very warm letter of regret over my retirement from the President, for which I was deeply appreciative. When I returned from Ottawa to Washington toward the end of May, 1962 to conclude the mechanical details of resignation from my post and retirement from the Foreign Service, the President said that he would like to see me. I went over to see him one morning around ten near the end of May. I remember I was impressed with the informality of the interview in that the President was sitting in a chair in the middle of his office in the White House having his hair cut.

I recall having it flash through my mind that the barber must obviously be cleared for "Top Secret" security. The President made some friendly remarks in connection with my retirement, expressed the hope that I would be available for future assignments, and then launched into a discussion of what was, among Canadian topics, obviously at the top of his mind.

This related to the famous lost document which Mr. Diefenbaker had made me aware of two or three weeks earlier when I had paid my farewell call on him. This was a personal memorandum on one page from Walt Rostow, who was then on the White House staff, and who accompanied the President to Ottawa on his

official visit in May of 1961. It was by way of being a shorthand check list of topics which the President obviously had indicated he wanted to raise with Prime Minister Diefenbaker during his private talks with him in Ottawa. I'm inclined to believe the paper was mislaid. It came into Mr. Diefenbaker's hands under ambiguous circumstances and he failed to return it immediately to the President, notwithstanding that it was clearly a personal, privileged, and private paper of the President and the President was then the guest of the Canadian government in Canada. Rather than doing that, Mr. Diefenbaker had locked it up in his safe and apparently brooded over it for approximately a year. Then, in my

farewell call on him, he indicated that it had a very sinister connotation, and that he might be forced under the pressures of the campaign he was then embarking on for reelection to publish this document as support for his justified need to assert a very strong and nationalistic Canadianism. It was a shocking episode. It disturbed the President greatly and, needless to say, it did me. The President had it much on his mind in this final call I paid on him in the latter part of May, 1962. Finally, after we discussed it back and forth, he asked me if I would give some thought in the next few weeks as to what step might be taken next to bring Mr. Diefenbaker

to a frame of mind where he would return the document and give some reasonable assurance that he would not pervert its contents in the course of the campaign, which -- were he to do so -- could only result in strained relations not only between the President and the Prime Minister, but between the two governments and the two countries.

I promised the President that I would give thought to this and within a matter of weeks let him have my ideas were I able to develop any which might be helpful. I sent him my recommendations through Dean Rusk in the later part of June, I think -- about a month after our interview -- and told him in effect -- to the best

of my recollection -- that I saw no further steps which could be usefully taken at that point. I stated that Mr. Diefenbaker seemed to have had second thoughts on the wisdom of the dangerous course he had contemplated embarking on and that the matter was at least quiescent. Needless to say, the whole episode made a very deep and unfavorable impression on the President's mind. It led to a rather stilted relationship between the Prime Minister and himself thereafter.

MR. CLAXTON: That is easily understandable. Did that persist into the time in October of that year, 1962, when the President sent you on a special mission to see Mr. Diefenbaker again in connection with the Cuban missile crisis?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't know as to the President's reflection of this rather distant relationship with Mr. Diefenbaker in this particular context. Mr. Diefenbaker was one of the few leaders of our allies to whom the President sent a personal emissary. He sent Dean Acheson to London and Paris and the NATO Council, and he sent me to Ottawa. As far as I know those were the only cases where personal representatives were dispatched in advance of the crucial television speech of the President on the Cuban missile crisis.

MR. CLAXTON: Did you meet with him on that occasion, or did you receive your instructions. . .?

MR. MERCHANT: I received my instructions through Dean Rusk and I had several conversations as well with George Ball. I was summoned back to Washington rather hastily from Princeton to undertake this mission a day or so before I flew up there. The White House made available a special Air Force plane for me, and I was provided by the intelligence community with a set of blownup air photographs of Cuba and two intelligence experts -- interpreters of aerial intelligence -- to display to Mr. Diefenbaker the factual evidence on which the President was operating. I was originally scheduled to leave Washington early in the morning of the evening of the broadcast,

but was delayed until the final text of the President's speech had been decided upon and locked up, with the result, as I recall, that I didn't take off until noon or one o'clock in the afternoon from Washington.

Meanwhile, our Embassy had arranged for me to see the Prime Minister. I arrived in Ottawa in the later part of the afternoon and met Mr. Diefenbaker that afternoon in his office in the East block at 5:00 or 5:15. He had with him Howard Green, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, and Doug Harkness, the Minister of Defense. Those were the only two people in the room apart from myself and the intelligence experts, and Ivan

White, our Charge d'Affaires at the Embassy.

I was somewhat taken aback by Mr. Diefenbaker's extreme personal coolness to me, which I had never encountered before. My relationship with him up until that time while I was in Canada had been a friendly one. We had had two rather strained interviews that previous spring on the matter of the missing document. I've subsequently surmised that this coolness might have been accounted for by two things. First, some foreknowledge which he may have gained from his Embassy down here, or even newspaper reports at the time or the ticker-tape, that the President was going to speak that night on

SECRET

the Cuban crisis. Secondly, from the fact that there had been in one or two columns in newspapers in the United States obviously inspired, inside stories of the "missing document," which undoubtedly had come to Mr. Diefenbaker's attention. It occurred to me at the time that he had ascribed these to my personal efforts to leak them to the press. This was not true so far as I was concerned, although I had reason to believe that they were inspired directly by the White House with the authority or knowledge of the President.

In any event, the meeting with Diefenbaker and his two Ministers opened on rather a cool basis. I

had planned my presentation in a certain fashion leading up to reading him the full text of the President's speech as it was to be delivered that evening. Mr. Diefenbaker wanted to find out immediately what was in the speech without even looking at the photographs or studying them or listening to my preambular remarks as I had worked them out in my mind. So, in general, I thought it was not too happy an atmosphere. We did, however, come to grips with the problem. He did finally study with great interest and in great detail the various photographs. He asked a number of questions about them, and was quite obviously impressed with the indisputable character of

the evidence of what the Cubans and the Russians were up to. He went over the speech in some detail, and made a remark to the general effect that he thought the President had no choice to do other than he was doing. In general his concluding attitude, I felt, was one of understanding and sympathy, but also one of offended pride that he had not been genuinely consulted but in effect only had been informed two hours or so before the speech was delivered.

He did put his finger on one passage in the speech which I must say had struck me in reading it myself as unwise. This was a personal characterization of

Mr. [Andrei] Gromyko in connection with the President's talk with him in the White House a few weeks before this date in which Gromyko had denied that there was anything of the nature going on in Cuba. Diefenbaker put his finger on this passage and said, "Here the President is indulging in personalities; he is impugning the personal honesty of a high official of the Soviet government. This is not the way you should deal with the matter; it should be done more impersonally as the rest of the speech in fact does."

I was also impressed in that meeting with the almost total silence of Howard Green, who I would have expected to protest the very tough

line that the President was taking. Doug Harkness was enthusiastically in favor of what the President was planning to say. There came up a question just as we broke up -- the Prime Minister and his two Ministers had to return to the floor of the House -- the question came up as to what they should say to the press. There had been no publicity of my trip there, and my arrival had not been noticed by the press insofar as I could discover. The Prime Minister said to Green that there was no need for anyone -- himself or any member of his Cabinet -- to make any statement to the press that evening; they could wait and give a considered statement of

support in the morning. On the basis of this, I told him that I would report at once his objection to the particular passage relating to Mr. Gromyko's role, and said that I was sure the President would be happy and comforted by his obvious understanding of the situation, and by the support which I understood he was prepared publicly to give to this position being taken by the President.

I went back immediately to the Embassy and called Dean Rusk -- this must have been about 7:15. In any event, it was about fifteen minutes or half an hour before the President went on the air. I told him in summary of the Prime Minister's

reaction, which I said I found encouraging, and I thought that we could count on his moral and public support. I also told him of Mr. Diefenbaker's difficulty over the passage relating to Gromyko. The Secretary said immediately, "You can tell Mr. Diefenbaker that that passage will not appear in the President's presentation." I then told him I would be returning that evening, as I did. Before leaving I called Bob Brice, the Secretary of the Cabinet, and although he had not been present at the meeting, he was aware of its purpose and, I presume, at least in summary form, of its content and outcome. I asked him to get word to

Mr. Diefenbaker immediately on the floor of the House that the particular passage which he objected to in the President's speech would not appear in the text as delivered. I then returned to Washington that evening, and was amazed to learn the following day that Mr. Diefenbaker had given a statement on the floor that evening in response to a question, putting a most unfortunate face on what President Kennedy had said and was doing in this crisis.

MR. CLAXTON: Was this statement following the address, or before the address?

MR. MERCHANT: It was following the address. It may have been the following morning, but I think it was that evening. As I recall the House was

in evening session that night. It was to the general effect that this was a difficult and dangerous situation which President Kennedy was facing and facing resolutely, and that he hoped the United Nations could be brought into it. Possibly the United Nations might send a team of observers to Cuba to ascertain what the exact facts were. Well, of course, the inference to be drawn from this formulation was that the facts -- and they could not have been more solid facts than those contained in the photography -- that Mr. Diefenbaker doubted the facts; he suggested that they be certified or investigated by the United Nations. It put a gloss on

his support which was qualified and thoroughly unhappy. The following day, as I recall, he explained this away and affirmed his support for the President's policy in less equivocal terms. It was a disappointing episode to me personally in that I had left with his assurance that he would give unqualified support to the President, and in point of fact his initial public statement failed to do so.

MR. CLAXTON: Looking back, Mr. Ambassador, to this episode from this perspective, what is your appraisal of the value of that particular presidential gambit at that particular historic moment? Did it turn out well on the whole that he sent you to give his

advance notice to Mr. Diefenbaker? Was it a useful maneuver?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't think there is any doubt that it was a useful maneuver and a wise thing to do, recognizing, however, that it was not good enough to satisfy Mr. Diefenbaker in his frame of mind, and given the particular sensitivity of Canadians to situations in which we move ahead, taking risks in defense of not just ourselves, but the whole free world. The interesting thing was that Mr. Diefenbaker never acknowledged publicly, at the time or afterwards, that President Kennedy had sent a special emissary in advance, even though it was only shortly in advance of the delivery of the speech.

MR. CLAXTON: The comment in Parliament did not indicate that?

MR. MERCHANT: No. No.

MR. CLAXTON: That is very interesting.

MR. MERCHANT: What I'm saying is that the fact that he was informed, as he would put it, rather than consulted, left him upset and annoyed. He would have been more so, however, had the President not had the wisdom to send me or someone even that short period in advance.

MR. CLAXTON: Can we turn to the next period of your relationship with the President, as Presidential Adviser, again before the period of the MLF, which we will come to in a moment. On the occasion of the so-called Perkins Panel on the Foreign Service Academy. Is

there anything in that particular matter that you recall which would cast particular light on the attitudes and activities of the President?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't believe so. I did not have any direct dealings with the President in this matter. The Secretary of State asked me to be his representative in working with the so-called Perkins Panel, which had been appointed by the President to consider proposals and come up with recommendations with respect to a new or revised Foreign Service Academy. The understanding originally given to me by both Secretary Rusk and [McGeorge] Mac Bundy, whom I saw a number of times

in connection with this particular assignment, was that the President had decided to add me as a member of the Panel, in order, I think, to inject a point of view which reflected Foreign Service and State Department experience. I worked very closely with Mac Bundy in this matter, and met once or twice with the Perkins Panel, but somewhere along the line the President decided, quite obviously, not to formally name me to the Panel. Whereas I submitted a report to the Panel which I think had some influence on their final report, I was playing a role, as it developed, really as a representative of the Secretary of State and

the interests of the Department and the Foreign Service, a representative to the President's White House staff, and to the Perkins Panel. This was a group of very distinguished men and educators. But I had no direct personal contact with the President on this.

MR. CLAXTON: Suppose we go then to another major period of your relationship with the President, and that is as head of the Multilateral Force negotiating team. Fortunately for future historians, there are ample and well organized files on this subject, and therefore I won't ask you to go down through the matter in any chronological sense. On the other hand, it is a matter in which the President

did have a very direct and very large interest, yet in some ways a rather hesitant interest, it seemed, at times. So perhaps we can get to his relationship in the matter best by asking you to go back through your memory of the episodes or times in which the President participated directly, and cast what light you can from memory on those. Let me begin, however, with the beginning, which is when you came into the matter. How were you brought in? What early relationship did you have with the President in taking over the responsibility, and secondly, or perhaps it was at the same time, in developing the European trips?

MR. MERCHANT: Well, this assignment came to me rather out of the blue by Secretary Rusk asking me one Sunday if I would come down to see him at the Department. This was maybe the last week of January in 1963. I went down to his office and talked to him. He started by saying that he and the President were anxious to have me undertake a temporary assignment as chief negotiator of the Multilateral Force. I said I was complimented, anxious to do it, naturally, but that I had other commitments which would really set a time limit on the period I could devote to this on a full-time basis. I said this period that I could make available would be of the order of two or three

months at the most. The Secretary said that the President had in mind utilizing me only for the initial phase of presentation and opening of negotiations with interested NATO allies in the matter, and that this he thought was at most a sixty-day requirement. He said that the decision had been made for the United States government to take a somewhat more active role in presenting our concept to our allies who had expressed an interest in the project, and explaining to them why we felt this was a sound answer to a very complicated military, political problem.

On that basis, I undertook the task. I made three trips to

Europe during the spring. The last week in January, two or three days after this first talk with the Secretary, I flew over for about thirty-six hours in Paris, primarily to have the opportunity to talk to [Thomas K.] Tom Finletter, US Permanent Representative and Ambassador to NATO, and to ensure that there was no misunderstanding between us as to the relationship of my Presidential assignment to his role as the representative of the United States on the NATO Council. On that trip I also took occasion, with Tom Finletter, to see several old friends of mine who were Permanent Representatives on the Council for their governments. These were the representatives

of the [United Kingdom] UK, France, Belgium, and Canada, and also Dirk Stikker, the Secretary-General. I then returned immediately to Washington and plunged into taking hold of the task which an inter-departmental, high-level committee had been working on for several weeks. This was the preparation of instructions for the chief negotiator in his dealings with these other governments.

This instruction was a complicated document. It covered all the difficult and complicated questions such as control, mode, and all the political and military aspects of the concept as we had developed it. I was not unfamiliar with this concept since I'd had a

considerable part in its genesis, going back to 1959. Therefore I was able to pick it up at a later stage, but the skeleton of the original concept was still visible and identifiable.

I must say, it was an extremely competent and cooperative inter-departmental group that I plunged into to try to put on an agreed basis instructions which the President could then approve, prior to my setting out to talk to the leaders of the NATO governments which had already expressed an interest in exploring the project. This led to two or three -- or it may have been four -- meetings with the President on the subject prior to

my departure. My departure on the first of these negotiating trips was, I think, shortly after the middle of February, 1963. I was scheduled by the itinerary for that trip to spend some time in Paris and make a presentation before the NATO Council, to talk to [Maurice] Couve de Murville, the French Foreign Minister, then go on to Rome to talk to [Amintore] Fanfani, the Prime Minister of Italy, and his key ministers. From there to Brussels to see [Paul-Henri] Spaak, from there to Bonn to see Chancellor [Konrad] Adenauer and his key ministers, then to London to see Lord [Alec Douglas-] Home and Harold Macmillan and their advisers, and

then back to Paris for consultation with Tom Finletter, and further consultation with some of the key Permanent Representatives at the Council before returning to Washington. I was gone about three weeks, in all, on the trip, and it was a rather hectic one.

But in any event, before I left it was necessary, obviously, to have the President approve the document. The first meeting we had with him was a very large one in the Cabinet room. Secretary Rusk and George Ball were there; Mac Bundy, [Maxwell D.] Max Taylor, who was Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, and I think George [W.] Anderson, the [Chief of Naval Operations] CNO. [Robert] Red Dowling

was there -- he was back on consultation from his post in Bonn as Ambassador to Germany -- David [K.E.] Bruce was present, similarly back on consultation from London. Dean Acheson was there and [Christian] Chris Herter. . .

MR. CLAXTON: Secretary McNamara?

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, Secretary MacNamara. And I believe John McNaughton and I think Paul Nitze. It was a large meeting. My recollection is that the document which had been agreed on by the various department heads concerned as constituting my instructions had been sent over to the President for his consideration before the meeting. My general impression of the meeting was not one of

getting down to any detailed review of my instructions, but rather to a general exploration of the problem, possible answers to it, some of the key elements in the MLF concept as it had emerged from our staff studies, with the President seeking the views of everyone, asking very penetrating and intelligent questions, giving no real indication of what his own view was. I remember my outstanding impression was a wondering in my mind whether -- granted that this was a most complicated and difficult problem to grapple with -- the President might not have too fine an intellect, was too much of an intellectual to find it easy to come to a decision on a fine point

of judgment where much hung on the result. In any event, I received no clear sense of presidential direction at that point. Out of the discussions some modifications in the general line of the paper emerged, and we went back to work on it to try to meet the points which had been raised and to which the President seemed to attach importance. We had another meeting -- I would guess within a week -- with the President and a somewhat smaller group -- Ambassadors Dowling and Bruce, I think, had returned to their posts, and I don't think Chris Herter was at this meeting -- smaller in any event. The President finally, in effect, gave approval

to the general line of the instructions, but indicated that he wanted some further refinement and wanted to see me before I left which was, I think, at that point scheduled to be within forty-eight hours or so.

The next day I got word from him -- my chronology may be wrong here, but this is my recollection of the span -- I received a message that the President wanted to see me. I went over and saw him alone and talked about the MLF. Almost out of the blue -- this was less than twenty-four hours before I was scheduled to start off to see these governments as his representative -- he sort of sat back in his chair

and said: "I wonder if this is really a good idea at all." So I went back over the essence of it, what seemed to me the compelling arguments: the need to do something to take a lead with our allies who were increasingly divided and confused by General De Gaulle's attitudes, and why I felt that in a very complicated problem all the other alternative solutions contained more serious objections than the concept embodied in the MLF, as we were supporting it. In effect, the President said: "Well, I think you're right." I think we had, then, one final meeting in which he approved textually my instructions. Possibly that was done

through Mac Bundy, though no great change had been involved. I set off on my travels.

Looking back on it, and at the time, I say in all modesty that I think the round of visits, discussions, negotiations I had were extremely successful. Certainly they exceeded my expectations. I secured an assurance from Couve de Murville that, whereas France was not interested in joining the MLF, France would not, "blockade" the project. The meeting I had with Fanfani and his ministers in Rome I thought was very successful. From the final meeting emerged a communique in which the Italian government gave

strong support to the MLF. From there I moved on to Brussels and had a most interesting lunch with Spaak. The only others present were Tom Finletter, Ambassador Doug MacArthur, Baron Rothschild, chef de cabinet, and Andre de Staerke, a close friend of Henry Spaak and the Belgian Permanent Representative to the NATO Council. Spaak gave me his personal assurances of his devotion to the MLF and acceptance of it as the best possible answer to a very difficult and urgent problem, but cited the great difficulties within the Cabinet and his doubts as to whether Belgium could give public support or any assurance of participation in it in the immediate future. But he certainly

held out quite promising hopes of being able to win over objectors within the Cabinet to his point of view within a matter of weeks or months. Then I went on to Bonn and had a most successful series of meetings there, including a long session alone with Chancellor Adenauer, who, of course, I knew well, and with van Hassel, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Finance. The Foreign Minister was ill at the time and Dr. Carstens, the Minister of State in the Foreign Office, held up their end. I talked to the military as well. I spent, I suppose, three days in detailed discussions and came away with a communique in which the Bonn government gave full support to the MLF.

I went on to London. Somewhat to my surprise, and certainly contrary to David Bruce's expectations, we encountered at our very first meeting, which was chaired by Lord Home, the Foreign Secretary, a rather coolish reaction. There seemed to me -- and I'm sure at the time it seemed to the President and the Secretary -- to be close to a repudiation of what we interpreted as being a British commitment with respect to the MLF as imbedded in the Nassau Agreement. In fact, Alec Home rather took me off my feet in his opening remarks at the meeting -- after words of personal greeting, he said: "Livie, you know, Her Majesty's government is

not necessarily, in principle, opposed to the MLF, providing, of course, that it is proved to be feasible." This was something short of total enthusiasm. It was quite clear that we had strong opponents to the concept, notably, I think, Peter Thorneycroft, Minister of Defense, and, even more notably, Earl Mountbatten, Chairman of their Chiefs of Staff. However, we made good progress, particularly after David Bruce and I saw Harold Macmillan alone with Alec Home on the first evening we were there. I reminded him of the Nassau Agreement, of the inseparability of the proposals contained in it, the elements in the Agreement. The

next day at the next meeting the following morning, again chaired by Lord Home, he and his associates were markedly forthcoming. When we finished, either that evening or the next noon (the next noon I think it was), we had an agreed communique in which the British gave something quite close to unqualified support with reservations, however, as to the financial problems that were entailed in British participation. On this point, I think we relieved them by indicating that contributions could be made in kind, and that we would understand if Britain took a share of the total cost of the MLF, very substantially below the

United States and Germany and appreciably below that of Italy. I didn't feel that this was a real obstacle. I stopped then, briefly in Paris and then returned. . .

MR. CLAXTON: Let me interrupt a moment. At what time was this, approximately? Was this in February, March, April?

MR. MERCHANT: This was early March. I returned really elated, as did my associates on the team that accompanied me, with the reception we had received and our ability (we were satisfied) to communicate to not just the ministers we talked to but the naval people, the top civil servants, and the key technicians -- the knowledge we were able to communicate concerning the MLF, and

the impression that the thoroughness of our staff work quite obviously made on them.

I reported all this to the President at one of these large meetings with the attendance that had become usual on the discussion of this topic. Having been forewarned by the Secretary that the President had some question in his mind, I was satisfied, and I so informed the Secretary and the President that I thought we had a sufficiently solid measure of support, primarily from the Germans but also from the Italians and very probably from the British, to enable us to move ahead very rapidly, building on what we had achieved

up to that point. I pointed out, also, that we had an assurance that the French would not actively oppose this, though there was already some evidence that, in subterranean fashion, they were contributing to antagonistic propaganda on the subject. In any event, I felt that we were making rapid progress and that we had achieved a momentum which we could't afford to lose. I was very well aware -- as certainly everyone was -- of the fact that the concept we had proposed to our allies would require a change, in one legislative form or another, of the Atomic Energy Act and that there would unquestionably be sceptics and opponents on the Hill. I urged, from that point on, that we embark on an active process of consultation with

the key leaders in both Houses, both parties, and the key congressional committees with the President himself kicking off the project as one of his priority items, and to do this at a joint leadership meeting where he could convey personally to the key people on the Hill his own involvement in and enthusiasm for the concept.

At our very first meeting reporting to the President, I was frankly taken aback by the cautiousness of the President. I don't know what accounted for it, but his reaction seemed to me out of tune with not just my own reaction to my talks but what our Ambassadors in Bonn and Brussels and London and Rome had been reporting during, and subsequent to, my visits there. In any event,

he said he was not prepared to go to the Congress, and that he didn't want anyone to talk to the key people on the Hill -- that he wanted to be absolutely certain that, first of all, the Germans were solidly lined up. I said, as I recall, something to the effect that I couldn't imagine a more solid assurance than had been given me orally by the Chancellor and confirmed in the language of the communique. Nevertheless, he said "No," that he wasn't prepared to consider sponsoring this before the leadership of Congress without having the German Chancellor very firmly tied down. Out of that and one or two (I think at least one other) subsequent meetings on the subject with the President evolved the plan

to have [William R.] Bill Tyler, who was going to be in Europe on another matter, hand-carry a personal letter from the President to Adenauer, who was vacationing on Lake Como at the time, asking his forthright and explicit assurance that Germany was prepared to go into the MLF and support it with our other allies, and commit themselves to it. This letter was prepared. The President signed it. Bill Tyler carried it over. The President received from the Chancellor a letter as explicit, I think, as one could have asked for.

Meanwhile, there had been indications from other capitals of our NATO allies that they wanted to have the opportunity to hear about the MLF and our concept. So I started off on a third trip

SECRET

to Europe to cover the three capitals which explicitly had invited me. I went with a smaller team this time and went first to London and saw the British again . . . . I didn't see the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister, but I saw some of the key civil servants who were working on it for the British government. I then went on to Athens and had an enthusiastic reception for the project from the government of Constantine Karamanlis. Then I went on the Ankara where the Prime Minister, Ismet Inonu, and his ministers and Chief of Staff were enthusiastic over joining the MLF and regarded, in effect, Turkish participation in this as being

compensation for the withdrawal of our missiles a few months earlier, which they had hated to see go. Both Greece and Turkey pointed out that their financial contribution would, unhappily, be minimal, but that they could contribute manpower and, maybe, facilities. In any event, they were anxious to participate. From there. . . . I'm sorry; I skipped one stage. From London I went to The Hague and saw my old friend [J.M.A.H.] Luns, the Foreign Minister. I spent a day with him and his chief associates. He had a story to tell very much like what Spaak had told me a month earlier in Brussels. That was that he thought the concept

was excellent, that the problem was real, and that no one had come up with a better answer, but that there were budgetary difficulties and there would be problems within the Cabinet and possibly objections from some of the military. He could give no assurance that the Netherlands would go in. He did indicate, however, what I felt was a truism, really, that if the project were seriously and definitively embarked upon and had as original participants the United States, Germany, Italy, and Great Britain, then the Netherlands would be certain, as I felt also the Belgians would. And, needless to say, the Greeks and the Turks.

I felt very strongly in this whole period of that late spring that there were two keys to the MLF and success with respect to it. One was the adoption by the President of a posture of active advocacy, particularly with the Senate and the House. The other was moving ahead very rapidly so as to take advantage of the momentum that seemed to have been worked up and not spin it out into a time scale where the British would be approaching their elections and the government less willing to act. Similarly, Italian elections were approaching and again the government would be moving into a period where it couldn't take difficult positions.

I thought time was the key; and strike while the iron was hot. I returned from that trip, reported to the Secretary and to the President, urged again that. ...

MR. CLAXTON: This would have been when?

MR. MERCHANT: This would have been around the middle or latter part of April, I guess. I could not get the President to agree to talk to the leaders on the Hill, and he was very skittish over any of us individually talking to key people on the Hill. I did subsequently get authority to go up and talk to a few of them on the understanding that I was doing it confidentially and informally. I talked to [J.W.] Bill Fullbright, Senator [Bourke B.]

Hickenlooper, one or two others. It was the belief of the White House, and I believe of the President, that I should stall making a return appearance before the Joint Atomic Energy Committee, which I'd had a rough session with just before I'd left on my initial swing around the circuit.

The matter then settled into a rather dragged out process with technical studies and a working group composed of the Permanent Representatives of the interested countries in Paris, meeting in the NATO building but not under the aegis of the NATO Council. It dragged on until the Italian elections and the imminence of the

British elections had guaranteed that those two countries' governments were paralyzed. I felt at the time and I still believe that if the President had moved more vigorously in earlyish and middle spring of 1963, we could have had a signed agreement on the MLF by mid-summer.

MR. CLAXTON: You were just beginning to say that if the President had acted with vigor and determination during the spring of 1963 you think that there might have been another outcome -- before the Italian and British elections made it impossible for those countries to move.

MR. MERCHANT: Right. I can't even speculate . . . Well, I can speculate, but I can't,

obviously, explain the reasoning behind the President's caution. I've no doubt that there were other compelling elements in the situation which led him to be unwilling at that particular time to commit himself publicly to the Congress on what I think was certain, to an extent anyway, bound to be a controversial issue; one on which there would be a good deal of blood on the floor before the Atomic Energy Act had been amended as necessary and put through the Senate. Only the President can reach judgments of that sort in the field of total policy because it's on him, and him alone, that the various forces and counter forces converge. So I don't criticize

the President; I'm not in a position to, even though I do think there might have a different and, from my point of view, happier outcome had he been prepared to push ahead more vigorously at that time. But I don't criticize him because I've no basis for knowing other considerations of peak import which undoubtedly centered into his decision to play this one cautiously at that time.

MR. CLAXTON: He had an entire legislative program involving many other subjects and perhaps he decided that this was one more item than the traffic could bear at that particular time.

a submarine fleet, which had been held open at least as a possibility in the early part of the discussion. Do you recall what part the President had in the final decision to go to surface vessels, finally, rather than leaving open the possibility of submarines?

MR. MERCHANT: I think he had really the decisive, determining role in that decision. I'm not sure that I know all of the reasons that led him to the conclusion. Incidentally, when I first was brought into this role in January of '63, the assumption on which the inter-departmental committee was operating was that the mode would be submarine rather than surface. I was dead opposed

to this from the outset for a variety of reasons -- some of them going back to 1959-60. I remember very clearly at one time I went to see Dean Rusk in those very early days before my instructions were approaching final form to present to the President. I said I wanted to be satisfied that the surface mode was not excluded as a possibility, that I felt that it had very real advantages in some very important respects. I remember Dean saying, "No," he thought that could be kept open, but he thought that I'd have to accept at least some submarines. The subsequent decision, of course -- I think it was the right one -- was at least for any first tranche in an

MLF fleet to concentrate on surface vessels and not include nuclear submarines. I think this was right. I suspect the force, or the influence, which led to the shift and most influenced the President came either from the AEC or Admiral [H.G.] Rickover. It may have come also from the Navy though McNamara originally had been in favor of the submarine mode.

MR. CLAXTON: There is a story which goes the rounds, I've never known how true, that Admiral Rickover called personally on the President, at his own request, and protested vigorously against the possibility of having foreigners in submarines which, for this purpose, would

almost certainly have had to have been nuclear-propelled. His objection, as I understood it, was not so much to the use of submarines or the Polaris weapon in submarines, but to the nuclear propulsion in the submarines.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes, his opposition was very clear and, I think in some respects, well grounded. There were other factors against the submarine, at least in the time period we were discussing then. I heard this same story. To the best of my recollection, the President never explained, or exposed, the reasons for approving a surface vessel and not a submarine, but, if I had to guess, I'd be pretty well satisfied it was Rickover.

MR. CLAXTON: Your discussion of recollections so far bring us up approximately to the time of the President's trip to Europe, during which there were at least three occasions on which he discussed the MLF either slightly or in detail. One of those was at the speech in Frankfurt where he referred to the possibility of an MLF in favorable terms and, in very carefully phrased terms, to the possibility of increasing European control. Do you recall the background, or was there a background, in which you participated in the President's particularly important statement in Frankfurt?

MR. MERCHANT: I think -- I can't give any sequential recollection -- there

was the increasing discussion among the interested top officials in Defense, the White House, the State Department, AEC, on this question of control, and, I think, increasing doubts as to the wisdom in being too forthcoming in holding out the promise, or the likelihood, of the willingness to have the United States abandon its veto or shift over responsibility and control of the fleet to the other allies at some time in the future. This was one thing I myself had very strong views on. The draft, as it went over to the President of my instructions back to February, contained one paragraph which, in effect, was quite forthcoming on

this, saying: "You are authorized to [and I'm paraphrasing it now, but the general sense of it was. . .] extend the very real possibility that, with the passage of time and further developments of unity within the alliance and Europe, the control of the fleet could pass to the European partners." I asked the President to strike that from my instructions. I had two reasons for doing so. One was that I didn't think the United States should, under any circumstances I could foresee, extend any real hope that we would abandon our veto. Secondly, I thought that to extend such a hope, regardless of the merits of the matter, would

not really be, in my judgment, to act in good faith with our allies because I thought that this would be an undertaking which in the crunch we could not deliver. I thought that, if the time came when the Europeans asked us out of the MLF, the circumstances, by definition, would be such that the Congress and anyone else in this country looking at it open-mindedly would be willing to step aside and leave our missiles and warheads in the hands of Europeans who were splitting from us to the extent of no longer wanting us as a partner in a great joint venture. So I thought it was misleading and dangerous and unwise on that practical

ground as well as on grounds of my objection to contemplating giving up the veto. The Secretary of State felt very strongly on this subject, too. He said he couldn't foresee any circumstances under which we could or should give up the veto. Among those enthusiastically and effectively working for the MLF, there were those who believed that it would only solve the political problem if we could extend this hope. I was not enthusiastically a member of that school.

In any event, from early June on my connection with the MLF became attenuated. I felt, as a matter of fact, by early June

that I'd fulfilled my engagement to carry the process through the stage in which I participated. This was, in effect, getting my instructions, getting agreement in the government on the details of the concept, and then giving a full expose of it to our interested partners and obtaining from them such expressions of commitment as they were prepared to give. I did have unavoidable other commitments which I had taken on before I was asked to do this job. So I was away all summer, and in the fall every few weeks I would go to the Secretary and to Mac Bundy and ask that I be relieved. I was able to give only on the average, I suppose, of one, or at

the most two days a week to it. Meanwhile, in the summer the scene of greatest activity had shifted to Paris, and Tom Finletter was doing a highly competent and professional negotiating job there.

MR. CLAXTON: In late August or early September.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. Finally, I was able to make my break on the first of March, 1964.

MR. CLAXTON: Over a year later.

MR. MERCHANT: Over a year after my sixty-day term finished.

MR. CLAXTON: Was it during the period when you were still active -- I believe it was, as I recall -- that the question arose of a possible demonstration ship -- an idea which originated with the President

himself. Do you recall that episode and any conversations with the President? I think that was perhaps in June or July that this took place; you were already only occasionally participating.

MR. MERCHANT: That's right. I was not present when it came up. I have a vague recollection that at one of my last meetings with the President he expressed an interest in it. I'm not sure of that. In any event, this was something which he felt very close to his heart, pushed very hard, and put through. I think this probably has been a very good thing. From all I've heard, it's been very successful. I must say, my instinct at the

time, and I expressed it, was that it was a mistake because I was so conscious of the pressure of the Italian and British elections working against us that anything which gave an excuse to delay hard decisions by those governments would guarantee that none would be taken for some months. I thought that this demonstration ship could be much too easily interpreted as an experiment to find out whether or not a mixed crew could work and that, therefore, no one in his right mind would want to reach a decision on the MLF until the evidence was in a year or so later.

MR. CLAXTON: This is why it was carefully

called a demonstration, not an experiment.

MR. MERCHANT: That's right. But the President, by all reports, was personally deeply interested in this, and it moved ahead with great dispatch, very competently handled by the Navy.

MR. CLAXTON: One final question then. At the time that you relinquished this assignment did you meet with the President or have any final communication with him as you signed off?

MR. MERCHANT: I don't think I met with him during the fall or winter. I got, out of the blue, a very nice note from him in the late fall, saying that he appreciated the

personal sacrifices I was accepting in continuing to devote at least some of my time on the MLF and was very grateful. One of those sacrifices was that the last two or three months I was working for nothing in that I couldn't take my consultant's fee without jeopardizing my pension.

MR. CLAXTON: Is that right?

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. So I could no longer claim consultant's fees on a per diem basis.

MR. CLAXTON: It was also interfering with your private employment as well, I recall.

MR. MERCHANT: That's right. Then, when I had worked out with Dean Rusk and Mac Bundy my departure date and the

determination of my successor, who was the man I recommended, Jerry Smith, I wrote the President and thanked him for having given me the opportunity to serve and told him how much I appreciated the opportunity and the association, and, needless to say, was available for odd jobs in the future. I got back a very warm and friendly letter of thanks from him.

MR. CLAXTON: Well, I think that's a good point on which to end, then, the final sign-off in formal terms. Thank you.

MR. MERCHANT: I can tell you, if you want, one amusing little incident. It's just that I'm reminded of it. It's an interesting personal sidelight

on how the President operated personally. In the summer of '62, when I was in the State Department -- just come in for a two or three weeks' assignment as a consultant on the Foreign Service Academy proposal -- I was given an office and a secretary who had never seen me before, a very nice girl. The second morning I was in my office, at nine o'clock the phone rang. She was sitting in the outer office with the door open, and I heard her say, "Yes, he's here. Just a minute." She buzzed me, and I picked it up. Since she didn't announce who it was -- hadn't inquired -- I assumed that she had recognized my wife's voice,

and that it was my wife calling. This strange voice came on and said, "Good morning, Ambassador, how are you?" I said, "I'm fine, but who the hell are you?" The voice said, "This is the President." [Laughter] I said, "I beg your pardon, sir." He said, "No, not a bit." But he said. . .

MR. CLAXTON: "This always happens."

MR. MERCHANT: He said, "Max Taylor has just told me that you've definitively turned down this job that I was anxious to have you take, and I just wanted to ask you if you wouldn't reconsider." The job, incidentally, was pressed on me by Max Taylor and [U.] Alexis Johnson of taking over on a part-time basis in the

White House the chairmanship of the Counter-Insurgency Committee which Max Taylor had chaired while he was Military Adviser to the President in the White House. When Max was named Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff -- Joint Chiefs of Staff -- I was recommended, apparently, to succeed him as chairman. Max came and talked to me at length, and I talked to Alex Johnson at length and, I think, the Secretary. All of them were insistent that this was something I could do on the basis of one day a week. I felt very strongly that that sort of job could not be done on a part time basis by someone who was not

actively in the policy stream and cut into the daily cable traffic and who lacked an established position in the government hierarchy. It was a high-ranking committee. The Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff sat on it; Bobby Kennedy sat on it; and under the President's prodding and interest it was a very active, high level, important committee. So, when the President urged me to reconsider, I said, "Naturally, I have no choice, sir. I will reconsider, though I turned it down definitively yesterday in my last talk with Max Taylor. My reasons, I think, are good. I think you should consider them, Mr. President, because you're

interested in having that job effectively done. First of all, I don't think it can be done properly on a one day a week basis. Secondly, I don't think it can be done by someone who hasn't got a title and a position in the hierarchy." He said, "Livie, you could do it. I'd name you Special Assistant to me; you'd have my blank check of support; and you've got the personal prestige. There's no question about your being able to do it. I'm sure it could be done. Max Taylor assures me that you could do it without devoting more than one day a week to it, and this would enable you to meet your other outside obligations

and commitments." And I said, "Well, I'll reconsider the whole thing, Mr. President, and I'm greatly complimented that you want me to do it. I'll let you know within forty-eight hours." He said, "I appreciate that," and hung up. I then went out to my new secretary, and I said, "Let this be a lesson to you. Always find out who's calling your boss and let your boss know who's calling." And she said, "Yes, sir." I said, "Do you know who that was you put through without any warning?" She said, "No." I said, "That was President Kennedy," and she nearly fell off her chair. [Laughter]

MR. CLAXTON: To continue that, because that's an important aspect of the President's interest in participation in the things he was doing. What did you. . . . Did you call back; did you write back; did you reconsider; what were your conclusions. . . .

MR. MERCHANT: I wrote him. I reconsidered and I wrote him a fairly long letter in which I elaborated my original reasoning which, after reconsideration, I remained of the opinion to be sound. I wrote him a regretful nonacceptance. But he was, particularly in the early days of his Administration, very prone to pick up the phone and put the call through to whomever was the

person he felt most directly concerned in some problem which had engaged his interest.

MR. CLAXTON: Yes, that's right. He felt that they all worked for the President, and that the President should talk to the people directly. It was a fascinating relationship.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes. A man of extraordinary scope and energy and judgment and charm...an unusual man.

MR. CLAXTON: And attention to detail which remained significant to the end.

MR. MERCHANT: Yes.

MR. CLAXTON: Well, I thank you again. Anything further strike your mind that should be recorded for posterity?

MR. MERCHANT: I can't think of anything else, Phil.

MR. CLAXTON: All right, we'll put thirty on this.