

**Elvis J. Stahr Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 8/18/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Elvis J. Stahr

**Interviewer:** Robert H. Farrell

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**Biographical Note**

Elvis J. Stahr (1916 - 1998) served as the Secretary of the Army from 1961 to 1962. This interview focuses on Stahr's responsibilities as the Secretary of the Army, the restructuring of the Army under John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s administration, and the Army's role in U.S. diplomatic relations during the Cold War, among other issues.

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Elvis J. Stahr—JFK #1  
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Stahr's first introduction to John F. Kennedy (JFK)
2	Stahr's appointment as Secretary of the Army
5	Cold War tensions between the US and Soviet Union
9	Robert McNamara's leadership qualities
17	JFK's emphasis on youth in his administration
22	On the Bay of Pigs crisis
27	Tensions in Laos and question of US involvement
29	Growing concern over situation in Vietnam
33	Lack of support given to the Army under Eisenhower
36	JFK's visit to troops at Fort Bragg
44	JFK's interest in the education of the armed forces
48	Chiang Kai-Shek's proposal for an alliance
60	JFK's farewell gift to Stahr
61	Role of the Secretary of the Army
62	Stahr on the personal and leadership qualities of JFK
68	JFK's controversial appointment of General Van Fleet
85	JFK's interest in civil defense program
95	Role of the National Guard and the Reserve
98	Organization and Operations of the Army Secretariat
105	Four major reorganizations of the Army under the Kennedy administration
114	Drastic increase in size of the Army
127	Anxious insecurity of West Germany in its relations with U.S.
129	Construction of the Berlin Wall
Addendum I	Stahr's letter of resignation to JFK
Addendum II	JFK's response accepting Stahr's resignation

Oral History Interview

with

ELVIS J. STAHR

August 18, 1964

By Robert H. Farrell

For the John F. Kennedy Library

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, I have some questions here and we might start with your first meeting with the President of the United States, either before or after you became Secretary of the Army.

STAHR: This is a very interesting thing to me because I first met him -- I first met President Kennedy -- about an hour after he was inaugurated as President of the United States, on the reviewing stand out in front of the White House, where a group of some fifty to a hundred of us were with him, shivering and watching the Inaugural parade go by on Pennsylvania Avenue. I had been designated Secretary of the Army less than a week before and I wasn't to be sworn in for another day or two, the Senate being a bit behind on its confirmations, but I had attended the Inauguration and had sat (with the Secretaries-Designate of the Navy and Air Force and our wives) a few rows behind the podium on the Capitol steps, and had seen the President then, curiously enough for the first time in my life, taking the oath and making that great Inaugural address. I was introduced to him on the reviewing stand, oddly enough, by another man I had never met before that day, a man by the name of Lyndon B. Johnson, and I was introduced to the new Vice President by the new Military Assistant to the President, General C. V. Clifton, who had been designated by the Army just a few days before, with my approval, to serve as Military Assistant -- and he is still there, though serving President Johnson now, of course.

FERRELL: So what did you say to the President on that first occasion?

STAHR: I don't keep a diary, I'm sorry to say. But I'm sure I said something like:  
"How do you do; I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. President,

[-1-]

and that was a great speech you just made." And he astonished me by knowing instantly who I was and going beyond that to tell me with apparent sincerity that he deeply appreciated my willingness to serve in his Administration, especially on such very short notice and at some financial sacrifice, and inconvenience to my family, and what not. He knew about all this of course from having talked with Bob McNamara who had to get the President's permission to have me as the Secretary of the Army. That's a story also, by the way, which sheds some interesting light on President Kennedy's approach to the presidency.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, let's turn to that subject then, the manner in which you were appointed Secretary of the Army.

STAHR: I received a telephone call a little before the middle of January, 1961, not very long before January 20. As I remember, it was around the eighth or tenth of January. I happened to be out of town and they ran me down from my office (I was in Pittsburgh) and told me a Mr. McNamara was calling from Washington, and had asked that I return the call at my convenience.

FERRELL: Did you know who he was?

STAHR: I got to thinking that I don't know anyone by the name of Mr. McNamara in Washington, but then I suddenly realized I had noticed in the paper not too long before that the President of the Ford Motor Company had been named Secretary of Defense in the new Cabinet, so I had a hunch that was who it was. The number perhaps should have tipped me, it was an Oxford number, and yet I'm not sure they had that Oxford exchange during my previous days at the Pentagon, ten years earlier. I really wasn't sure who it was, but I

[-2-]

thought I'd be polite and return the call and take a chance.

FERRELL: Did you get him right off?

STAHR: I did, and he told me who he was and asked me if it would be convenient for me to come to Washington sometime in the next few days -- he'd like very much to discuss something with me. Well, I said, it just happens by sheer coincidence that the only day this week that I could possibly consider such a thing is

tomorrow. He said that's fine. I said all right, I'm in Pittsburgh, I can fly easily from here -- I can be in your office tomorrow morning, is ten o'clock convenient? He said that's fine -- I'll see you then.

FERRELL: Did you have any premonition that he was going to offer you the Secretaryship of the Army or did you think that perhaps it was an Assistant Secretaryship hidden perhaps somewhere in the Defense Department.

STAHR: That night when I got to Washington I stayed with some friends and was sitting talking to them about this mysterious appointment the next morning. We were speculating about it and suddenly -- I then began to have a premonition that maybe he wanted me to do something. Up to then I hadn't had too much time to think about it, but I had thought he might want to ask me about somebody else he was considering for something.

FERRELL: You thought this was just some advice.

STAHR: Yes, I thought that was the most likely thing because I knew a number of people who had served in the Pentagon before in Democratic Administrations, and I knew a few, not very many, but a few military leaders who hadn't retired, and I also thought possibly he was going to set up an advisory board or a series of panels -- you know, people in academic life are always being asked to serve on panels or advisory boards. It wasn't until that

[ -3- ]

night that the thought hit me that maybe he wanted me to be an Assistant Secretary of the Army. Of course, I couldn't possibly consider it, but I went over there the next morning.

FERRELL: What did he say to you then? Was it small conversation?

STAHR: Yes, we chatted -- it was the longest conversation I guess I ever had with him.

FERRELL: That's interesting.

STAHR: We talked for fifty minutes, I'd just say, just the two of us.

FERRELL: You'd never met him before.

STAHR: I'd never met him -- I'd never seen him -- I'd only heard of him as everyone else had, as the bright young President of Ford and that he'd been selected to head this enormous enterprise.

FERRELL: Let's go into this conversation you had with Mr. McNamara.



STAHR: Well, I can remember the main points of it vividly, after these more than three years. After we got acquainted a little -- we didn't have a great deal in the way of common background to get acquainted -- it seems to me he told me he had once been a candidate for a Rhodes Scholarship but hadn't quite made it. He knew I was a Rhodes Scholar and thought that might establish some sort of ground, but you know, I'm not even sure about that because I have several very good friends who were unsuccessful Rhodes Scholar candidates. But in any event, as soon as we began to get serious, which was pretty fast, because you know Mr. McNamara doesn't waste an awful lot of time on chit-chat, particularly during working hours -- he just tried to make me feel at ease, but it was pretty obvious that he was measuring me and I must say I was beginning to think.

FERRELL: How did you feel about the drift of this conversation as it

[-4-]

became personal?

STAHR: He didn't waste too much time in getting around to the personal point -- I soon began to feel a little tense, though not nervous, but realized this was a serious conversation about me and not just asking me about various people.

FERRELL: Did he mention something about the Kennedy technique of interviewing when he talked to you?

STAHR: I'm coming to that. His first point was -- and of course I'm boiling everything down -- his first point was that, although there was no official declaration of war, in fact this nation was at war, that the struggle between the forces of freedom and anti-freedom was a deadly serious one and the stakes were enormous, that the power in the hands of the two nations who led these two blocs -- one of free nations, and one what you might loosely call slave nations -- that each of these leaders had the power to create unbelievable destruction. He said: "I know you are aware of all this; I just wanted to give you my own thinking about it, the importance of the Defense Department of the United States." I agreed with him that the world was in bad shape and that this was a deep and serious struggle which would probably go on throughout our time and that our own military strength was the only thing that had prevented us and many others from having been taken over, so to speak, long since. Right about that point, as I remember, he said: "Well, Mr. Stahr, the reason I asked you to come here is because I wanted to ask if you are willing to be considered as Secretary of the Army in this Administration."

FERRELL: What did you say then?

STAHR: I suppose I gulped, but not obviously, I hope. I -- I don't

[-5-]

remember exactly what I said, but something like, "Mr. McNamara, if you had asked me to consider any other position in the Government, I couldn't possibly do it right now. But that's the one position I guess I would have to at least -- I'd have to think about it for a few minutes at least." I said it was because I had spent four years in the Infantry in the Army during World War II -- and worked for Frank Pace during the Korean War -- I was an Army man (and still am).

FERRELL: In McNamara's way, did he then tell you to think about it for a while and was that the end of the interview?

STAHR: Then he said, "In order to understand what I'm saying to you, and to give you a little more to go in considering this, I should tell you of my own understanding with the President." After the election, sometime around the end of November, 1960, or the beginning of December the President-elect had called McNamara (they got in touch somehow anyway) and a conversation had been arranged, I don't remember now where. In any event the President-elect had talked to Bob McNamara and asked him to be his Secretary of Defense. They had never met, and McNamara said there certainly was nothing political about it, because he was a Republican though he did vote for Mr. Kennedy, but "He didn't know that; I didn't tell him then and I'm not sure he knows even now." He said that "What President-elect Kennedy said to me was that he was looking for first-rate people and that he had reason to believe I was such a person and that there was nothing political about it and there wasn't going to be anything political about it, about the appointments in that administration, in three departments." And, more or less quoting Kennedy to McNamara, "There are many important positions in government, Mr. McNamara, many agencies and departments, etc. -- there are

[-6-]

many jobs to be filled -- and my campaign obligations are very heavy -- many, many people have helped to get me elected President and I'm going to do my best to repay those obligations -- but I can do that, and get fine people, and still preserve one thing, and that is the principle that in three departments, State, Defense, and Treasury, appointments are going to be made on merit alone -- I'm going to get the best Americans I can find for these key positions, regardless of party, regardless of politics, regardless of anything except ability to serve the country." Bob said to me: "Of course you don't make a bargain with a President, but at least I felt reasonably free to inquire about the terms and conditions of my servitude, so I said, 'Senator, would I have freedom to select the people that I want to work with me?'" As a matter of fact, I guess McNamara had gotten that question in early and it was in response that Kennedy had said in these three departments we're going to have first-rate people. At some point Kennedy said: "If you will take the Defense Secretaryship..." I'm not sure he said outright he'd give a free hand to pick all people but he gave Mr. McNamara to understand that that's what he meant and Bob acted on that basis and every time a minor

crisis would arise in the appointments in the Department of Defense, if there was someone he didn't want, the President wouldn't make him take that person. The White House gang, so to speak, did make a number of suggestions, and some were very good -- but they learned very early not to send a second-rater over to the Pentagon. When they sent a first-rater and if there was no one better or there wasn't someone another person would prefer, or someone McNamara would prefer, he'd be accepted and appointed. The curious thing is that most of the people who want government jobs are not the people you want.

[ -7- ]

FERRELL: How do you think the President and Mr. McNamara got your name -- do you have any idea?

STAHR: I still don't know for sure where they first got it. I have a hunch, however, but I don't think I ever asked -- I have a hunch that either Earl Johnson or Frank Pace gave them my name somewhere along the line because the President or McNamara or both had asked them for suggestions of people for the Defense Department, because Johnson and Pace both worked there a long time -- they were both at that point still heavily involved in General Dynamics and there had been some talk about Frank Pace possibly being Secretary of Defense, but it was just impossible to appoint one of the largest defense contractors as Secretary of Defense.

FERRELL: You mean this is something Chancellor Litchfield didn't have anything to do with? How did he feel about that?

STAHR: Nothing at all, so far as I know... Well, you can see McNamara just turned the conversation right around and said, "I'm going to make the same sort of statement to you that the President-elect made to me. That is, that if I ask you -- if the President asks you, excuse me, to take this position, and I want you to know very frankly we're considering two or three other people and all I wanted to know this morning is whether you are willing to consider if you are asked. I'll have to report to the President on our conversation. Bob said, "We're still checking you out and we're still checking one or two other people" -- he was perfectly candid about it, and he should have been; I would have thought he was nuts if he'd just called me in out of the blue and said: "Hey boy, I want you to be Secretary of the Army." Probably I wouldn't have taken the job -- I'd be afraid to work with anyone that impulsive.

[ -8- ]

FERRELL: How long after this was it, then, that you got presumably another call from Mr. McNamara?

STAHR: We kept talking a little longer that morning and at the end he said, "I really want you to think very seriously about this," and I could tell that he was

satisfied with me as a person at first meeting and that whatever sizing up he expected to do then had gone all right. I made it clear that I wasn't looking for a job -- in fact, I didn't see how in the world I could do it -- but we left it that I would think about it and I said, "I'll think about it some, but I'm not going to think about it hard until you tell me you really want me to," and I said, "If the President wants me to do this, you let me know; I've never had trouble making up my mind as far as taking a lot of time goes -- I'll give you an answer in twenty-four hours from that time, whenever it is; you take your time, if I don't hear from you again it's all right, in fact I sort of hope I won't." We left it that way. I'm trying to think how long it took this fellow to move after the interview. I was in Pittsburgh Monday, that means I was in his office on Tuesday -- he said he would call me Thursday in any event, either to ask me to think about it some more, to ask me to take the job, or to tell me that they had decided on someone else, but he would certainly let me know by Thursday. I said O.K., then I should be able to let him know by Friday.

FERRELL: It was a very honest way in which he was dealing with you, not just to let you dangle for weeks on end; he'd tell you even if he chose someone else.

STAHR: That's right -- I appreciated it. That's one of his fine qualities I think, he neither tries to sugarcoat nor to insult -- he's candid, and you appreciate that. The curious thing is, though, he called me Wednesday

[-9-]

about or before noon and he said, "I've just come from the White House and the President would like you to be his Secretary of the Army." "Well," I said, "now I really will start thinking about it." Instead of two days, you see, it was one before they finished their checking-out to make their decision. So I said O.K., I promised I'd give you an answer in twenty-four hours and I will. He gave me a little more sales talk, not much. I then went home and talked to my wife and called him back the next day and said I didn't see how I could do it but I would.

FERRELL: That's a fascinating method which you remarked approximated the same sort of method Mr. Kennedy used with him. Did he know your politics -- did this enter the questions?

STAHR: This was another thing -- I'm glad you asked me that -- this had been another thing in that interview. He said, "I don't know your politics -- I assume you're a Democrat, but the thing I want to make very clear is that that doesn't make any difference, one way or the other. The President told me he didn't care about my politics -- I'm telling you I don't care about yours, so let's get rid of that one quickly."

FERRELL: One other question about your appointment -- do you think your academic background, your service at Kentucky and Pittsburgh and West Virginia

entered this calculation of McNamara's or did he simply take all of this on your experience in the Defense Department?

STAHR: Now you remind me of yet another part of the interview. He said, "You might be interested in knowing how I'm trying to go about filling these positions: Secretary of the Army, Navy, Air Force." He said, "There are three desirable qualities that I'm looking for and if I find all three in one man it makes it easy, but the first one is the most important. The first

[-10-]

one is real intellectual capacity and the willingness to work. The second is demonstrated administrative ability -- I've got to have someone who has run a large and complex organization and understands problems of organization, delegation of authority, staff work and all the rest. The third is, and this is not essential but would be very nice to have, experience in the government. It doesn't require a long time to find out how things work around here, but, particularly with experience in the Defense Department, we'd be that much farther along. It's very clear you have the second two -- you've been in the Pentagon before; and you've been in the Pentagon before; and you've been a university president and in other administrative posts in universities -- you've had administrative experience and as far as I've been able to determine it's been successful." Then he said, "You couldn't have the record you have as a Rhodes Scholar, Phi Beta Kappa, etc., if you didn't have some intellectual capacity." I said, "That's the one I would question the most -- I have a reasonably good mind but I'm not the quiz-kid type" -- I don't believe I said literally that, but I was thinking it. I phrased it in some way, though, to let him know that I wasn't (and I'm not) a brilliant person who can assimilate great masses of information, ideas, opinions, and whatnot -- run them through a machine and come out instantly with the right answer. This is something Bob McNamara does pretty well, incidentally.

FERRELL: One other question regarding your appointment. Mr. McNamara of course is not himself the usual sort of businessman but he had business experience. Did he look at that aspect of your record, that is, the lack of it, or didn't that have anything to do with it?

STAHR: As far as I know, it had nothing whatever to do with it. He was aware, I think, as I had been ever since my days with Ed Litchfield, that

[-11-]

the administration of universities, the administration of government agencies, the administration of manufacturing corporations, the administration of railroads, armies, hospitals, etc., has much more in common than is dissimilar -- in other words, good administration is transferable; it has been proven many times, particularly by people who

have been successful as general officers in the armed forces, and have then become successful as executives of large corporations.

FERRELL: Now after this conversation with Mr. McNamara and his decision to urge your appointment, you still had not seen the President.

STAHR: That's right. I found that a little surprising -- looking back it shouldn't have been quite so surprising. At the same time it reinforced with me at least the point that the President had confidence in McNamara, and second, that he was extremely busy. And by the way, there's another thing here I should mention because it has some bearing possibly on what I may be saying a little later. I want to repeat that this was pretty late in the game -- almost all the other major government appointments had been made, in fact all the Cabinets, plus Secretaries of the Navy and Air Force and most other top officials; had been designated, including the Deputy Secretary of Defense and most of the agency heads around the government; and, I don't know what the problem was, but there'd evidently been some trouble about the Secretaryship of the Army -- there was gossip about this. The papers at one point said that the Governor of Georgia was the leading prospect, for instance, and I've heard since the names of one or two other people who would really have liked to have the job.

FERRELL: Do you think the job was offered before it came to you?

STAHR: I'm pretty sure it had not actually been offered; I think,

[-12-]

however, there'd been applicants and there'd been interplay, possibly even there'd been someone the White House boys wanted but McNamara wouldn't take, or something of that sort. I never inquired about that -- the minute I got there I got so busy and stayed so busy I never had time to look back.

FERRELL: Coming back to Mr. Kennedy again, you still hadn't met the President at this time -- it was entirely a conversation with McNamara.

STAHR: That's trigh, but of course the appointment was presidential and soon thereafter was announced by Mr. Kennedy's press secretary, from Palm Beach. This was a few days later. Let's say it was Friday, though, when somebody, I've forgotten who it was, called the President's House at West Virginia University and got my wife on the phone (I was out) and asked what party I belonged to. My wife for years had had strict instructions to say nothing whatever about this sort of thing. Moreover, there had just been some press speculation about the appointment, though Bob had told me to keep it in strictest confidence and I had -- and one of the things that must have happened was a check by Mr. Kennedy's political sides with some at least of the West Virginia delegation to Congress. With McNamara having decided he wanted me, they

naturally wanted to get all the "Brownie points" they could and thus checked; and one of those Congressmen, I'll always be convinced, though I don't know which one, but one of them must have given the tip to the editor of the Democratic paper in Morgantown -- and he's a man who just is unable to keep a confidence, especially if it's newsworthy -- and he had printed something in the paper that morning and apparently it then got on the wires -- just as speculation, you understand -- but it got on the wires and when Dorothy got this long distance call, from a name she didn't recognize, asking something to the effect he understood I had definitely accepted the Secretaryship of the Army and he'd like a little biographical background or

[-13-]

something of that sort, she was extremely noncommittal and apparently irritated this person. About five minutes later someone else phoned and said, "Mrs. Stahr, we're not playing games, what's your husband's politics?" She said, "Why, he uses his best judgment in each election and votes a secret ballot." With great restraint but probably clenched teeth, the voice said, "Mrs. Stahr, how does he register?" And she said, "Why, Democratic of course." And the phone went dead with a bang.

FERRELL: So then the President made an announcement from Palm Beach on Sunday as scheduled?

STAHR: That's right.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, this was not Andrew Hatcher who called and somewhat irritated your wife.

STAHR: No, it certainly was not the first time -- I think it was a girl, someone who just had been instructed to fill out a few blanks in the press release and had thought that everything was all set, and naturally my wife would know about it. But it was Hatcher who called back five minutes later.

FERRELL: Your wife later became a great fan of Pierre Salinger.

STAHR: She liked him as anyone would who got to know Pierre. Very shortly after our arrival in Washington -- in fact, before she herself moved there, while she was commuting from West Virginia trying to find a house for us -- General Bill Quinn (who by the way quite recently has been in the news -- he's now Commanding General of the 7th Army in Germany, and you may recall that just before the Republican Convention of 1964 Senator Goldwater became incensed because a proposed personal visit he and his wife had planned to make a General Quinn and his wife in Germany to rest up for a few days after the convention, had been somehow misinterpreted by the CBS correspondent in Europe and Goldwater

[-14-]

canceled the trip, but that's another story). This same Bill Quinn is a great fellow and was at that point the Chief of Information of the Army and as the Chief of Information he was also what you might call our principal Public Relations Officer and in that capacity wanted to be very sure to get the new Secretary of the Army well acquainted with Pierre Salinger, his own counterpart in the White House, so he had a dinner party and this was the first time that Dorothy and I had met Pierre and we were just enchanted with him.

FERRELL: After the somewhat extraordinary nature of your wife's first conversation with his office, Pierre became a great friend.

STAHR: None of us had time to see each other as much as we'd like but we were all cordial acquaintances, anyway.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you met with the President quite a few times in large groups and occasionally face to face and we have a list here of the meetings which you and Mr. Kennedy had in the year 1961 and I notice the first meeting is March 24.

STAHR: Yes, this appears to be the first formal meeting, and would have been only the second or third time I had actually been with him since January 20 which was, as I mentioned earlier, the day I met him on the reviewing stand and he was so very gracious. March 24 must have been the luncheon to which he had just five guests -- Bob McNamara; Ros Gilpatric; John Connally, Secretary of the Navy; Eugene Zuckert, Secretary of the Air Force; and me. It was the first meal I'd ever had in the White House, though I had been over some weeks earlier to the big reception when six or eight assistant secretaries of Defense were sworn in, en bloc so to speak, about the end of January after the Senate had confirmed them. I had spoken to the President there but that

[-15-]

was just a reception. Although I may then have eaten shrimp or something, my first meal at the White House was on this March 24. The President didn't seem to have any particular agenda, but, although he was an extremely pleasant man, his mind never wandered very far from the business at hand, and one of the things I remember he seemed to be trying to organize in his own mind was (now I'm trying to think for him; I'm giving the impression that I got, from the way he led the conversation, of what he was after, and it was pretty clear to me that he was trying) to shape up what were or were going to be the major issues with Defense.

One of the things he had very much on his mind then and throughout my eighteen months there was the matter of leadership in the uniformed services. He had this impression. He came to the White House with what seemed to me some mis-impressions, so did Bob McNamara, but they were the kind of misimpressions that most civilians have and therefore



it wasn't too surprising, though it was a little dismaying. Many of the impressions were sound, don't misunderstand me, and again obviously all this is my opinion, but neither of them I think appreciated the quality of the typical high-ranking military officer. They didn't have a very good grasp of the way the promotion system and the career management system of the services, and I can speak best of the Army, do bring very able people to the top. (Look at George Marshall, MacArthur, Eisenhower, Bradley, Gruenther -- a number of others -- really exceptional people.)

FERRELL: This feeling was apparent at the luncheon?

STAHR: This was apparent, because he asked rather searching questions about what we all thought of our chiefs of staff and major commanders around the world, etc. Now here all of us were still now.

[-16-]

FERRELL: These were personal questions?

STAHR: Pretty much. I'm not going to name them -- there was no necessary suspicion, but he seemed to have the feeling that one of the first things we ought to do was take a look at these major military slots, and if we didn't have an absolutely top-flight person in there, we should take him out and put in someone who was. He emphasized youth heavily -- he even put the hammer on me, shortly after this, to fix Army policy in such a way that people would become generals earlier and would retire earlier so they'd be pretty young when they were at the top, so to speak.

FERRELL: I gather from your conversations with the President that Mr. Kennedy was much concerned about the quality, perhaps the age even, of his commanders and this raised the point of the accent on youth which was no simply something talked about in the newspapers, but was a serious proposition with the President.

STAHR: It certainly struck me that way. I would sit there and reflect that both McNamara and Kennedy were younger than I, and I had always thought I was pretty young. I was amazed because not only were they young but they liked to have young people around (there were exceptions, but they *were* exceptions). Now the Army retires people younger than any other segment of our society, age 60 being the extreme limit, except in the most rare and extraordinary circumstances. Most generals retire before that, either voluntarily after thirty years service or because they are caught by a policy called 35 and 5, that is, thirty-five years service which for a West Pointer begins, you see, at age 22 or so, and thirty-five years after he finishes West Point he's still well under 60 -- thirty five years service and five years in grade, permanent grade, and you're out, unless the Secretary

[-17-]

of the Army specifically continues you, which he can, to age 60. But beyond that he can't have in the entire Army more than five people who are over 60, and he usually doesn't get close to that five.

FERRELL: Did the President understand this?

STAHR: I don't think he quite did, at first. Nowhere else do people retire on this side of 60 and yet he thought these fellows well under 60 were, speaking generally, probably too old.

FERRELL: Where did he get this idea, did he say?

STAHR: I don't know, he never articulated it to me, but you could tell he had it by the kind of people he had around him in the White House, the Irish Mafia, as everybody called them, a very attractive, bright, driving group. They had all the energy and the impatience of youth -- not necessarily the impulsiveness, but certainly the impatience -- and this was a quality that the President seemed to like very much, just the feeling when he was with somebody that they were full of ideas and trying to get things done. Those first days in the White House, you will recall, he himself was full of exuberance -- you remember all the stories about his picking up the phone and just calling some government employee or something. Of course, eventually he began to get over that, but his accent on youth was a reflection I think of his own feeling that perhaps one's best years are the thirties and the forties rather than the fifties and sixties.

FERRELL: Back to this luncheon again, you had to defend some of your commanders, or was it mostly a presidential airing of opinions?

STAHR: This wasn't an inquisition -- he asked us to size up generally, and by and large without names because he didn't know the names of most of them, and while I knew most of the names I didn't yet know many of the people

[-18-]

in far flung posts. Though I still had acquired some impressions which turned out to be fairly good, they were not nearly as good as they should have been for this serious a discussion.

FERRELL: May I ask a flippant question about the lunch -- how was the food?

STAHR: Excellent; it was really good. We ate in a small room, I've forgotten on what floor, and the food was terribly good. I've forgotten what it was, a fish I think, but I remember reporting to my wife that evening that they had a good chef at the White House. They had excellent wine, by the way, with it. There were a couple of other things that came up at this lunch. Again, as I say, he was looking for the big issues. One was the Reserve and National Guard, particularly the National Guard. At that point he didn't

seem to think that the National Guard was something that Federal money ought to be spent on, and frankly Mr. McNamara had about the same opinion. It took them a long time -- it took the Berlin crisis, I think -- to make them see that you did have to have strength in reserve and that the National Guard was not a political boondoggle. This surprised me because I knew the President's general bent toward development of a more balanced force, the ability to respond with measured force instead of massive retaliation. He and McNamara together changed the posture of the Defense establishment quite a lot in three years along that line, but at that early stage they still didn't quite see how the National Guard fit into this thing, so we talked about that a little bit, and the President was obviously aware that fooling with the National Guard was political dynamite, but he seemed inclined to think that if you're ever going to fool with it, maybe very early in the Administration might be the right time, and that's a whole story in itself, the way this thing developed (a great deal did happen later that year).

[-19-]

Anyway, I had the temerity to urge him to go slow -- to look into the facts some more -- and maybe that helped -- who can say? But another major issues was Nike Zeus, the anti-missile missile. I remember we talked about that. It was something Bob McNamara was skeptical about, I gathered, from the beginning.

FERRELL: Did the President want to make that?

STAHR: No, the President seemed to feel this was potentially a very important thing, not just politically and economically but quite possibly a major addition to our defense, but he was disturbed about the controversy. The Air Force had been trying to shoot the thing down, figuratively, and McNamara was concerned about the cost, so we kicked that one around quite a bit. At that stage the research and development were going well, but there was a major question about budget. The Army was screaming for some more money to move the thing along so they could get into production, and while that wouldn't have affected the upcoming budget very much, within a year or two it would have added some billions.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, I see that you then saw the President on April 11, 1961, the Committee on Equal Opportunity. Was this a large group of no major importance?

STAHR: This was a large group and there were some important people there -- and the committee itself was, I'd say, one of the most important committees the President set up. This was the committee headed by Lyndon Johnson, the Vice President, and composed of a number of people in the government who had much to do with labor and jobs and government contracts, either as employers or on the policy level, the Secretary of Labor for example. Arthur Goldberg in fact was a member, as I was, and I've

forgotten who all of the others were, but it was made clear ta that meeting by the President and the

[-20-]

Vice President that they meant business about the general field of civil rights and nondiscrimination in employment in particular. They were going to start out, and did, on the government contract front. There wasn't too much of a problem by then as far as concerned integration in the armed forces or in direct government employment generally. But much of the government's money is still spent through contracts rather than payroll and this was a way they hoped to make some progress.

FERRELL: Did you get the impression that Mr. Johnson was greatly interested in the committee?

STAHR: I have some difficulty in recalling what impression I had at that first meeting of that committee except he certainly wasn't weaseling; he gave no impression whatever that, well, this was just an exercise we'd got to go through. He said something to the effect that, "Gentlemen, we really mean business,"but I still didn't quite realize how seriously he meant it until subsequent events, even up to now, demonstrated it fully.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, I see that you had several meetings of the National Security Council, beginning on April 22. Would you care to say something about those?

STAHR: There are several angles to this that were very interesting to me and I should think might be interesting to nearly anybody. I was thinking I'd gone to an earlier meeting or two, but maybe not. The April 22 meeting must have been around the time of the Bay of Pigs. I was not a member of the Council, by the way, but was subject to being invited and during this one period was invited several times, along with the other Service Secretaries. It seems to me that the first one I went to, which may not be on this schedule, though my memory of dates is not too good, had to do with Laos, and came along shortly before the time the President went on

[-21-]

television, you'll remember, with a map of Laos that showed what was happening over there and appeared to be getting ready to make a major U.S. commitment. In any event, the Laotian crisis was going on right through this period of the Bay of Pigs, which may be the reason I'm not sure about dates and agency, etc. -- all that can be checked.

Anyway, my most interesting memory of the National Security Council is what happened the morning after it was clear that the invasion at the Bay of Pigs had failed.

But before I come to that morning, let me put in a little sidelight on the evening before. My wife and I had gone to a reception at the Mexican Embassy, had just stopped in for a little while, had seen some friends and chatted, and were getting ready to go. The Vice President was standing near the door. He called me aside and said -- he called me over in the corner -- and he said, "Mr. Secretary, I know you're a good friend of John Connally's, and I know you've been invited to the National Security Council meeting tomorrow morning, both of you, and I just want to give you a friendly tip. Between now and ten o'clock tomorrow morning you'd better find out everything you can that you would need to know to protect yourself." He said, I've forgotten how he phrased it, but something to the effect that there was going to be blood running on the floor in that Cabinet room in the morning, and he said, "I don't want you and John to get cut up, but there's going to be hell to pay for somebody. The President is determined to get to the bottom of this thing and find out whose fault it was, and I just thought I'd give you that friendly little advance notice."

FERRELL: Were you supposed to alert Mr. Connally -- was this the purpose?

STAHR: No, I think he probably had already told John and probably would

[-22-]

never have said a word to me if he hadn't just happened to bump into me, because I didn't know him very well at that time. But in any event, that same feeling had gotten abroad in Washington -- that sort of thing gets abroad fast -- so that when the NSC group got together the next morning at ten o'clock in the Cabinet room there was real tension in the air; you could feel it. Instead of everybody standing around as usual shaking hands with each other and maybe getting a little business done on the side during the few minutes before the President came in, there was very little conversation and there were some very serious countenances. I was not particularly worried about myself, despite the Vice President's friendly warming, for the simple reason that -- this is one of the curiosities, I think, of the many associated with the Bay of Pigs -- the simple reason that I'd had nothing whatever to do with it! This in itself is a rather shocking thing, and it turned out that neither the Secretary of the Army, nor the Secretary of the Navy, nor the Secretary of the Air Force had had anything to do with the Bay of Pigs. They hadn't even been told about it in advance, and their own chiefs of staff had been specifically instructed at the Joint Chiefs meeting, I presume by Mr. McNamara, to say nothing to anybody, and that included their own Secretaries whom presumably they worked for. That was how determined the Administration was to keep this thing a secret. It was so closely held that, in my judgment, that was one of the reasons it failed; there wasn't the opportunity to do proper staff work.

FERRELL: Presumably now, having heard about this for the first time, you were put in the position of having to defend your own men in the Army.

STAHR: I had talked to the Chief of Staff and, as a matter of fact (I think I can say this -- we'll consider later whether to make it available), I had known such an

invasion was being planned because of my Chief of Staff, General Decker, had come in to see me privately a few weeks before they had said, "There

[-23-]

is something I want you to know, Mr. Secretary, and then you can tell me how much you want to know, how much you want to be involved, because the Army is going to be indirectly involved, and it's your Army. I'm not supposed to say anything to you or anybody else, but from the beginning the Secretaries of War and of the Army and their Chiefs of Staff have had the closest relations and I believe in the military and the civilian working as complete partners so I want to tell you this. A group of Cuban exiles are planning an invasion of Cuba and we're giving them some logistical support. The precise date hasn't been set but it's not very far off, and I just don't want you to read about it in the newspaper and learn later that the Army had furnished some supplies, and this and that." I told him I appreciated it and we talked a bit more and I said it sounded to me like something I didn't want to know anything about because obviously the thing was set up in such a way I couldn't possibly influence it one way or the other, and I think I told him that I knew I could trust him and that as long as the Army was not to be directly involved, let's forget.

FERRELL: So this was your background when you came into this rather tense meeting of the Council?

STAHR: That's right. So the President came in -- he was a few minutes late.

FERRELL: You had, incidentally, briefed yourself after the Vice President's warning?

STAHR: No, not much -- I figured ignorance is bliss and why not stay that way. I decided that my best posture at that meeting, if it turned out the way Mr. Johnson had predicted, would simply be to say I didn't know anything about it. And that was true, and the only thing I really know about it even yet is that I wasn't supposed to know anything about it at all! But in any case the meeting didn't go that way. The President came in -- of all the

[-25-]

times I ever saw him, this was the only time that he did look grim and even haggard -- absolutely not a smile, nor any effort to, you know, just be casual or come in and say good morning and shake hands and that sort of thing which he usually did. He came in and we all sat down; then he stood -- no, excuse me, as I remember it he said, "Gentlemen would you be seated" and he remained standing at his chair, at the rocking chair, and he said, "I want to make one thing clear at the beginning of this meeting, there is no -- there isn't going to be any, witch hunt -- there's not going to be any attempt to find a scapegoat and punish him or disgrace him or embarrass him or them. This is the worst catastrophe that has happened to our country in many decades -- we've lost prestige, we've made a bad misjudgment (or

mistake -- I've forgotten the word he used); it's a more serious blow than I had hoped this Administration would ever have to take. It's an enormous disappointment, but I am taking the complete personal responsibility. I've just called in the press and told them that. I'm telling that to you and to the country and the world, and as far as the Bay of Pigs is concerned it's a closed chapter. Now what's the next thing on the agenda?"

FERNELLE: That was the end of the discussion?

STAHR: That was the end of it and there never was any more talk, in the National Security Council at least, about finding what went wrong and all that sort of thing -- there were other steps that were taken over a period of time, largely to ensure against similar breakdowns in the future I think, but the President so far as I know until he died never tried to duck that responsibility and shift it to anyone or explain it away by blaming somebody. Other people did, of course, but he never did. This was a tremendous man -- this is the first time I think some of us may have realized it. It took a real man to do that because he meant it -- now if this had just been a front, you know, the usual thing, like "I'm the President, naturally I take the responsibility,

[-25-]

but listen, in this room I'm going to find out, I can't have people like that around, etc.," but none of that at all, he was talking to us, there was no press there, he didn't want the morale of his team to break down as it quickly could when something like that happens when everyone is suspicious of everybody else, pointing the finger at everybody else, and shifting the blame around. He knew that could be even worse than what had happened.

FERRELL: So far as you can see then, there was no effort later, either by the Mafia or by Mr. Kennedy to attempt covertly to circulate around through the government and pinpoint responsibility and perhaps retire people, all coming out of this fiasco.

STAHR: Not so far as I could tell -- not directly -- though I know it shook his confidence in the Joint Chiefs, among others, when it really was a case of his not yet understanding the Joint Chiefs system. He felt someone should have warned him much more than they had; actually, the Joint Chiefs' paper had been full of "ifs," but others didn't get their significance. I just never had the kind of relations with the President's staff, or close relations -- I had very cordial relations with Mr. Dulles, Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, but not close -- to be able to answer your question very helpfully, but I am convinced from just having been around that the President himself never went back on that. Now he did make some changes later on. One of them was that he soon thereafter brought in (and I think this had a lot to do -- was a pretty direct result of the Bay of Pigs, but not that alone) he brought Max Taylor in as his special assistant, military assistant, a move that was speculated about greatly, both in and out of the Pentagon. Technically, I had to get

into that, because we ordered General Taylor out of retirement back to active duty. Then later of course Mr. Dulles retired,

[-26-]

and McCone took over. I'm rather sure that the Bay of Pigs was in the background of those and some other things but none of them was done precipitately and they were all done I think for the future, not just in peevishness about the past.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, I notice that your first meeting with the National Security Council was on April 22. I see also there were meetings on April 27, 29, May 1, 2, and June 13 and July 20. These were all meetings in the year 1961 -- do you recall offhand any business or other items that struck you about those meetings?

STAHR: This was a period of considerable tension -- Laos as I mentioned earlier was a very upsetting situation, with the Pathet Lao seemingly driving very hard -- we can talk about it as a special case, maybe, later on. But the curious thing about all this is that, as you'll notice, those meetings were pretty well bunched and there was not more than one, and there may not have been any, meeting of the National Security Council to which the Service Secretaries were invited before the Bay of Pigs. And after a couple of months following, they stopped again -- all this I think is a reflected of the fact that McNamara wanted to run the Defense Department by himself but they got shaken by the Bay of Pigs and, until they got over it a bit they thought they may have made a mistake by not having others of us around more. McNamara even invited us to several of his meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staffs right through that period -- he hadn't done that before. And that again faded out in a month or two.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, there was a great deal of press comment during the early Kennedy months that the President was dissatisfied with the somewhat ponderous mechanism of the defense structure, the Central Intelligence Agency,

[-27-]

the National Security Council and all of these other organizations, including the State Department, and was inclined to cut through this maze of committee work. Did you sense such dissatisfaction in those meetings of the National Security Council you attended?

STAHR: Some, except that that probably was exaggerated -- he certainly was impatient of anything ponderous, whether a person or an organization, but at the National Security Council meetings he would invite the additional people -- and there were always some, at least when I was there, who were not members -- he'd try to get the top people and do the coordinating right there. Then he brought in General Taylor, brought him back from retirement, and used him to try to keep the peace, as it were.



FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, watching Mr. Kennedy in committee meetings, did you sense a certain impatience and desire not to listen to long reports and generally mechanical procedure or was he at least superficially a good listener while perhaps his mind went elsewhere?

STAHR: As you finally phrased it, I'd say neither -- he was a good listener -- but if someone started repeating himself he would graciously inject some comment of his own and head it off. I never saw him -- I'm sure he was human and there must have been occasions -- but I personally never saw him appear to be impatient with someone who was trying to have his say. On the other hand, he certainly kept things moving -- it wasn't a relaxed bull session sort of thing that went on in the National Security Council. When Mr. Rusk presented a point of view, or Ambassador Stevenson, or whoever happened to be there who was either directly concerned or had background relevant to the problem at hand, the President would listen very carefully and I'm positive that there were times when his inclination to *do* something was deterred by

[-28-]

listening to calm or at least cool and well-reasoned arguments of the pros and cons, of the points of view -- I got the feeling, for instance, he wanted to and was about ready to do something drastic in Laos, because he was afraid it was going and that all Southeast Asia would go, but in the end he didn't, at least as far as sending our forces over there (and this wasn't natural timidity at all; in fact his own inclination I think would have been the other way). For one thing, it just came too early, before a powerful non-nuclear capability had been rebuilt in this country. And he was also much impressed by the Army's estimates of probable casualties from tropical diseases if large forces were sent into that country.

FERRELL: Did you sense in these National Security Council meetings that this institution, set up under the Defense Acts, worked out very well?

STAHR: Yes, I'd say so; it ensures that the President has the benefit of the advice of at least some of the people most closely in touch and most responsible for the major aspects of our foreign and defense policies and capabilities.

There was one other recurring item on the agenda of those meetings through that period, and that was Vietnam -- there was very great and growing concern all through there about Vietnam, the situation there, the difficulties of getting hold of it, the difficulties of working with President Diem, and at every meeting there were discussions of military aid, economic aid, guerrilla warfare, this, that and the other. This was in early '61 and already it was clear that this was going to be a real, and continuing, trouble spot.

FERRELL: Had you noticed that Vietnam turned up on the agenda each time you attended a meeting of the NSC?

STAHR: That's my best recollection, that there was at least a brief

[-29-]

discussion of it at every meeting. I remember General McGarr was there at one meeting -- he was then the head of our military aid mission. Eventually a special task force was set up, an interdepartmental task force, headed by Ros Gilpatric, to try to put all the pieces together and come up with some specific recommendations. Of course this is still going on -- Gilpatric is gone, and I don't know whether the particular task force still exists or not, but there were many things that were done during my days there that have been repeated in one way or another, such as Max Taylor's and Walt Rostow's trips to Vietnam and Bob McNamara starting his fairly frequent visits to Hawaii, where the Pacific commanders would come in and meet him -- and all that was almost entirely about Vietnam. It's a toughie. I had one meeting with the President which isn't on Dutton's list that you have, or maybe it was in early 1962, when I took two or three Army officers, not very senior ones, who had just returned from Vietnam, over to see the President at his request -- and he talked with them for nearly an hour, picking their brains and getting their descriptions and reactions about the kind of fighting that was going on in Vietnam and their ideas of what we should do.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, I notice in your meetings with the President that you had three more meetings in 1961 and one of them was a most memorable one, we might deal with the last, that is the meeting at Fort Bragg. Now on July 31, though, you had lunch with the Chinese delegation; do you recall anything about that?

STAHR: Yes, this was an official sort of visit by the Vice President of Free China, Chen Cheng. I'd not met him before (though I knew several other members of the government of China from my own years in China during the war), but anyway the President had a luncheon for him at the White House

[-30-]

to which my wife and I were invited and I suppose there were somewhere between 25 and 40 people there. It was a very nice affair and again I was able to observe with real admiration in the way in which the President vyer graciously, and very warmly and beautifully, said the things that ought to be said on such an occasion -- he was very good at the appropriate word for the visiting foreigner, he loved to have them come in. (You remember that one chief of state after another came to Washington in 1961 -- it got to the point where anybody who wasn't invited just wasn't anybody, and I suspect some feelings were hurt.) But before I forget it, let me mention that we also attended the very impressive dinner that evening, or the next, at the Mayflower when Chen Cheng had President Kennedy as his guest of honor. Among many others, I recall chatting briefly with Adlai Stevenson that evening, and sitting across from Walter Judd, who still speaks good Chinese. I've forgotten most of mine!

FERRELL: Do you think the President was so clever at saying the right thing that it

wasn't even apparent that this was a sort of formality?

STAHR: Yes, and it wasn't. In fact he always put some meat in these things; he had an objective. Dean Rusk has a similar quality; I went to at least four state dinners at which the Secretary of State was the host in that magnificent new dining room on top of the State Department Building. These were in each case for a visiting chief of state and he, like the President, not only could say the polite thing and the nice thing but show a genuine knowledge of the substance of what this other fellow, the guest, was interested in, a knowledge of his country, a knowledge of whatever were the most likely things to draw that country and our country closer together. Whatever meeting grounds there were would be at least alluded to -- they were both just masters at, without notes, making a formal, diplomatic, polite occasion meaningful.

[-31-]

FERRELL: Presumably there was a little homework behind it, but you feel that this was more than that, that there was some knowledge here and desire to do this and a sort of enjoyment of it.

STAHR: In both cases, in the case of both Rusk and President Kennedy, I would say yes. And I knew quite a few Ambassadors in Washington pretty well, and some better than that, and they had the same reactions -- and some of them were hardened professionals.

FERRELL: I notice also that on November 30, 1961, you brought the Army commanders in to see the President.

STAHR: Yes, and this was the first time so far as anybody could determine -- you're a historian, you can run this thing down if you want -- that any President of the United States has ever had all of his major Army commanders in his presence at one time. This was not just a gimmick; it was a historic thing but there was a real reason for it.

FERRELL: Was this an effort on your part to show the President that these were not superannuated characters?

STAHR: No, this was an effort on my part to build up their morale -- and Ted Clifton gets a lot of credit for this, in fact I'm almost sure he's the fellow who first thought of it. He knew that the Army commanders conference was coming up. Twice a year the Army commanders are brought in to Washington for two or three days of very intensive reviews of the world situation, the Army situation, national policy, what's going on in either other's parts of the world, exchanges of information like that. This is a very valuable and useful device which is going on all the time, but Ted saw that the

November meeting was coming up and helped persuade the President to invite them to the White House -- a real innovation.

[-32-]

FERRELL: What did the President say to the Army commanders?

STAHR: The reason he was most receptive to this idea was not merely that he wanted to get firsthand impressions of these people as individuals, for by this time I think he was satisfied that our policies were modernized, shall we say, that we were bringing younger names before him for promotion appointment, and so on, and he was off that "kick." But, he was very *much* on the counter-insurgency kick, the guerrilla warfare business and so on, and he picked this as an opportunity to tell them face to face of his own keen interest in that. He talked about Vietnam and a few other places. What he was trying to get across -- I knew it, Ted Clifton knew it, and I hope those Army commanders knew it -- was that "I want you guys to get with it; in other words, I know that the Army is not going to develop in this counterinsurgency field and do the things that I think must be done unless the Army itself wants to do it, and so I want you guys to want to do it." Of course, as I say, he's much more subtle than that -- but it was clear to me that's what he was trying to get over. Plus one other thing. For years prior to his Administration the Army had been taking a beating in this interservice rivalry, not just as a political matter but because the defense philosophy of the preceding Administration was a great deal different -- the emphasis being on the presumed deterrent effect of nuclear weapons, the oversimplified phrase, massive retaliation, and so on. This was not just a high policy matter alone; it had real effects upon the day-to-day support that was given to the Services, and upon their missions and all the rest. The biggest problem the Army had when I got there was that it was barely beginning to recover psychologically from having had the satellite mission taken away from it -- when NASA was created the whole ground was pulled; Von Braun (and lots more) was taken away from the Army and

[-33-]

handed over to NASA. The Army had put up America's first satellite right after Sputnik, after trying to get permission for years to go ahead with this sort of thing, and with missiles and what not, and being held down; then Sputnik suddenly comes along and everybody decides maybe we'd better get into this after all. The Army put up our first satellite within ninety days of Russia's, a tremendous achievement, yet the Air Force and the Navy kept fighting like mad to be the big guns in this act and when they did take it away from the Army, which had done a lot of the pioneering and had been the most successful, this was a blow, a real blow, on top of the Army's conventional strength having been driven down and down and down, all through the Eisenhower Administration, from the time of the cessation of hostilities in Korea when we had very large Army of course to the time of the Kennedy Administration when the number of divisions of the Army had been more than halved, to a mere eleven.

FERRELL: So this meeting had morale purposes.

STAHR: Yes. I wanted the Army to know that he depended on them, that they did still have a major role to play in the defense of this country, not just in my, but in the President's judgment, a very important and crucial role. And he talked to them brilliantly to the effect that defending freedom was not just being ready to exchange nuclear weapons, it was creeping around in the jungles sometimes, that sort of thing, and that he wanted the Army to be able to fight at the lowest end of the spectrum, you might say, as well as right on up, and not just be a supply service for the Navy and the Air Force which some people had had some ambitions to make it.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, what did the President say to the commanders then?

STAHR: That's about all. We all stood throughout in the middle of his

[-34-]

office, though later on we had some pictures on the rose garden steps. I remember we first waited in the Cabinet Room; then everybody went in, I introduced them individually to the President and we all just stood round him in a ring like a bunch of guys talking, you know, only he did about all of the talking. He talked for a good ten minutes -- he could say an enormous amount in ten minutes. He spent about five minutes of that, at least, talking about the importance of this counter-insurgency, guerilla warfare, stressing that the Army's got to study and become the best in the world at that just as they were the best in everything else that had been assigned to them, and maybe they ought to study Mao Tse-tung's theories of wars of liberation and that sort of thing.

FERRELL: Did this young man charm the commanders?

STAHR: Yes he did. He undoubtedly did. They were impressed with his strong personality and character and with his obvious keen and deep interest in what he was talking about -- he wasn't just going through some ritual.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, we were talking about the President's appointments and we come to your visit with the President at Fort Bragg in the fall of 1961; would you care to say something about that?

STAHR: This was an extremely interesting day; it was a day that was a shot in the arm to the entire Army because it was the first time the President, as President, had visited any of the armed forces in the field. The date was what, again? October 12, yes. The idea came out of a conversation the President had with his military aide, General Clifton (with whom the Chief of Staff and I had been talking on the side.) The sequence of dates I've forgotten but it seems to me that the Berlin Wall had certainly been built and the

Berlin crisis had begun by this time, the Berlin crisis being the period following Khrushchev's ultimatum to get out by the first of the year or some such date. In any event, I had had difficulty constantly with

[-35-]

Bob McNamara, trying to get him to get out of the Pentagon and see something, find out what he was dealing with, what kind of people these were in our Army, what kinds of things they did, to see some of it with his own eyes. He thought he knew all of this in an abstract sort of way and that that was enough.

FERRELL: He preferred to look at it through the computer, is that right?

STAHR: Well, he rather gave that impression. He seemed to think that getting out with the troops was sort of a waste of time, even for the Service Secretaries, though I think he may have vaguely recognized that we had a little more intimate connection with the Services than he did. But in any event somebody, not Bob, but I think Ted Clifton, got the President interested in going and looking at the forces that he might have at his command in a crisis, and after all there was already a sort of crisis. Fort Bragg was selected for at least two reasons: one, it wasn't too far from Washington, so it wouldn't involve a long journey and a big chunk of time; the other was that the 82nd Airborne Division was there and it was our first strike force so to speak if we had to move ground forces anywhere in a hurry. There was a very important third reason, and that was that the Army's principal counterinsurgency school is at Fort Bragg. Putting all this together, the President decided he would go -- we didn't have too long to plan it, but it was extraordinarily well planned. We were lucky enough to have a beautiful day, and he certainly got a good look at a cross section of his Army that day. There are picture records, etc., of this trip available, of course.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, how did you get down there with the President; did you go down by helicopter?

STAHR: I didn't go down with him, though I did go back to Washington

[-36-]

with him. I went down independently, but that was because he wanted to go over to Chapel Hill first and make a speech -- he spoke at the University of North Carolina at a morning convocation outdoors -- and then he flew on into Fort Bragg in Air Force 1, his jet, and we met him there and I was with him, right beside him, the rest of the day. Bob McNamara came down with him. This had the additional advantage of giving Bob a look at a bit of the Army, and I think, in spite of himself, he was somewhat impressed.

FERRELL: Did Mr. McNamara give sort of a bored look to all of the proceedings or did

he get a little lively?

STAHR: No, the President was obviously interested and very intent on everything that was going on and I think Bob took -- I won't say took his cues from the President, but he adopted the same attitude; he didn't try to do anything but look, he left it entirely to the Army to present whatever it wanted to present and didn't interrupt, and so on, as he did at briefings very often. He left it to the President to ask questions this time.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you mentioned that Mr. Kennedy gave an address at the University of North Carolina -- you didn't get the impression during his visit at Fort Bragg that he sandwiched the visit between perhaps that, or at least used that as perhaps the useful occasion of the day -- the Fort Bragg visit was a serious business to him?

STAHR: My impression was that it was indeed a serious business for him though I don't know how his calendar was put together; I suspect that the date for the Bragg visit may well have been tied to the other thing, but I think he had decided to go to Bragg at some time in the near future, regardless of that. I could be wrong. He did later visit the other Services -- but the pressures on his time were such that he always tried to tie together 2 or 3 things on one

[-37-]

trip and this was just common sense, I'd say.

FERRELL: Did the President see a great deal or did he stick to his schedule -- what happened after you got down there?

STAHR: Yes, he stuck right with it and saw plenty. First of all they had the entire Division lined up on a big field -- and even though an Airborne division is a relatively lightly equipped outfit, still seeing an entire division and its equipment at one place at one time is bound to impress anybody (relatively few people have ever seen this sort of phenomenon, you know.) There was a platform and a P.A. system and he said a few words to them. I hope someone recorded them because they were, as was typical of him, very well chosen. The troops obviously like him and what he said; the Airborne fellows are strictly gung-ho anyway. I think he sensed that here was something he'd been overlooking for ten months as President, that he had a magnificent fighting force of young Americans who were sharp instead of stodgy and who knew their business. And this was evident throughout the day, that they know what they were doing and that they were proud of what they were doing; the esprit was tremendous and this as the day wore on got to him, so that at the end of the day when it was time for him to go, the last thing he was to do was to go and watch an element of the 101st Airborne from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, which had taken part in a demonstration, load up their airplanes. He went over there -- he was to

watch this loading operation -- and he just walked right out in the middle of hundreds of soldiers and started talking to them individually. The photographers were going crazy, trying to keep up with him and hear what he had to say, get pictures, and this, that and the other, but he seemed to get just about as much of a boot out of meeting those soldiers as the kids did themselves.

[-38-]

FERRELL: You mentioned the other day that the President had the notion that the Army leadership, at least, was rather old and perhaps needed a little more youth -- did he say anything about that during this visit?

STAHR: No. It wasn't just the Army, by the way; he was concerned about the youth and drive of the Navy and the Air Force just as much. No, he didn't say anything about that in particular that day, that I recall. There was certainly nothing stodgy about anything he saw, I might add.

FERRELL: One personal query, that is, about the President. Now here you saw him in action for a good part of a day -- did he show a sort of large physical vitality, did he jump from one thing to another, or did he get tired behind the scenes? What was your impression of this?

STAHR: I got no impression that he got tired; and this could have been a tiring experience, because every minute was so crammed, you know. But of course it would have been very stimulating to anybody. Every weapon in the Army was demonstrated, even including those that were capable of firing tactical nuclear warheads (of course they didn't fire nay such warheads): like the Little John and this, that, and the other; dozens of weapons, all the way down to the one kid with the new M-14 rifle who was able to put 20 shots right in the middle of the Ace of Spades in about 14 seconds. The President was just thrilled with that, and took the thing home with him as a souvenir -- the target, you know. They had tanks, amphibious vehicles, and of course demonstrated Ranger training where they jump off cliffs with a rope and so on. And there was a big parachute jump. As I said, there was everything, and it was all so interesting that if he had become tired, he probably wouldn't have been aware of it. Anyway, with almost every military attache in Washington also watching from nearby seats, he wouldn't show it, I'm sure.

[-39-]

FERRELL: Did you take a large group of brass down with you?

STAHR: No, this wasn't the way we did things, partly because I think this sort of thing would have been frowned on by Mr. McNamara. I was not allowed to take my own undersecretary or any of the assistant secretaries, and the chief of staff couldn't take his vice chief or any deputy; it was just the Secretary and the Chief of Staff, as



far as the Army went, from Washington. A few field commanders slipped in, though, I noticed, and that was O.K. because they had helped prepare the whole day.

FERRELL: Then you came back on Air Force One and it was a good day?

STAHR: Yes, and that it was. I didn't see much of the President on Air Force One because, as I remember (I think this is the trip I'm thinking about,) Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson was aboard and the President got him up in the front of the plane in his little conference room and they spent (the trip wasn't very long on that jet, an hour or so) the whole time, with maybe one or two other people, talking business again.

I'd just like to add one thing about the Fort Bragg visit. I couldn't possibly tell you how one gets impressions, you know, let's say how the Secretary of the Army gets impressions of what the President is thinking (unless he happens to tell him), but I got the impression in the succeeding days and weeks and months that the President showed much more confidence about the position of this country and his own ability to adopt and implement the kinds of policies he would like to adopt than he had before. I may be very wrong, and quite possibly am because I had no firsthand information about his meeting with Khrushchev at Vienna early in the game, but I had the impression that he may have had a deep unease himself about our ability to confront the Soviet bloc, except on thermonuclear terms,

[-40-]

which were just about unthinkable, and which I'm sure Khrushchev knew were unthinkable except *in extremis* and which he must have played for all it was worth. I think President Kennedy may have had an unease because he knew that for years our defense policies had been such as to weaken our ability to respond conventionally to anything but a very small brushfire like Lebanon, or to use what today is being called measured force, and so he had to trend a little cautiously. And I think by October of '61 his own policies were beginning to be felt strongly in our overall defense; we were beginning to develop a third option; and although we were still a long way from having all we should have, his visit to Fort Bragg where he saw a good sample of the third option gave him heart and made him feel he was on the right track in his own views about defense policy and its relation to foreign policy.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you had a sixth sense perhaps after this trip was over that Mr. Kennedy enjoyed himself for this very special reason.

STAHR: I suppose that's right. He saw that he had something here. He never had any desire that I could determine, that I could even sense, to use force, but I think he resented the thought that the other guy could bluff him, could use force against him, directly or indirectly, and that he wouldn't be sure whether he could respond in kind or not, though he could be sure in the early days that the other side knew that we were not as strong conventionally as they were. This would be very disturbing, you know; if your

only options are surrender or a thermonuclear exchange. You just can't run a country like this in a world like this without being pretty nervous.

FERRELL: So, Mr. Stahr, this Fort Bragg visit then you feel was one of the great moments in that otherwise rather dull autumn of 1961, so far as the President was concerned.

[-41-]

STAHR: Well, it was of course in part symbolic, but there was enough concrete power which he saw there which was his to use if necessary. I do think, though maybe I wouldn't call it a turning point, that it was a back stiffener, so to speak.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, as a factual footnote would you say just briefly what the divisional strength of the Army was at this time and where those divisions were?

STAHR: This was just about the time that the call-up of Reserve and Guard units was going on or about to go on (I've forgotten again the precise sequence of dates) but it was obvious enough that we didn't have enough in the active Army to handle something like the Berlin crisis. The active Army at that point had only eleven combat divisions, and six of those were in Europe, without full support, but they were there, committed to NATO. A couple were in Korea where they were eye-balling the communists daily at the 39th parallel, and one was in Hawaii, the 25th, and finally there were these two Airborne divisions in this country. This meant that if trouble broke out anywhere, serious trouble, our conventional response couldn't be very powerful, at least on a sustained basis. Even in Europe our conventional response couldn't be sustained because we didn't have the supporting forces rather than divisions. In the third add-on to the Defense budget request to the Congress we finally got McNamara to let us have the money and men to convert the three training divisions we then had in the active Army into combat divisions, making in time, fourteen. But we had to call up National Guard divisions in the meantime to meet Berlin.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, let's turn to the year 1962 where I see you had a

[-42-]

considerable number of meetings with the President; the first meeting here is the National Security Council on January 18, 1962.

STAHR: I regret to say that I don't remember right off what that meeting was about or what the occasion was for inviting the service secretaries. If there were any way in the world of refreshing my memory, I'm sure the meeting would come back vividly but I just don't remember now what in the world it could have been about; it was six months after the last meeting we attended.

FERRELL: I think perhaps that very fact that it was six months after may have some importance.

STAHR: It may have had something to do with the defense budget that was going in by that budget had already gone in. We had big decision on that one; that was the budget for fiscal '63 and had been made at Palm Beach around Christmas of '61.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, let's move then to the next meeting, I see that was on March 1 -- this was the President's prayer breakfast at the Mayflower.

STAHR: This is an annual event in Washington -- I went both years I was there as Secretary; it's a rather impressive gathering of almost all the top people in all three branches of the Government. Incidentally sometime somebody ought to tell what the President said at his Gridiron Dinner appearances; I hope someone taped them; the two I attended made great impressions on me. Anyway, at the prayer breakfast I was also genuinely impressed. It was a deeply moving thing. The President spoke beautifully and with feeling, briefly as always.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, the next meeting noted here is on May 1 at five o'clock in the afternoon in the White House.

[-43-]

STAHR: May 1, 1962, was the afternoon that I went over to tell him that I would like to resign as Secretary of the Army in order to accept the presidency of Indiana University. I delivered my letter and he received me as a courtesy, and I thought that's about all there would be to it, but we had -- just the two of us -- an extraordinarily interesting conversation. The fact that I was going to an educational institution got him on this track about the education of the military which was always a matter of great interest to him. I don't know whether we talked on this particular occasion about his desire to have every officer in the armed forces read *The Guns of August* or not, but there was a sample of something he had wanted done, and incidentally trying to arrange for that to be done was an extremely interesting exercise. He recognized that our senior military officers (and of course our junior officers grow into seniors) were now much more than just military commanders -- that they were stationed around the world, that their daily activities in many parts of the world couldn't be separated from what was going on in the countries where they were located, politically and economically and diplomatically and so on. He recognized that the military officer of today, particularly the American military officer, because we are concerned about almost everything that goes on and we have about as much of our force overseas as we do in the continental U.S. -- this military officer even in peacetime can do great good or great harm. Therefore, he wanted them to be as broadly

grounded in things like political science, international relations and economics, as, let's say, a high-level state department officer would be.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, this came out during your vis-a-vis conversation, is that right?

STAHR: Yes, though it's of course not the only time it came out. This

[-44-]

time he wanted to talk very specifically about what might be done with the curricula of the various service schools. You know, military officers, unlike most other professionals, do continue to be formally educated all their lives; they go to school almost as much as they serve in the field.

FERRELL: This is not like when you become a professor.

STAHR: No, the young officer first, after he gets out of West Point, let's say, or out of a college or university where he goes through ROTC, very soon finds himself in a service school taking a basic course for officers. A few years later he'll take an advanced course for officers of his branch, infantry, artillery, signal, or what not. They all have excellent schools where instruction is just supremely well organized and presented. As a matter of fact, we civilian educators could learn a lot from them if we weren't so proud, but that's another story. But then they go on as what I might call middle-grade officers to the Command and General Staff School, let's say of the Army. A few years later as lieutenant colonels and colonels, selected ones will go to the Army War College, and then as their careers seem to be pointing more and more toward the highest ranks, they'll be selected to go to the National War College or the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. They're constantly going to school; at the least it seems that way, almost constantly; they'll take a tour of duty and then a tour of education. The President was generally aware of this and he wondered whether we couldn't do more in the service schools to bring in things besides just military science and tactics, and it was interesting to hear him talk about it, and it was interesting also to find that he had not been terribly well informed about it. He didn't realize that quite a bit of this is done, that in the National War College there are always some students from the State Department, for

[-46-]

example, and that a great many of the lectures there and in the War Colleges of the Services are given by civilians who are top people in government and outside government. All this interested him, but he still wondered how we can make complete representatives of the United States out of our military who are our representatives and who are abroad and who are going to be abroad and who are going to be involved in making the most serious decisions that can possibly be, that any of us can be confronted with. He himself said, in effect, "I can't make an important decision in anything to do with international affairs, I'd be foolish to

make it, without asking the advice of the military, but I sometimes wonder what their background is. I want their military point of view, but I want them also to understand the other considerations that I have to take into account, because if they do, perhaps they can give me a more informed or a better balanced judgment or recommendation.”

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, this is what he said to you then during this frank man to man conversation, just the two of you.

STAHR: That’s right, and if we may skip two or three of the times I saw him within a very short period after that, he elaborated this theme in his commencement speech at West Point just a month or so later and that speech I suppose is on record. But it was remarkable to me how much he seemed to ad-lib at West Point as he went along -- maybe he usually did a lot of that but I hadn’t noticed it so much before. Here again, he told this brand new set of lieutenants just graduating that morning from West Point that they were going to be far more than Army officers, that throughout the foreseeable future and probably their entire careers, they were going to have to be concerned with economics, with international relations, with intercultural relations and all that sort of thing, because they were going

[-46-]

to serve as much overseas as they were going to serve within the U.S. and they were going to be meeting people overseas and whether or not they were fighting they’d be making an important impact on people and an impression. More than that, what they sent back in reports and recommendations through their own channels would eventually heavily influence the kinds of decisions the President of the United States would have to make.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you mentioned that the President ad-libbed this during his speech at West Point on June 6 and that you thought that was more ad-libbing than you’d heard perhaps before from him. Did you see the text in advance of the speech?

STAHR: No, at least I don’t think I did, but I could tell, I was sitting right beside him, I could tell where he was ad-libbing. He didn’t ad-lib all of it, he just elaborated.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, how long was your conversation with the President when you met him on the first of May, 1962?

STAHR: I don’t remember exactly of course, but it seems to me it was a good half hour, which in itself impressed me because I had only expected to be there about five minutes and, to use a colloquial phrase, he seemed to be hipped on this idea that our military leaders have to be more than merely competent military men.

[Footnote to meeting of May 1, 1962:]

STAHR: There was one other topic which the President and I discussed at this meeting and it took nearly as much time as did the one about education of the armed forces. This was my then recent trip to the Far East in which I had visited Kwajalein Island, where the Nike Zeus project was going forward, Korea, Formosa and Vietnam, with a short stop in Japan on the way back. The

[-47-]

only thing that is worth, I think, recording here in terms of what I told the President that afternoon would be my conversation with President Chiang Kai-Shek in Formosa and part of my conversation with President Chiang Kai-Shek in Formosa and part of my conversation with the minister of Defense of South Vietnam whose name now escapes me -- I've forgotten his name but he was a pretty bright and interesting fellow. I had a two or three hour conversation with President Diem of South Vietnam, but everybody who went there did that (the conversation was always his talking and the visitor listening) I had that usual experience and I'm sure many other have reported on that -- on President Diem's themes at these meetings. Ambassador Nolting accompanied me that afternoon.

When we get around to talking about policy, I might want to elaborate a little bit on the talk with President Chiang in Taipei, but right here I can say this was the only time in my very limited number of personal conversations with the President that he made no response whatever and this is just as well as you will see when I tell you what I told him.

President Chiang, after dinner -- a beautiful dinner party which he and Madame Chiang had for me and the small group that was with me -- talked with each of us for a few minutes individually, with an interpreter. He then talked to me for quite a while, I suppose because he was under the impression that, as Secretary of the Army, I must be very close to President Kennedy and have his ear daily. There was something he very much wanted me to take to President Kennedy and he said so quite specifically. Also he felt, I think, that I could be a trusted messenger because he knew quite well that I had fought with his armies in World War II as American Liaison Officer in the CBI Theater, and he had been with Chinese troops nearly two years and some of his own commanders remembered me. Indeed, we'd had quite a sentimental

[-48-]

reunion just the night before. Word of this no doubt got to President Chiang during the day. So he thought, now here's a fellow I'd really better unload on, and he did. It was an extremely interesting thesis which he asked me to take to President Kennedy.

This conversation I had with President Chiang was, I suppose, the most interesting I have ever had in my life because we were talking about such enormous stakes. It went something like this. His first point was that he wanted me to take directly to the President that he, Chiang, was a trustworthy ally, that the record would show that no matter what people might say, he had never made any move at all without consultation with and approval of the

President of the United States and he never would. This was highly significant because at about that time there was a good deal of speculation that he might on his own try an invasion or something of that sort, so he wanted me to reassure the President that he had no intention of embarrassing the President, that he would not make a move without consulting him.

Next, he would like me to point out to my President that the whole situation in Asia was worthy of a fresh look because of the converging or the coinciding of three or four major factors which were new in the picture. Number one was the extreme difficulty which Red China was having in feeding her people. They were just having another famine at the time of the conversation, the second or third in a row and the ordinary people, he said, were not a bit happy as indeed few people are when there is a famine. It had become so serious that, as we all remember, the "great leap forward" had been postponed, because industrialization had to be slowed down so as to get people back on the farm. This was serious, he said, and added, "I don't think that in America you realize, this is a very bad famine, it's not just a fantasy of mine."

[-49-]

The second thing, he said, was the Sino-Soviet split, which had just then become more or less apparent to the outside world, and again he said, "This one too is more serious than perhaps you in America realize. This seeming ideological conflict between China and Russia is not only ideological but it also has other roots and other causes and it's going to have other effects, but in any case for the first time you can be confident instead of hopeful that Russia is not going to stick her neck out to help Red China."

Number three, he said, is that "My Army [that is, Chiang Kai-Shek's Army] is at its peak of training and readiness, and it is a very fine army, probably the best in the Far East, but it can't stay that way much longer because the leadership, the senior noncommissioned officers and the higher ranking officers, not just the generals, but the majors and lieutenant colonels and so on, on up, all are getting on in years, getting close to retirement. Not an arbitrary measures of retirement, but they have only a few more years they could physically fight effectively; and yet among them they have an enormous amount of experience in actual combat which, as we get farther and farther from World War II, farther and farther from Korea, is gradually disappearing all over the world, and soon there just aren't going to be sergeants and colonels and so on who have ever fought. But I have still a hard core of noncoms and officers who have experienced combat and who are still not too old to make effective use of that experience, and with the help of the United States I also have a large army which is highly trained and well equipped, and their morale is tremendous, but if we wait much longer the experience will be gone, the experience and the leadership.

"There is a fourth factor," he said, "which should be weighed along with

[-50-]

these. It is that Red China in a few more years will have nuclear weapons. But she does not have them now! Nor has she the capability of making them yet. These four things are all major factors which exist now but are not going to exist together much longer, and a

completely new approach to the future of China, of Asia, and of freedom will have to be taken perforce if this juxta position is allowed to pass by.”

“Finally,” he said, “I am getting old; I have only a few years left in which I could effectively lead a force for freedom, not militarily, but politically and symbolically.” He said, “My enemies abroad have for years accused me of wanting to be a dictator and I have forsaken any hope of convincing some people that this is not my ambition -- my ambition is for the freedom of the people of China and always has been; but,” he said, “in any case I want you to tell your President this, that my name is still known, that there are still millions on the mainland who know and look upon me as the symbol of an alternative to what they have, the only real alternative, and they’re becoming extremely disillusioned about what they now have. And you can assure President Kennedy that the moment I am in control of the mainland of China there will be free elections and I will bow out with grace such as you’ve never seen. I want to free my country and that’s the last of my ambitions; I wouldn’t live long enough to carry out any more even if I had anymore. I am reconciled to my age but I hate to die without making the contribution which I know I could make.”

This all added up to a pretty good case, you know, and it was bolstered a few days later, as I also mentioned to President Kennedy, by my talk with the Minister of Defense of South Vietnam. President Diem may have said it, too, I don’t remember positively; he said so much! But his Minister of Defense

[-51-]

certainly told me, after dinner one evening, that Americans should keep their minds on the fundamentals in Asia, that, for example, Americans aren’t the only people who love freedom, and there is great manpower in Asia and there is no need for us to send large numbers of our own young men over there to fight. Furthermore, it’s much better for Asian to fight Asian than for American to fight Asian, because when an American fights an Asian all Asians tend, at least, to turn against America. All our friends and the friends of freedom want is our support. This was a point that President Chiang had also made but I hadn’t seen it then in quite the same terms (he said we don’t want you to send your Army over here; we have an army and we have allies’ there are other freedom-loving people in Asia.) The Vietnam official said that Red China is enormous and you people are scared of it, but the Koreans aren’t scared of it and the Vietnamese and the Filipinos aren’t scared of it, though some others are -- Cambodians and so on. We Asians, he said, will do the fighting if we just have the equipment, the weapons and the ammunition. This we don’t have and we can’t get in time without help, because as time goes on two things will happen: number one, the Red government will get rid of all the Chinese who remember freedom and make their own stranglehold that much harder to break; and number two, they’ll achieve the nuclear capability, and then we won’t be able to fight them and you won’t want to.

I conveyed these messages to President Kennedy and, as I said in the beginning, he listened very intently and then sat silently for a few seconds, maybe longer; he seemed to be thinking about what I was saying and certainly kept his countenance serious, and I think that he thought seriously, tucked it away in his mind to do something with, I don’t know what, whether to talk



[-52-]

to somebody else or just think more about it. Then he suddenly said, "Well, is there anything else you might report from your trip?" In short, he never made any comment whatever.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, your next meeting with the President was on May 15 in the morning.

STAHR: Well, this was an interesting one. I took over to the White House the commanding officer of the Women's Army Corps on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the birth of the WAC, and with her I took her second in command and all of the former commanders of the WAC who were available and who had come back for the anniversary. I think they were all there except Colonel Hobby; I did notice her absence. In any event the President received them in his office; he was very gracious and he proceeded in just three or four minutes to make them feel that he felt that they were just about the most important thing in the country, and they just loved it.

FERRELL: Do you think he felt that way or was this the Kennedy charm again?

STAHR: Oh, I think it was a little of both. I think he did recognize that they could make a contribution, that they were doing jobs which released men for combat slots and what not; so that there was a definite practical side to this, and indeed there is; but at the same time he wasn't going to miss the opportunity to let them know that he appreciated them. And as I say, they were impressed and terribly grateful.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, that same day at 5:45 in the afternoon, there was the President's military reception at the White House. Do you recall anything of that?

STAHR: Yes, this was something which I think again was a great morale

[-53-]

booster for all the people in the Services. I have a picture, taken there that afternoon, of the President and Mrs. Kennedy and the Secretaries and their wives and the Chiefs of Staff and their wives coming down from upstairs where we had assembled and standing at the foot of the stairs leading into the main foyer of the White House. This was strictly a social occasion and yet I noticed two things. First of all, in the fifteen or twenty minutes when we were together upstairs before we went down where the big group was, the President made a point to speak to everybody and he usually had something he wanted to ask, maybe a quick question, something quite relevant -- he was always surprising people by his knowledge of details; it's one of his well-known characteristics of course, he always seemed to be current. We then went down and he went through that crowd which was composed of I guess just about every general officer in the

Washington area and all the Services, and several key civilian people too in the defense establishment. There was no receiving line; this was not that formalized a sort of thing. They were all in groups in several rooms; everybody was mixing and mingling, as if at a cocktail party or something. But I would be willing to bet a small amount that he saw and spoke to and shook hands with everyone at the party before he got through. He kept just walking through, you know, and stopping to say hello and so-and-so he knew many of them by name.

FERRELL: Did he have an aid at his side who identified people for him or did he know their name?

STAHR: I think one at least of his aides was nearby at all times and I'm sure some of them were identified that way, but only the ones he didn't know; he wasn't anybody's -- I started to say he wasn't anybody's fool, that's well known -- but he wouldn't have pretended to know somebody if he didn't, he

[-54-]

wasn't that kind of politician. I suppose if he saw somebody that he thought he should know and he wasn't quite sure about it, then maybe the aide could help him. But he didn't need much of that. He either knew you or he didn't know you, and he made no pretense as far as I could see.

FERRELL: And he was all the more effective because of that?

STAHR: Of course.

FERRELL: We're coming up now to a meeting of May 24 of the White House Conference on conservation, apparently a rather large thing. Mr. Stahr was this of any importance?

STAHR: Not really, no, as far as my contacts with the President were concerned. This just happened to be an occasion when the President and I happened to be briefly at the same place at the same time. I was one of the hosts, along with the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior, as I recall. He greeted the delegates at the opening session, I believe.

FERRELL: Let's move to May 25. I wonder if that meeting wasn't the same sort of thing.

STAHR: Yes.

FERRELL: Then we go to May 29. Here was a talk by the President. Was this connected with the same conference?

STAHR: No, no. This was a talk by the President in the Pentagon. It was in the little

auditorium up on the fifth floor. Secretary McNamara brought him over; it was the first time the President and I think had been in the Pentagon since he'd been President, and certainly the first time he'd been in there with an audience. The top people in all services and in the Office of the Secretary of Defense were all there and Bob McNamara introduced him and he talked without notes for 10-15 minutes to all of us, and I'm sure there

[-55-]

must be a record of what he said so we don't have to go into it. I sat on the stage just because I was Secretary of the Army, but I had no personal involvement except as a listener. His remarks were certainly well received, I might add.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, before we come to your meeting with the President of June 28, 1962, which would be your last meeting with the President while you were in his Administration -- your farewell call, so to speak -- I wonder if we might turn to another subject which is the use you made of the military assistant in the White House, in this case, General Clifton, to present the Army's point of view on problems. I gather that it was not necessary always for you to meet the President in order to put your views to the President -- that you were able to do this through General Clifton; is that right, Mr. Stahr?

STAHR: Yes and no. The fact is that the President used General Clifton to get things to me more than I used General Clifton to get things to the President. In fact he seemed to make great use of all three of his military assistants, but Ted Clifton, the Army one, was the senior one, an extremely able officer, who had the sort of imagination and flare for doing things exceptionally well which attracted the President to him. The President would sometimes suggest to Ted or just ask him a question, why doesn't the Army do so and so? Pretty soon Ted would call my office and ask if he could come to see me and he's let me know that the President had raised this question. Occasionally there might be something that I hoped the President hadn't overlooked, having to do with the Army, and which I had no good way of checking on except by asking Ted; then I would do it. But actually he wasn't in the White House as an Army spy or anything of that sort at all. He worked for the

[-56-]

President and not for the Army, but he still loved the Army and he didn't want us to get into any "trouble" that could be avoided.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, might I ask you, how was General Clifton appointed?

STAHR: He was selected just about the time I arrived and I feel reasonably sure that the Chief of Staff selected him but what other names the Chief may have had

before him at the time when he made the recommendations I don't know. I know that I approved the appointment informally when I was the Secretary of the Army-designate, but that was a sheer formality because I had no very good basis for approving or disapproving, not knowing the people. The Chief of Staff was the transition officer, you might say. (Incidentally, I had known him, General Decker, ten years earlier, as it happens.)

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, there's an interesting historical question here -- we know that back in Mr. Roosevelt's period, General Watson, General "Pa" Watson, as he was called, was the President's crony and good friend but apparently of not much use as liaison between the President and the War Department; then in Mr. Truman's administration, there was General Vaughan who was a special friend of the President and, of course, a Reserve General.

STAHR: Don't forget Admiral Leahy, who I think was there in President Roosevelt's time, wasn't he?

FERRELL: That's right. Admiral Leahy was there during the time of President Roosevelt and President Truman, down I believe until Mr. Truman's second administration. Then one has a new view of the military assistant during the time of President Eisenhower when Mr. Eisenhower believed in staff work and used General Goodpaster and other individuals. But I wonder if, in the case of President Kennedy's rather short-lived administration, one has a very special and perhaps rather admirable use of military assistants

[-57-]

and if this is not evidenced by your relations with the President through General Clifton.

STAHR: I would certainly say that you hit a, moderately at least, important point. He did have three very bright and useful military assistants: Ted Clifton of the Army, Tazewell Shepard of the Navy, and Godfrey McHugh from the Air Force. He used them for all sorts of things. He used them sometimes just to carry his briefcase, but he used them quite often to organize events, or receptions, or trips, or what not. They did a great deal of the planning and supervision for both his travels and his entertainment, and they handled a lot of his mail and met a lot of his callers. He also used them I'm quite sure to give himself another little pipeline into and out of the Pentagon. Not in any sinister way at all; he may not have even realized he was doing it. But Bob McNamara being the kind of man he is (mind you, the kind of man he is is a kind that I respect very much, on the whole) -- nevertheless Bob is just not the sort of fellow to want more than one pipeline from him to the boss and that pipeline is Bob McNamara. He saw the President frequently but nobody else from the Pentagon was apt to see him at all, particularly alone, except when the President specifically requested it, and that didn't happen very often, of course, because he had great confidence in Bob. And yet, he, the President, had the kind of

curiosity that would lead him at least to want to have a few other little ways of finding out what was going on around and about, other than just through official channels. I'm sure that the military assistants did help him understand military matters. They had his ear; they had his confidence and he liked them all, and I'm sure he would listen to them. On the other

[-58-]

hand, they were smart enough not to abuse this. He never used them deliberately to try to get around the Secretary of Defense or to undercut him or anything of that sort, I'm sure. Furthermore, they were relatively junior officers, so when he decided he did need to have somebody quite close to him to give him military advice, naturally he didn't turn to them; he called Max Taylor (General Maxwell D. Taylor) back and brought him right into the White House, so to speak. That one didn't make Bob very happy, I'm convinced, but he was careful to avoid letting it show, and he tried to avoid arguments with Max, who reciprocated that. I must say that I could talk much more freely with Max than I could with Bob, because Max knew so much more about the Army.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you mentioned a while back that the President coming into office, no doubt an impatient man but certainly willing to sit out conferences, etc., was a little disturbed by the ponderous nature of the committee structure of the government, and especially so (you may perhaps have noticed this) in his use of the National Security Council. Was his use of the military assistants an effort to cut under or cut through this administrative situation which he may not have been entirely fond of?

STAHR: This may well be -- you're speculating. I would speculate right along the same lines but I couldn't verify it, except that he did like to have the feeling that he himself had at least some personal feel for the thing that he was being told about, and one way to get that sort of relationship is to take a personal interest in people and programs and events that are presumably at a lower level than the man who immediately reports to him.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, in these conferences which you had with the President, analyzing what you said to the President and what he said to you,

[-59-]

we now come to your last meeting with the President which was on June 28, this was 12:15pm. It was at the White House. It was your farewell call on the President. Can you recall anything about that meeting?

STAHR: Yes, of course. The thing that I can recall most vividly and most warmly is something that's quite personal, and that is that to my utter surprise and amazement he had a sort of present for me, or a souvenir if you want to call it that -- a beautiful walnut plaque with his own Inaugural medal blown up, you might say, and

inserted in it, both the front and the obverse of the medal, and a flattering quotation from his letter accepting my resignation engraved below it, and so on. It was on an easel with a canvas over it (I mean a sheet over it) when I went in and I scarcely noticed it. We chatted a few minutes, then he walked over as though he were unveiling a portrait or something. He took the sheet off and here that thing was. I was really moved. The only relevant point is that this man could be thoughtful; he could be warm and he could draw you to him. He had no particular reason to want to draw me to him anymore, but he did anyway.

The other thing I remember is that once again he got on this business about education and particularly education of the military people, and as I remember he said, "If you get any more ideas on this after you get out to Indiana, let me know."

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, did he know that it was Indiana University and not the University of Indiana, a small detail but I wonder if he knew that.

STAHR: I'm pretty sure that he did because I would certainly have remembered if he didn't.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, we come in this first section of the interview, in this first major section and we have three of them (the second one dealing with

[-60-]

organization and the third one dealing with policy) -- we come to a sort of analysis which you might care to make about the public and private Kennedy, what place you think Mr. Kennedy had in history, what generally were his qualities and how did you appraise them as you saw him during about fourteen or fifteen months while you were Secretary of the Army.

STAHR: Almost eighteen months, though I didn't see him nearly as much as one might think. As I say, the way the Defense Department is now organized nobody from there sees the President very much except the Secretary of Defense. The next most frequent contacts are I suppose by the Deputy Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the rest of us poor fellows mostly just worked in the Pentagon or got out where the Forces are. I say this with no bitterness because this is probably desirable, and anyway I did have a couple of extra prerogatives which I didn't use much but which the other service secretaries didn't have, in the sense that there were and I presume still are two matters in which the Secretary of the Army is supposed to have the direct ear of the President. One springs from the fact that the Secretary of the Army is the sole stockholder of the Panama Canal Company, the Army having built the Canal and having operated it ever since. The Secretary of the Army appoints the Board of Directors of the Canal Company and also traditionally recommends the name of the Governor of the Canal Zone to the President for presentation to the Senate for confirmation; it's always been an Army engineer general officer. The other matter also has to do with an Army Engineer function, that of rivers and harbors and the like, the so-called civil functions of the Corps of Engineers. This is an

enormous thing, with great political influence. Some of my most interesting contacts with the President had to do with that, though none of them were fact to face. But having been

[-61-]

a congressman and a senator, President Kennedy knew very well the political importance of the Army Engineers and therefore when, for example, the appointment of a new Chief of Engineers came up fairly early in my term as Secretary, I was mildly astonished (but not more than that) to find that the President was very much interested. He didn't want to be in a position of turning down my nomination, knowing that my nomination would probably be the Army's nomination, but in order to be sure that he didn't have to turn it down, and also to be sure he himself would get some "brownie points" on the Hill since people there were always keenly interested in such things, he wanted to be sure that I brought him the "right" name -- or at least didn't bring him the "wrong" name -- in the first place. The way he went about this without ever saying a direct word to me was an interesting lesson to me in the art of politics and I'll tell you about that sometime if you like.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you have mentioned in the past your feelings about Mr. Kennedy as a person, his extraordinary thoughtfulness, his cleverness, but in a way, not his calculated cleverness, his ability to deal with people and make them feel that what he had to say was personal to them and not just the utterance of a public official. You mentioned that. I wonder if you would care to make one final summation on Mr. Kennedy personally, namely Mr. Kennedy as an administrator. You mentioned his at times apparent desire to cut through the lawyer of government; but whether he cut through or whether he went down through the ordinary channels, I wonder whether this was efficient administration in your opinion. How do you feel about that, after all you've been in the science and art of administration, shall we say, for nearly twenty years. You've seen a lot of these problems. How did you feel that MR. Kennedy handled his problems?

[-62-]

STAHR: I'd say without any hesitation that I think he was an exceptionally good administrator. He didn't do everything that modern administrative science would suggest, perhaps, or do it in the way it would suggest. He may even have done some things that nobody but he could have brought off successfully. This business of suddenly jumping over three or four channels, for instance, is dangerous for most administrators. But of course the President of the United States can do anything he wants in theory. As a practical matter, I'm not sure that very many Presidents could have brought off some of the things he did along that line, but at least he had a way that I think most presidents, all the presidents I've known (though I've only known three others, President Truman and President Eisenhower and now President Johnson), have had the ability to evoke genuine personal loyalty from people in the government that they personally came in contact with.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, according to the latest jargon, this is known as charisma, is it not, a charismatic leadership.

STAHR: I suppose, I suppose -- well this man really had it.

FERRELL: But it takes a little more than charisma, does it not, in the great mechanism of the government of the United States? It takes talent?

STAHR: This takes me back to one other thing that I want to remind us about later, having to do with what I said earlier, about a peculiar thing about my own appointment, how it stemmed from the way McNamara was persuaded to accept appointment. President Kennedy was determined to get good men immediately around him; he was determined to, and he knew quality when he saw it. His appointments of men like Dillon and Rusk and McNamara, not to mention Sorenson, I think bear this out. To me that's the most important thing perhaps of all about an administrator, the ability to judge men.

[-63-]

President Kennedy could do that. He could tell a phony in a split second almost. He wasn't, I've heard, very patient with people that weren't pulling their weight, but he would place great confidence in people that were. This is the most important single thing about administration because nobody can do everything himself, least of all the President of the United States. He just can't run every detail of the government. But he can make a big mess of things if he gets people who can't do their part. His ability to inspire personal respect and loyalty; it's not just a -- I think the word respect is just as important as loyalty.

He commanded respect, because of his own genuinely superior intellect and because he always gave the impression, and therefore I think it was true, that he wanted to find the best answer for the country and not just the best answer for himself. Now a lot of the Irish Mafia didn't look at it that way. Larry O'Brien, for instance, once told me very plainly (we were having an argument, I've forgotten what it was about ) but he said, "Now look, Mr. Secretary, you've got your job to do, my job is to get Jack Kennedy reelected President of the United States, so don't tell me how to go about that -- I'll handle the politics, you handle so and so." I had made some remark like, "I think it would hurt the President's public image if such and such a thing appeared to be politically motivated." And I thought that what Larry was proposing would be so transparent that we ought to try to find another way to do it. In any event, that's what Larry said -- "Look, I'll handle the politics and my only mission here or anywhere else is to get him reelected." But you never got the feeling that the President himself thought that was his only mission or even that it was any of his mission. He himself thought of himself not as the candidate but as the President, at least primarily, and he was looking for the solution or the program or whatever it might be that

[-64-]



would be best for the United States of America. Now if he was cynical about it, believe me I just don't believe it, it just never came through to me. I know some of those birds around him, while not cynical, not crooked, nevertheless were thinking of him first, but he was thinking of the country first.

I haven't perhaps answered your question about administrative ability but everybody knows how he administered. A lot of it was personal contact. He also had this enormous capacity to read reports, to get the meat out of them. He was a rapid reader, had a quick mind and he could say to this fellow, take care of that, to that fellow, take care of this. He kept an enormous number of balls in the air and rarely dropped one because he would see to it that somebody took the ball. That again is the mark of a good administrator, to pin the responsibility before you move on to the next thing, pin the responsibility on somebody to do whatever you decide should be done, about whatever you had just been talking about. Evidently he could do that extremely well.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, this is a fascinating discussion about Mr. Kennedy's administration and if you were to list his administrative qualities, would you perhaps say that his first quality was his ability to pick good men?

STAHR: Next to his own keen intelligence, yes. I think anybody who remembers those early days of the New Frontier and the type of men that were being brought to Washington would almost have to agree that he at least thought this was important. More than that, he did something about it.

FERRELL: Would you say that his second quality then was to inspire these good men, to give them a sense that whatever they were doing was not for the sake of the Democratic party but for the country?

[-65-]

STAHR: That's right.

FERRELL: Now I wonder about a third possible facet of his administration. Was he willing then to check up on his good men and his presumably inspired men to see that they did what he told them to do?

STAHR: I don't have very much firsthand evidence on which to answer or not answer that. I do remember a time or two when he would suddenly ask, "By the way, was anything ever done about so and so," and heaven help whoever he asked if it hadn't been done. But I don't think he methodically did it; I think he simply *assumed* that whatever he asked to be done was done, and I might add it usually was.

FERRELL: Would you say, Mr. Stahr, that there was a certain assumption that what he asked to be done was done but that beyond that he had extraordinary

sensitivity -- he had long feelers out into the reaches of the government, the casual question, the carefully read newspaper, the remark at the party, were all indications to him as to what was going on?

STAHR: Yes, there's no doubt about that. He knew, he checked up extraordinarily well. It is well known that he read every newspaper that got into the White House. He read them. He read more papers more thoroughly than perhaps any man alive. And he remembered things; one of the most extraordinary things about this man was his memory -- he would remember a small detail for a long time. When you consider the fantastic number of details which could come to him and could come to any President, and did come to him because he sort of liked them, this is almost an awe-inspiring quality. He'd come up with a little question about a little thing weeks or months later and absolutely stagger the guy he was talking to who had probably completely forgotten about it.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you have had a long experience in the so-called field of education. You've certainly had a large interest and concern about the

[-66-]

techniques of learning which goes back to your time as a Rhodes Scholar. Now is there not something involved here that is of great interest and moment to the general individual in this country, namely, the question as to whether it is possible to have a sort of administrative genius. Do you think Mr. Kennedy had almost a genius for this kind of thing or was this public stance, was this simply an effort to approach the public with this sort of guise?

STAHR: No, he had it. I don't think there's -- I just can't believe there's any serious doubt about that. He had the ability, and he used it. One of the reasons was that he could become intensely interested. Any of us can remember something if we are keenly and deeply interested in it, but most of us don't get keenly, deeply interested in very many things. This man could become intensely interested in an enormous variety and an enormous volume of things and this was not just a stance, because you just can't manufacture that kind of stance.

FERRELL: This was a special quality of intellect which you never, perhaps never, observed in any other individual.

STAHR: That's right. I never have. I've observed it on a more limited scale, in a narrower range of interests, but President Kennedy was interested in almost everything and he was extremely well informed on a greater variety of things than anyone I've ever known or known of.

[-67-]

FERRELL: We are going to look at some of Mr. Stahr's appointments with Mr. Kennedy which were not on the regular appointment sheet, and I think the first thing is the problem of General Van Fleet.

STAHR: The episode with General Van Fleet began at the time of a great deal of criticism spearheaded by the New York *Herald Tribune*, one of whose reporters was making a great effort to show that the call-up of Reserve and National Guard units at the time of the Berlin crisis in the fall of '61 was either being badly handled or had been badly prepared for and that these units were not well enough equipped and not well enough screened. What all the criticisms were, is not terribly relevant now -- most but not all of them turned out to be exaggerated -- but somehow or other the President became concerned, and rightly so; all of us were concerned, of course, and were trying to find out what the problems were. One of the criticisms was that these civilian component units which had been called up were not receiving the most modern training. President Kennedy conceived the idea the General Van Fleet, USA Retired, who had made quite a name for himself in Greece after World War II during the days of the Greek civil war, as an expert on guerrilla warfare and inspirational leader, and later in Korea had won the affection of the South Koreans, should be asked to take a look at the training of these newly called-up units and perhaps even of the army in general and see if they had had or were getting good training, including enough guerrilla training, and in general take an unbiased but expert look that the quality of training and overall combat readiness of these units. General Van Fleet had become controversial in the minds of some people since his retirement, and President Kennedy's idea might have raised a good many more eyebrows than it did if it had not been handled the way it was. The story was given to the press, jointly as I

[-68-]

recall -- my memory is a little hazy on details by now -- by the White House and the Department of the Army, that General Van Fleet was being asked by the Secretary of the Army to be the Secretary's and the Chief of Staff's personal consultant, and to go around to the training camps and come back and report on his findings. As I say, this was all President Kennedy's idea and both the Chief of Staff and I, and particularly the Chief of Staff, thought this would probably be a mistake. However, we felt that if General Van Fleet undertook the mission without any idea of developing it as a sensational assignment, perhaps no harm would be done, and maybe some good.

FERRELL: Did Mr. Kennedy have any idea of the General's propensity to make a statement?

STAHR: He must have, since it was fairly well known, and he certainly found it out pretty soon because it wasn't more than a few weeks after this that General Van Fleet, in the opinion of some people at least, put his foot in his mouth on a different subject at a talk in Tampa, Florida. Beginning with that, President Kennedy began

to try to figure out ways to get General Van Fleet gracefully out of his official connection with the Administration.

In any event, all this led to at least two visits by me with General Van Fleet to the White House. The first one was a meeting upstairs in the Oval Room, as I recall, with just the three of us present, when we were giving him his marching orders, that is, starting him off on his assignment. Then there was one some weeks later after he had visited a number of camps and came back to report -- that one was followed by a press conference outside the door of the press room of the White House, with all the cameras, which General Van Fleet and I handled after coming out of the President's office. All in all, everything went all right, and General Van Fleet found that the Army was doing a

[-69-]

good job of training as he had been insisted all the time, though there had been some bugs in the call-up -- I might add not all of the Army's making. For instance, when it was decided by the President to call up units, Bob McNamara gave us only about twenty-four hours to select the units and there was no opportunity to check them out -- a few units in fact were called that shouldn't have been, that is, units which either were of a type that wouldn't have been called at all or which would have had other units substituted for them if we'd had a couple of days to check them out. Reserve and Guard units are scattered all over the United States and vary at any given moment in their degree of readiness. A lot of lessons were learned from this, by the way -- a partial mobilization is a trickier thing than general mobilization in many ways. One of the lessons, I hope, was learned by some of the bureaucrats in the Defense Comptroller's office, because many of the temporary shortages of equipment were traced to their foot-dragging in releasing funds for this unbudgeted crisis. The interesting thing from the point of view of what we're talking about, however, was the President's apparent desire to get out of channels, his kind of instinctive feeling in his first year in office, a feeling I mentioned earlier I think that seems to be shared by a lot of civilians in this country, that you can't be absolutely sure of what the military people tell you, that they're likely to be defensive, that if you want to know you'd better have somebody from the outside take a look; that if *they* tell you something, you can believe it. This is an annoyance to the military people, though it's an attitude shared I think by most civilians who first come into the government. Anyway, in the end General Van Fleet brought in a good report and gave the Army a clean bill of health and then wanted to extend his own assignment. I think he was enjoying this business of going around as

[-70-]

a retired four-star general and looking into things, and he wanted to do some much more elaborate reviewing and inspecting and even wanted, as I recall, to make a trip to Europe and a trip to Korea as the Secretary of the Army's eyes and ears, ostensibly, but really working for the President. Fortunately, as I said, by this time he had displayed his old tendency to be a little careless about the way he phrased things in public statements, and there had been questions raised about what in the world is Van Fleet doing working for the Kennedy

Administration, and so we put the quietus on these further trips and ambitions and gently eased him out, to the President's great relief.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, there's a little more to the Van Fleet episode -- would you go ahead on that please?

STAHR: I just want to make clear something that might well have been misleading in what I just said. I'm not sure in this instance that it was the President's reluctance to accept the advice and the reports of his own military people so much as his fear that this whole call-up was going to become a national problem. People have mostly forgotten about it now, but it was a hot business in those days. Therefore his desire was to have the public reassured, if indeed reassurance was in order, by having someone from the outside whose reputation was such that everybody would be sure he wouldn't say anything that he didn't find and believe. Van Fleet was never known as a great liberal and certainly would not have been considered a New Frontiersman or a captive of the Kennedy Administration. But he was famous for canor. So I think it was to reassure the public, as much as himself, that President Kennedy decided to get a man like Van Fleet to go and look, thinking that if he said things are alright, everybody would have to believe it because they'd know it wasn't politically motivated -- and if he found anything

[-71-]

seriously wrong, then we'd all like to know about it and straighten it out. The President's confidence in the military had undoubtedly been shaken for a time by his understanding (or misunderstanding) of their role in the Bay of Pigs, but I think by November things had improved along that line.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you remarked about General Van Fleet's political coloration -- when the General talked to President Kennedy, did Mr. Kennedy move with a little bit of care when speaking to General Van Fleet or was the conversation entirely on military matters?

STAHR: It was entirely on military matters -- they talked some about concepts of guerrilla war, and more about basic training of recruits and so on, but anytime General Van Fleet would begin, which he did once or twice, to talk about his own interests, which were quite sincere, in the economic development of South Korea -- one of his most urgent personal aspirations -- the President would listen briefly but wouldn't get into much conversation about it.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, we'll go into this later, but just a footnote to your discussion of Van Fleet. One of my graduate school friends at Yale was Roger Hilsman, who was then I believe Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence. I understand that Roger was a great man on guerilla warfare -- do you know that he had any influence on Mr. Kennedy in that regard?

STAHR: I don't know personally, no; I didn't really know Mr. Hilsman in those days. I do know that Walt Rostow who was then Mac Bundy's deputy had a great deal of influence in this. Walt was interested in guerilla warfare and very keenly conscious of its importance in many parts of the world, and he was a gadfly in this business and on the whole, I think, a useful one. I remember taking him down to the Special Warfare School at Ft. Bragg and also talking with him on other occasions. He had a lot of ideas on curriculum for this sort of training.

[-72-]

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, turning from the Van Fleet episode to something not quite related but still connected with the President, this is an affair in which Drew Pearson involved you. Would you care to tell about that?

STAHR: Yes, that one was interesting. In early 1962, not long after, in fact only a few days after, I had testified on Army posture before the House Armed Services Committee, where questions had arisen about the budget that was being submitted for fiscal '63, a story appeared in the Drew Pearson column to the effect as I recall that in executive session I had told the Committee that I felt that the Army had just not been allowed to ask for sufficient funds to do effectively the things that the Army was called upon to do -- in other words to carry out its missions -- and that I was unhappy with the proposed budget, but that since the Secretary of Defense, the Bureau of the Budget, and the President had said this is all the Army's going to ask for, I was in a helpless position in defending the budget. It happened that this just wasn't so; I had actually said to the Committee that I felt the budget certainly had no fat in it, but that it was a strong step in the right direction and would permit us to carry on the orderly buildup that was in process.

Now, against that background, the day that the Pearson column appeared in the *Washington Post* I got a call right away from Bob McNamara saying that the President was upset about this, that he expected better teamwork or something -- I found out later that the President hadn't said quite that -- that he had merely wondered whether this story was true or not, and indeed was somewhat skeptical about it himself, but anyway, McNamara said to me, "What are you going to do about this?"

I said I didn't read Drew Pearson regularly but somebody had shown it to me that morning, somebody in our office. In the course of the conversation

[-73-]

I said: "Look Bob, I don't know whether you believe the story or not, but I happen to have a copy of the transcript of my testimony right here on my desk because I called for it when I heard about the column, and would you be good enough to read it so you'll know what I did say?" He said: "Yes, I'd like to see it." So I sent it up; he read it, and then he called back and said: "Well, it's perfectly clear that Pearson is wrong and we've got to do something about it." I said I had already talked to our public information people, and they felt the best way to

handle it was to ignore it, that you could do more damage than good by getting into an altercation with Mr. Pearson.

McNamara said: "No, that's not good enough, we've got to do something -- you've got to issue a statement or something like that."

I said: "I can't very well do that because the testimony was given to the Armed Services Committee in executive session and the transcript is the property of the Committee, and they will release it as usual when they are ready. It's being edited for security purposes before being released, and it's always the Committee's prerogative to release testimony that it hears. I am afraid I'll get myself and the Army in more difficulty with the Committee than would be justified if I try to contradict Mr. Pearson by quoting from my testimony before it is released."

McNamara said: "Well, you've got to do something."

So I said: "Well, I'll see if I can think of something."

In the meantime, either I had called Ted Clifton or he had called me. I was concerned about what the President's attitude might be. I wanted him to know what the facts were, and I told Ted that I'd like to send the transcript over, if the President would read it, so he'd know what I actually had said. Ted said he'd call me back and he called me back and said,

[-74-]

"The President is perfectly willing to take your word for it, and if you didn't say what Pearson said you said, that's good enough for him and forget that part of it." I then felt that maybe we ought to take another tack -- I was under orders from McNamara really to do something, because he was terribly sensitive about anyone's ever saying that his budget actions would impede military readiness -- so I called Drew over to the office two or three days later, after a graceful interval, and instead of raising Cain I said I felt I'd been misinterpreted by one of his sources, and then spent an hour giving him a great deal of positive thinking about the way the Army felt about Kennedy's defense policies and particularly his attitude toward the Army, that President Kennedy had done more for the Army than had been done for years and that he appreciated its roles and its missions and its problems and its importance and this and that and the other, and I gave him a lot of facts about the buildup which had been going on, the big increase in the upcoming budget for the purchase of new weapons and equipment, the authorization of a couple of new divisions, and so on, all things that were perfectly true and which I would have I think cleared up the notion in anybody's head that the Army was angry and dissatisfied or felt put upon by the President and by that budget -- that's one of the best budgets the Army ever had, incidentally, though it had been a tough fight to get it by McNamara even after the Berlin crisis. Well, Pearson never directly retracted what he had said but he did write quite a friendly and laudatory column the following Sunday about the new Army and the new look and the New Frontier approach to the need for the third option, and so forth -- and that was the end of that.

I recall I asked McNamara why he was so concerned about the Pearson column.

[-75-]

He said: "It's well known that every congressman in town reads it."

And I said: "Then at least those on the committee who are the ones of most importance here, as far as the Congress is concerned, know that he was in error in this case."

"Well, yes, but we just can't have any appearance that there's any disagreement here on our team and we've got to have the old united front," and this, that and the other.

So I said: "Well, Bob, you know I've always been loyal to decisions once they are made, and as long as you and the President know that I haven't been unfaithful, that's good enough for me, and it seems to me it ought to be good enough for everybody else."

It sort of died -- something else came up about that time and distracted McNamara's attention.

This was similar to an earlier incident involving the President and McNamara, and the way they worked together and the way I kind of got pulled in like the tail of a kite sometimes. That was the famous General Walker case. You may remember that a sensational story suddenly appeared, in May of '61 as I recall, datelined in Germany. (We haven't talked about this before, probably because I never personally saw the President on this case, but he was involved.) I got a call, on a Saturday morning -- I was at home, oddly enough -- and I got a call from McNamara saying, "Have you seen this report from Europe about General Walker trying to influence the voting of his troops and so on?" I said, "Yes I'd heard about that" I'd had a report that morning through Army channels as well as seeing the thing in the paper. So he asked: "what are you going to do about it?" I said, "I'm going to try to ascertain the facts, and then discuss them with the Chief of Staff." "Well," he said, "the President's all upset about it and he wants to know something today."

[-76-]

I figured, even though I'd only known Bob three or four months, that he was more upset than the President, because the President didn't seem to have a very short fuse, really. But I was concerned myself -- it sounded bad when it first appeared. It turned out the story was written by a reporter whom General Walker had once thrown out of his office and who had since been threatening to "get" Walker, a German reporter as I recall, or at least a reporter for something called the "Overseas Weekly" which was always needling the American Army in Germany. I've forgotten some of the details, but consideration of the source raised some doubts about the story. Anyway, the interesting thing about it was that the President never did contact me directly -- I don't know how much in the way of briefing that Bob gave him from time to time in the next few days, but by Monday morning the Vice Chief of Staff and I (the Chief of Staff was away), having been in constant touch with General Bruce Clarke who was the commander of the U.S. Army, Europe, had decided that General Walker should be suspended from his divisional command, pending a thorough investigation. There already appeared to be enough in the way of, at the very least, indiscretion on the part of Major General Walker, that we felt that relieving him of his command, assigning him on a temporary basis to General Clarke's headquarters in Heidelberg and having a thorough investigation by a high-ranking general officer -- General Clarke picked Lieutenant General Frederick Brown, who is a very fine officer and was a corps commander over there at that time -- would be the best way to go about it.



Well, I went up Monday about eleven to tell all this to Bob as I had promised. Technically, in my opinion, it was none of his business -- this was Army business -- but technical points were apt to be unimportant to McNamara unless they were on his side. Anyway, he gave me the impression that he was

[-77-]

under some kind of mandate from the President to "do something" about General Walker, and I said: "Well, don't you think that we ought to get the facts? You know, you can't be sure that a story in a newspaper, particularly by a reporter who has some questionable chapters in his own history, and who was known to have a personal vendetta against General Walker, is sufficient basis to court-martial him or retire him or what not." "Well, all right but we still have to issue a statement." So we got in touch again with General Clarke in Heidelberg, who was pretty furious with this interference from Washington, but again he couldn't do anything about it when he got a cable from the Vice Chief of Staff telling him that General Clarke ought to recommend that General Walker be relieved, or that he thought Clarke ought to relieve him. But Clarke played ball and the wording of a press release was agreed on between us and him. Bruce Clarke -- he's retired now; he was one of the very few men left in the Army by this time who had seen a lot of combat in World War II as a general officer, and he was a great officer in many ways.

We got the report of the investigation, of course, in due time. Meanwhile, the papers were always asking questions -- this went on for some weeks. The report finally came in. I then wrote up a statement of what the Army was proposing to do and took it up to Bob and I said: "Since the President is interested in this, I think before we take final action and before we make a statement to the press about it, the President ought to know what we are going to do." Bob was very much immersed in something else -- I remember this was about six in the afternoon -- but I barged in and showed him the statement; he scanned it quickly (he really seemed to have just about lost interest in the case) and asked if a transfer and reprimand by a superior was "much of a punishment." I said that a formal written reprimand to a career officer, particularly of such high rank; was very rare and quite severe, and ordinarily would signal that the man's career hadn't much future in it. He then said, "O.K." when I said I'd

[-78-]

send it over to the White House.

Even though it was in the form of a letter to the President, I never got a direct reply from the President, but Ted Clifton did send it back -- he sent the original back to me and pinned on to it was a separate note saying, "The President has seen this," plus some word like O.K. or go ahead or something like that. But I'm pretty sure that as far as the White House records go there was nothing left over there at all.

Of course another mild storm blew up in the papers when General Walker was brought home (by the Army) and it wasn't very long after that when he resigned -- he did not retire -- and became Mr. Walker. The General Walker case is mainly interesting, for the

purposes of this interview, I think, for the fact that the President apparently was interested but kept entirely in the background, and I think he was smart in doing it. I also think it would all have been handled with far less pain and suffering to the Administration and to the Army if the Army had been allowed to handle it from the beginning in its own way, but that's another story. Walker became a sort of hero, or at least martyr, to some people, and a good deal of this might have been avoided. But maybe not.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, one more chapter on your relations if not immediate, then connected with the President. This concerns the Corps of Engineers.

STAHR: One of the most interesting examples of the effective way President Kennedy worked as a sort of combination administrator and master politician was in connection with the appointment of a new Chief of Engineers, which occurred fairly early in the Administration, upon the retirement of the outgoing Chief. The Chief of Engineers is a terribly important figure in the

[-79-]

relations of the executive branch with the legislative branch because of the billion-dollar-a-year program of building dams and locks and carrying out flood control projects and navigation projects and rivers and harbors work and all that sort of thing in which, of course, every congressman is interested in seeing that his own district is properly taken care of. When the President learned that a new Chief was going to have to be appointed, he got word to me (I've forgotten how for sure, but I think it was through Ted Clifton rather than through one of the civilians in the White House, though it may have been through a phone call by one of the civilians) that he wanted to know how the thing worked. I got the word back that we had a promotion board of senior officers who screened all the potential new Chiefs of Engineers and submitted to the Secretary of the Army a list of three and that the Secretary from among those three recommended to the President that he send to the Senate the name of one for appointment. I was given to understand that the President would appreciate it if, before I formally sent a name over, I would ascertain that the appointment would be well received by the President, that the name would be well received by the President. This, of course, makes sense. On the other hand, the President as far as I knew didn't really know any of the prospective appointees. I was a little curious about how he would determine whether he wanted to receive a given name or not, and I found out. It was suggested to me that, when I thought I knew whom I wanted to recommend, I take that gentleman over to see Senator Bob Kerr of Oklahoma, pay a little courtesy call, after telling the Senator that we were considering some people for the Chief of Engineers and we knew of his great interest in civil works and civil functions of the engineers and that I'd like him to meet the General I was thinking about before the time came for the Senate to consider his appointment

[-80-]

and give its advice and consent. I thought this was a rather interesting exercise -- with any other branch of the Army this would have been extremely difficult, but the engineers are very sophisticated politically. Having determined that General Wilson was the man we wanted (and of course he was on the list; he was the number one man on the list and he was recommended to me by the Chief of Staff on that basis as well as on the basis of personal knowledge). I first wanted to meet the General myself, so I called him in from Fort Belvoir where he was then the Commander and chatted with him, found him a personable fellow, and decided this would be a good man and I could see no reason in the world to reject the recommendation of the promotion board. So I then explained to General Wilson exactly what was going on -- as I say, having been in the engineers all his life, he knew about congressional relations better than almost anybody in the Pentagon. He went along with his amiably enough, and we went over and talked to Senator Kerr. Senator Kerr was, as everyone knows, a very dynamic soul; he was keenly interested in a project out his way in the Red River Valley, an enormous project which there were some doubts about as far as the cost-benefit ratio or economic feasibility was concerned. In any event, Senator Kerr said: "General, I want you to understand, I came to Congress and I've stayed here for just one reason and that is to do everything I can for the State of Oklahoma -- I don't really have any other interest here at all." Well, we took this with a slight, but not a very big grain of salt -- I'm inclined to think he really meant it. But in any event, nothing was said overtly about the upcoming appointment. As I recall, the excuse for taking Wilson over, the official reason used in the little game we were playing, was that I just wanted to see Senator Kerr and get to know him a little better and that since he had recently asked some question which I thought maybe General Wilson could answer, I brought him along.

[-81-]

Well, in any event, soon after that I was advised that it would be all right if I wanted to send General Wilson's name over to the White House. There's no question at all in my mind but that the President and the Senator had a little conversation following this visit in which the Senator said that Wilson seemed to be alright or something like that. It was just interesting to me that the President had that much concern about his own relations with Senator Kerr. There were a lot of other Senators and a lot of other Congressmen, many of them keenly interested in who might be the next Chief of Engineers, but the only one that the President went to come pains to line up ahead of time was Bob Kerr, as far as I know.

There was one other case where I saw the results of the President's thinking without having the opportunity to talk with him about it and that was a rather heart-rending case of an American soldier who had gone berserk over in Germany and had committed a really dreadful crime, a combination of rape and murder and not all right on the spur of the moment. After raping the girl he had gotten concerned that she might testify against him or something so he had run her down and tried to kill her by beating her with some kind of object, I've forgotten what. She'd gotten away, though, and he had chased her again and beat her almost into senselessness, and then had thrown her into a river, an icy river -- of course that brought her to and she struggled and was trying to swim away and he ran in and drowned her. It was just about as bad a case as you can get. Whether or not he was drunk when he

raped her I don't remember but he wasn't by the time he hunted her down and killed her. He had been court-martialed of course. The German populace had been terribly exercised about all this, and rightly so, but this wasn't the reason he was given the death sentence; it was because he deserved it. Eventually the case came up through all the levels of appeal and was confirmed through all the

[-82-]

court-martial processes and by the U.S. Court of Military Appeals, a civilian court, and nothing was left but an appeal for a reprieve, first to the Secretary of the Army; and after thorough review and consultation with the Judge Advocate General and with the General Counsel and others of my advisers, I felt that I had no real choice except to approve the sentence -- and the only thing left then was to seek clemency from the President. The case went over to the White House, taken by the lawyers for the soldier, who was in confinement. The case was referred, quite in the ordinary course, to Lee White, who was Ted Sorensen's assistant, a fine young man and a fine lawyer. Lee was deeply upset by this because as it turned out he himself personally just didn't believe in capital punishment, but in the end he briefed the President as objectively as he possibly could about the case, though telling him that he personally hoped the President would grant clemency (at least this in the feedback that I got; I didn't talk to the President); and the President, after thinking about it, I'm sure, in a very soul-searching way for some days, finally told Lee that he felt that the Secretary's judgment ought to stand on this case.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, here's another White House meeting that you had, with General Jablonski and a group of officers.

STAHR: This was sometime in the spring of '62. The President, as I have said earlier, was keenly interested throughout my whole time there, and I'm sure right up to the end, in this whole business of counter-insurgency, guerrilla warfare and that kind of thing, and particularly in what was going on in Vietnam. He was not only interested in Vietnam in itself, as being a really major problem for this country and for the free world, but he was also interested in seeing to it that the Army as a whole got a sense of the importance of what we sometimes call sub-limited warfare ingrained in all of

[-83-]

its thinking and planning, and particularly in its training. So he personally (I'm sure my memory is right on this) -- he personally conceived the idea that one way to help this process along would be to send key younger officers, from what one might call the working level of the General Staff in the Pentagon, to Vietnam to observe what's going on and to get the feel of the thing. A group of four or five officers, lieutenant colonels, colonels, brigadier generals, who were doing the guts of the staff work, so to speak, in various sections of the Staff, was to be sent to Vietnam for four to six weeks and then come back and be followed by another group, and so on. After a period of time the President's idea was, and I might add I think it

was an excellent idea, that there would be a really solid sprinkling of officers in key spots who had some firsthand understanding of the problems of fighting in the kind of situation that we had in Vietnam. Well, the first group that went over was headed by a Brigadier General by the name of Jablonski. We all called him "Jabbo" and he was a very fine officer (he's still in the Army; he's been promoted since). He was a straightforward guy and a very straight talker and in many ways I think was ideal for this first role. Anyway, he and his group went over for four or five weeks, and I think many of us had more or less forgotten about this. But when they came back, it wasn't more than a day or two before I got word from the White House that the President would very much like to see personally this first group that had gone over there and talk to them, to find out what they'd seen and what they thought about it. So I took Jabbo and this little group of officers over and we sat in the Cabinet Room with just the President for at least 45 minutes one morning. The official time sheet shows 10:30 - 11:35am, Tuesday, March 27, 1962. They first told him a few things they'd seen, and then he started questioning

[-84-]

them -- it was really a highly interesting reporting session with the President asking all kinds of questions and showing the keenest possible interest. I don't think there's any question but that this was one of his deepest concerns and greatest enthusiasms sort of rolled into one, the idea that this country has got to learn how to fight in these sorts of unclear, nebulous situations where you're not quite at war -- the sort of thing we still have in Vietnam, as a matter of fact -- how you work with the local people and what kind of training our own troops need, what kind of equipment they need, all that sort of thing.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, here's another meeting with the President concerning civil defense when Governor Rockefeller of New York was present.

STAHR: The background of this is well known by now. The President was concerned from the beginning of his Administration and possibly had been even before, so far as I know, with the fact that civil defense just wasn't getting anywhere, at least anywhere very significantly. Somewhere along the line he conceived the idea that the best way to get it moving was to transfer it to the Defense Department -- it had been in the Executive Office of the President under the Office of Emergency Planning which was then called, as I remember, the office of Defense Mobilization. The only point of interest here is that after he had told Secretary McNamara that he wanted the Defense Department to take over civil defense, McNamara's first idea and one to which he has incidentally recently returned, was that this should be done by the Army. Leaving out the reasoning behind that, I'll just say that he called me one day and said, "I want you to take on civil defense." Well, I greeted this with something less than enthusiasm, but I said, "Well, I'll see what I can do." I had a couple of meetings with the head of the Office of Defense Mobilization, a very nice chap

[-85-]

who is now a federal judge in Louisiana, and some of his staff and mine, and was just beginning to try to get hold of the problem, as a preface to trying to work out some solutions, when the Executive Committee of the Governors' Conference got an appointment with President Kennedy to talk about civil defense. It may well be that they had set up this appointment a little while before and that in contemplation of it the President had adverted to the matter sufficiently to decide to make this move so that he could tell them when they came in that he was getting on top of it. I don't know; maybe I'm a little cynical, but I doubt it in this case. In any event, when this group which included Governor Rockefeller of New York, Governor Brown of California, and I've forgotten but I think the Governor of Colorado and one or two others, arrived to talk to the President, he had me over there and sort of said to them: "Now, gentlemen, I'm keenly interested in this and I want to hear what you have to say." And he did -- and the Governors made a good pitch along the lines that we've got to wake the country up, and we've got to get some more appropriations for shelters and this, that and the other, and the states are keenly interested in this and they're doing their job but we don't think the federal government is. The President then said: "Well, I've got the Secretary of the Army here and we're going to put civil defense where it belongs, in the Department of Defense, and the Army is going to be the action agent of the Defense Department for this and so I wanted the Secretary to hear what you had to say and give you a chance to exchange views with him," and then the President left and I chatted with the governors a little while. They went away feeling I think a little better than they had before, because they thought (and I think at the time at least it seemed very sound from anybody's point of

[-86-]

view) that the Defense Department had a better chance of getting the needed appropriations than this independent agency. That's about all there is to that except that the President did continue his interest in civil defense. Eventually it was decided to set up a new Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civil Defense because this is really a full-time job and not something that the Secretary of the Army can do out of his hip pocket. Since there were some other things involved besides the Army, it was put in Defense at least to get it rolling and Steuart Pittman came in and set up a fine program. But they still have never gotten all the appropriations that careful students of the problem feel are necessary if we are to have a good civil defense. The only relevance here is that the President did stand behind the Defense Department and did his best to help persuade the Congress to beef up the program and indeed, whole they didn't get everything they asked for, they did get a significant increase that first year. I believe it began to fall off again the following year.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, here's one more somewhat ancillary arrangement with the President and this concerns Ambassador Duke and the former Ambassador to Panama, Mr. Farland.

STAHR: As the Secretary of the Army, I had to keep up to some degree with what was

going on in Panama as well as in the Canal Zone, and I knew that Joe Farland, who was the Ambassador to Panama, was the only non-career officer with the rank of Ambassador who was a Republican who had been kept on by the Kennedy Administration. He had been kept on because he was doing an outstanding good job in Panama having been transferred there from the Dominican Republic before Trujillo's assassination. I knew from our Army people in the Canal Zone, and from the civilian employees who ran the Panama Canal Company, and from a personal visit and so on, that Farland had established

[-87-]

excellent relationships with the Panamanian government and that he and his wife were both extremely well liked by the people. I knew, as everyone else did or should have, that the thing was a powder keg, because back in the latter part of the Eisenhower Administration there had been a riot about flying the flag and so on. This had all quieted down -- but there was a continuing unease about a fence which had been built to protect some of the housing in the Canal Zone from hoodlums and looters. This had been resented by the Panamanians because they thought it was an evidence that we were keeping them out of the Canal Zone, despite the fact that the fence didn't go anywhere near the length of the boundary; it just went on one side of a residential area. For some reason, and we won't go into all that, for a good many years there had been rather difficult relations with Panama about the Canal because they still think it's on their territory and they don't think we pay them enough rent (they wasted all the money they made out of it during the War.) I also know that Joe Farland liked the diplomatic service and wanted to stay in it, but I had heard there, there and yonder that possibly he just couldn't be allowed to stay on forever, not belonging to the proper party. In any event I ran into Angie Duke at a reception at some Embassy, I think the Vietnamese Embassy maybe, shortly before I left, and said: "Angie, I've got a very deep interest in the Panama Canal, therefore in our relations with Panama; I've been down there, my Under-Secretary has been down there several times -- he's the Chairman of the Board of the Canal Company -- and I just want to urge to relay to the Secretary of State and hope that he will to the President, that I think it's extremely important that we keep Farland on as Ambassador of Panama just as long as possible." Angie said: "Well, we know he's doing a fine job, but it may not be too easy. Anyway, I'll relay the message." I left Washington soon after and never heard anymore from this; I suspect that Angie did indeed

[-88-]

relay it. There's a poignant note about it because a few months later Farland's resignation was accepted. I have no idea what led up to that except what he said publicly, but as we all know it was only about six months after that when the whole thing blew sky-high down there; they had terrible riots and our relations with Panama went to an all-time low, and it's probably the only real trouble we've had on a completely bilateral basis with a country in the free world. I still can't help feeling that if my advice had been taken and if Farland had been kept, this wouldn't have happened.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr ,on March 24, 1962 you happened to run into the President out in California.

STAHR: Yes, that was one of the most amusing things I guess that I ever got tied up in. The President had been on the West Coast for a couple of days and was spending the weekend relaxing, as I recall, at Bing Crosby's house, down around Palm Springs, and my wife and I were visiting Jackie Cochrane and her husband, Floyd Odlum, at their rance near Indo -- this was a visit that had been set up long before, though we were just stopping over for the weekend after I'd had to be in Los Angeles on Army business. In any event, the fact that the President and I were both around there at the same time was sheer coincidence and, as far as I know, he didn't even know I was there. On Saturday morning, March 24, I had been over playing some tennis at the Eldorado Club, the Eldorado Country Club, which, as everyone knows, is where General Eisenhower spends his winters (he has a cottage out on about the eleventh tee or something like that.) President Kennedy had come over to pay a courtesy call on General Eisenhower. I hadn't even read the paper that morning; I was just taking life easy. I had known the President was in California and I guess I'd heard some rumor that he might call on General

[-89-]

Eisenhower sometime, but I had forgotten about it. In any event, I came out of the Club, having finished my tennis and shower, and I was wearing some Bermuda shorts in a madras pattern, and a sort of yellow polo shirt. A girl by the name of Ginger DeVeau, who was Jackei Cochrane's social secretary, happened to drive right by the front of the Clubhouse as I emerged, and she saw me and stopped -- she had another lady with her who turned out to be Ann Whitman, who was the Eisenhowers' social secretary, and I said: "Where are you going?" They said: "Why, we're going down and gawk at the President and the General." I said: "What do you mean?" They said: "Didn't you know that President Kennedy right now is down at General Eisenhower's cottage. They've been chatting for nearly an hour and he's due to -- the President's due to -- leave at any minute, and the Club is barred to the public and everything. We're just going down and see them when they come out of the cottage. Wouldn't you like to come along?" I said: "Sure." So I put on my dark glasses and got in the back seat and we crept along, and somehow or other got by the Secret Service -- in fact by sheer luck, since I didn't have any identification with me, it just happened that one of them recognized me; he was one that worked regularly around the White House and he had seen me there, and of course Ann Whitman was well known to one and all since she was always with the Eisenhowers. So, we drove up fairly close to the cottage -- although the public was not allowed in the Club grounds, the press was, and there were a half dozen TV cameras and some still cameras; there wasn't going to be any press conference, it was just that they wanted to get pictures. So I sort of stood in behind. There were a few people who lived at the Club, a few of the golfers and so forth, who had strayed over -- although I remember looking out on the course and seeing that most of the people were still playing golf and paying no attention to either Kennedy or Eisenhower -- but there was a little crowd, thirty to forty



[-90-]

people all together I suppose, and I got into the crowd and stood there. It wasn't two minutes before sure enough here the two great men, both very neatly dressed in business suits, came out of the cottage -- they were chatting quite seriously, but not intensely, I'd say, and the crowd broke into applause, a little smattering of applause, and both of the gentlemen looked up and smiled and with typical -- I'm afraid I wasn't even then aware as I should have been of how alert this man was -- but with what really was typical alertness, President Kennedy with his eyes just swept the crowd, and in what seemed to be one second had seen everybody there. To my astonishment, and dismay, I might add, he suddenly turned his head back in a sort of double take, looked at *me* rather intently, broke into a big grin, and then held up his hand -- and beckoned to me. I was very reluctant -- I was embarrassed to have been seen, and I was reluctant to do *anything*, but what do you do? So, I walked out in front of all these cameras and everything and I could hear whispers behind among the California newspapermen: "Who's that?" In any event, I walked on up to the two gentlemen -- I had to walk about twenty feet in all -- and as I got up to them I heard the President saying: "General, you know my Army Secretary, don't you?" Ike looked up and grinned and said: "Sure." As a matter of fact we'd become pretty good friends at Walter Reed; he was in there frequently for checkups and both he and Mrs. Eisenhower had been awfully nice to my wife once when she was sick out there. Anyway, the President made a crack or two to me about: "Where did you get that costume, or what have you been up to, or you look like you're off duty or something," I've forgotten just what he did say. I explained rather lamely that I wasn't exactly *on* duty, and I certainly hadn't meant to horn in, and while the three of us were chatting and kidding somebody took a picture and the next day it was on the front page of the Sunday paper, the Riverside *Californian*, with my rear, you see, to the camera in

[-91-]

shorts, and two well-dressed presidents, one over each shoulder, kidding me. I know have a print of that picture, and it's a prized souvenir, but at the time I could have gone right on down through the sod cheerfully.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, here's another case when you had some conversation with the President -- this was on the way to the Army-Navy football game.

STAHR: Actually, it was mostly on the way back. I was Secretary of the Army for eighteen months, but it covered only one *autumn* since my tenure as Secretary went from January, 1961, to January, 1962, to June. In the late autumn each year, as is well known, the Army and Navy academies have a little football game in Philadelphia. The hose institution alternates, and as luck would have it my one autumn as Secretary was the year the Army was the host. A lot of preparations go into this. The President is always invited and usually goes -- you remember the old custom, he sits on one side of the field the first half, the other side for the second half. We had set up a special train

on the Pennsy to go from Washington to Philadelphia, and had two special cars at the rear of it, in one of which I had my personal guests, and in the one right behind it the people who sort of had to be in the President's entourage were hooked on. The rest of the train -- it wasn't a very big one -- was taken up with army officers and their wives and some Congressmen, and a few other guests of the Army for the game. Well, the President couldn't go up with us, which was sort of a disappointment but I think probably he was just really too impatient to take a long train ride when he could jump on a plane, then jump in a helicopter, and be there in half the time, but he did arrive in good time, well before the game began, sat in my box next to my wife and me, of course, and it was a beautiful day and we chatted amiably. We didn't have as much opportunity to chat as I would have liked because photographers were swarming around down in front of the box and people were

[-92-]

coming up and wanting to greet him -- I remember Governor Dave Lawrence of Pennsylvania showed up and of course we were in his state so we had to be nice to him, in fact I guess I had invited him to sit in the box, now that I recall, and there were a lot of other people pulling for the President's attention, so I don't have any great affairs of state to report on in this connection. Then, at the half, he crossed the field and went over and sat with John Connally, the Secretary of the Navy, and there I think he felt more comfortable really, as an old P.T. boat man; he obviously couldn't help being for the Navy but he was very courteous about it that first half. After the game, however, he did go back with us on the train and he was in my car, and shortly after we pulled out he walked down the aisle and greeted everybody in the car, a dozen or more people. The Ambassador of Iran was one of my guests, and his wife who was the daughter of the Shah by his first marriage (to King Farouk's sister). This is somewhat irrelevant, but the point is that the President made appropriate remarks to them as to others. Arthur and Mr. Goldberg were another pair of guests. Incidentally, Arthur had been very anxious to see the game and had asked me a few days earlier at a meeting of the Fair Employment Committee if I could get him a couple of tickets. I said: "I can do better than that; I'll take you with me." He was just tickled to death and he's been a friend of mine ever since. It was a very nice group. After speaking to everybody and exchanging a few words, the President started to go back I think to the car behind where he could sit and relax with his military sides and other people who were close to him, but about that time he saw Phil Graham, the publisher of the *Washington Post*, and it was very obvious that they admired and respected each other. He stopped and sat down -- somebody vacated the seat so he could do it -- he sat down with Phil and they chatted for at least half an hour. I didn't eavesdrop; I don't know what they were talking about, but

[-93-]

it was a serious sort of conversation. About the end of it they called me over and we chatted a few more minutes -- I remember one of the things we were talking about was the importance and the difficulty of getting high-caliber young people interested in public service. We talked about that for another five or ten minutes and then the President excused himself and went

back in the car just behind and sort of took it easy. One of his aides, Godfrey McHugh, the Air Force aid, came up and got me a little bit later -- it wasn't a terribly long ride, of course, from Philadelphia to Washington -- came up and got me and asked me if I'd like to come back and have a drink. I said I thought maybe that would be nice so I went back and sat down and had a drink with three or four of them. The President, as I recall, was reading something. He looked up a time or two and made some sort of kidding remark at this one or that one and seemed to be relaxed and happy and enjoying himself and I suppose the fact that the Navy won the game may have contributed to that.

[-94-]

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, after our interviews last year, Secretary Dutton sent a group of appointments which we didn't cover and so let's run down through those and we'll then put them into the typescript in some form, perhaps in the form of footnotes. Here's the first one, which relates your conversation with the President on Friday, March 24, 1961.

STAHR: I have already discussed at some length the lunch with the President at which McNamara, Gilpatric, Connally and Zuckert were also present, but I had forgotten at the time I was describing the lunch that it followed the little ceremony in the President's office at which he put his signature to the commission which I had already signed restoring to Dwight D. Eisenhower his rank as a General of the Army. He had held the 5-Star rank of course before he became President -- he gave it up when he became President, and on President Kennedy's recommendation Congress passed very early in 1961 a bill authorizing the restoration of the commission to ex-President Eisenhower and he became General Eisenhower again. We had drawn up the commission and I had signed it in the Pentagon and sent it over to the President for signature, and he decided that he's make a little something of it even though Ike was out in Palm Springs and apparently didn't feel like making the long trip back to witness the signing himself. So those of us who shortly afterwards were to have lunch with President Kennedy, plus Vice President Johnson, lined up behind the President's desk, and he used several pens in signing it. I now have in my study one of the pens he used, together with the pen that I used, framed with a picture of the ceremony. The lunch itself I have described, but according to this list that Mr. Dutton sent us I had about ten minutes with the President alone afterwards. This comes back to me now -- this was a little discussion of the role of the National Guard and the Reserve, a subject which keeps

[-95-]

coming back into the news from time to time. The President was concerned about the National Guard -- he had a picture of it as something very political and not very useful militarily. I told him that I thought he'd better look into this a little bit before he decided on anything drastic. He possibly thought that I was just a stand-patter, but the fact is that I had heard this argument before, more than once, back in the days of the Korean conflict, when I

was in the Pentagon, and I didn't see any point in his plunging into something with so little prospect of profitable conclusion. He was new then -- but I remember being struck by the disturbing reflection that all too many intelligent American don't really understand the importance of the citizen soldier concept in a democracy.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, I see that you talked to the President from 2:50 to 3:00pm that afternoon after lunch. Can you remember anything about that?

STAHR: Yes, that's what I was just describing. I think I dissuaded the new President from trying to launch a downgrading of the National Guard.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you had a meeting with the President on Friday, April 14, 1961. Do you recall anything about that?

STAHR: Right off, and indeed after some reflection, I just can't remember what that was about -- I see that I was with him for about 14 minutes, which is a long time the way he gets down to business quickly and concentrates on it, but I just don't remember what that might have been at all. Just for the record I think we might note that the National Security Council meetings which I attended in that Spring period of 1961 included those of April 22, 27, 29, May 1, 2, June 13 and July 20. I think I've already described these in about all the detail I can remember -- they nearly all had to do, well, they all had to do in one degree or another with Laos, with Vietnam, and with Cuba,

[-96-]

and I think I've recorded about everything worthwhile. I do remember that General McGarr, who was back from Vietnam, attended one of the meetings, and I mention again that the questions of what to do about Laos and what to do about Vietnam kept coming up over and over, but I think we'd better stick with what I said when my memory was fresher.

Earlier also, I have said a good deal about what I call the General Van Fleet episode, and for the record I now note that the first time I took General Van Fleet over to the White House he and I went alone on Tuesday, October 10, 1961, at 4pm, and as I remember, we spent at least 45 minutes with the President in one of the upstairs reception rooms or sitting rooms. Then the next time was December 14, 1961, when Van Fleet and I were with the President for 26 minutes from 10:20 in the morning to 10:46. Apparently those were the only two times and I believe I've already described them adequately.

I notice the date, Thursday, June 28, 1962, when I was with the President from 12:35 to 12:50pm, 15 minutes -- that's the one you'll remember when he gave me the souvenir plaque and it's the one where I expected to be with him not more than 4 or 5 minutes and I think I said I thought I'd stayed with him at least half an hour -- it turns out it was 15 minutes, according to this list. This is a very good example of something about President Kennedy which struck me over and over -- that is, that he was able to get down to business in a hurry and pack an enormous amount of thought and discussion into a relatively short period of time. He was always courteous but he didn't waste much time in small talk, at least during

office hours, and he could roam a very large field in a few quick strides and leave you with the feeling that he'd plowed it pretty thoroughly.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, in most of our interviews thus far we've talked about

[-97-]

the President and your appointments with him and occasionally this has taken us into some other areas, discussion of policy and organization of your office, but now I wonder if we couldn't turn to what we could properly call a second major category of your work as Secretary of the Army, and this would be roughly the organization of your work in the Secretary's Office -- now this is a roaming field and let's simply start with some ideas here and move on into it.

STAHR: Well, the Office of the Secretary of the Army technically is a fairly large -- comprises a fairly large group of people, but the immediate office of the Secretary, during my time, was staffed by no more than a dozen, I suppose, including secretaries and stenographers, and the like. I had a private secretary, Dottie Haywood; an executive officer, Harry Kinnard, who was then a Colonel and one of the most promising young officers in the Army, which was the reason I had picked him as my Executive Officer. He has become very well known since then. When I felt in July of '62 I pinned his first star on his shoulder and he went down to Ft. Benning to organize a new and then experimental division called the Airmobile Division. This, as I say, was an experiment -- it was to be a test of the concepts in the so-called Howze Report, named for General Hamilton Howze, chairman of the study group and later the UN and 8th Army Commander in Korea. The report sprang from an effort on the part of Howze and some forward-looking young people in the Army, like Jack Norton, to look at the Army of the future with particular reference to mobility -- the increasing use of helicopters and small aircraft and that sort of thing, and the modifications of tactics and equipment that would be needed. There was a lot of argument about it, about the Howze Report, and the Air Force tried very hard to shoot it down, but McNamara stuck by the basic concept quite well, I think, and decided that he would authorize the necessary spaces

[-98-]

and funds to set up one experimental unit and see if it would work. As I said, Harry Kinnard was given the command of it, and it worked out so well that by 1965 it was authorized to be converted into a regular division -- it was renamed the First Cavalry Airmobile -- and sent to Vietnam. They pulled the designation out of Korea, re-designating one of the Divisions there. And as the whole world knows, in Vietnam it has been heavily engaged in fighting for the last several weeks and even as we are now talking.

Now, let's go back to 1961-62: Harry was a very fine Executive Officer to the Secretary. His job was to review all of the papers that came into the Secretary's office that

were of major official importance, to talk them over with me, to go back and get further information where that appeared to be desirable, and in general to be sure that we had all the facts before I gave the Secretary's official approval -- or otherwise. He also was in general charge of the organization of the immediate office -- he had 3 or 4 officers under him, each a specialist in some particular area, though usually a fairly broad area. Among the three or four they covered the entire Army spectrum: one was something of a specialist in personnel matters; somebody else in matters of supply, procurement and the like; somebody else kept up pretty closely with things like the Panama Canal, rivers, and harbors, that sort of thing; and so with a very small group Harry had the ability to assess information, staff papers, and so on right in the office at any time on almost any subject. That's about all there were in the immediate office -- except of course there was a receptionist, usually a WAC private or corporal, and a switchboard operator, and three or four girls who worked for the Military Assistants who had the assignments I mentioned. I also had a very outstanding Aide-de-Camp, Johnny Davies. The larger Office of the Secretary of the Army (OSA) included the Correspondence

[-99-]

and Records division and several miscellaneous activities for which there didn't seem to be any more logical place in the Department than in OSA. My best recollection is that there were two to three hundred people who were assigned to OSA, but not more than 12 or 15 of them would I be likely to see in the course of a month, or even six months, personally.

I don't know whether I mentioned before or not that one of the significant things about the Army Secretaryship is the close relationship with the Chief of Staff -- I believe I did mention that the offices are adjoining; that it has been the tradition since the Revolutionary War, or rather since Washington's first Cabinet, that the door between the Chief of Staff and the civilian Secretary is never locked, and this is more than just symbolic. Nevertheless, the Secretariat -- which is an interesting combination of civilian and military people, just as the General Staff is an interesting combination of military and civilian people -- the Secretariat is distinct from the General Staff, and the Secretariat and General Staff and the top echelons of the Technical and Administrative Services together comprised what is called the Department of the Army -- the headquarters of the Army at the seat of Government. The routine of the Secretary himself is rather minimal, but there is some. I'm of course talking about 1961 and '62, but I have some reason to know that what I'm about to say hasn't changed very much since and, indeed, it was not dissimilar to what had been going on before. On one morning of the week -- Monday morning or Tuesday morning, for about an hour, there is a meeting of the Secretary of Defense with the Service Secretaries and the military Chiefs. This is called the Joint Policy Council and is the only time the civilian Secretaries and the top military officer of each service normally

[-100-]

sit together. The Joint Chiefs of Staff is a separate organization entirely, and may or may not, usually will not, have members of the civilian Secretariat meeting with it, although it was not

uncommon for McNamara to meet with the Joint Chiefs during some part of their regular sessions.

In addition to that morning meeting early in the week in OSA, I always had a luncheon meeting of my own at least once a week with the Undersecretary, the three Assistant Secretaries and the General Counsel of the Army, and the Chief and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. Beyond that, I would have afternoon meetings once or twice a week with just the Undersecretary and the Assistant Secretaries and General Counsel. Though we never deliberately tried to exclude the Chief of Staff, we would usually meet when he was meeting with the Joint Chiefs, let's say. The whole point of all these meetings in my own office was to try to keep everybody reasonably well informed of major things facing us, major problems under study, and to help each other think through the important matters for which one of us might have primary personal responsibility. I always tried to run the shop as a team operation -- I didn't just try to tell everybody what to do; I always tried to be available to give them any guidance they felt they needed and sometimes to give them guidance I wanted them to have, but we really tried to run the Department as a team and not as a sort of monolithic command post. The personal relationships were excellent; we all liked each other; we all enjoyed discussing things with each other; we respected each other's judgment, and I think a lot of things were handled much better because they had been talked over -- and not just signed off on the basis of a piece of paper that some one person had written up. I think the record should include the names of my own immediate

[-101-]

associates, because they were really superior people, and I'm extremely proud that I was able to recruit them and to persuade the President to appoint them and send their names to the Senate for confirmation. My Under Secretary was Stephen Ailes, who later became Secretary when my immediate successor, Cy Vance, succeeded Ros Gilpatric as Deputy Secretary of Defense. My Assistant Secretary for Installations and Logistics was Paul Ignatius, whom McNamara later made Assistant Secretary of Defense for Materiel. My Assistant Secretary for Research and Development was Finn Larsen of Minneapolis-Honeywell, who is also now back in the Pentagon as an Assistant Secretary of Defense. My Assistant Secretary for Financial Management was Bill Schaub, who had had a long career in the Bureau of the Budget working on Defense budgets -- and speaking of budgets, even in my day the Army budget was something like a billion dollars a month. My General Counsel was Powell Pierpont, a fine young lawyer who is now back with his New York law firm. I believe I've spoken earlier and often of my Chief of Staff, General George Decker, and his Vice Chief, General Clyde Eddleman.

Fairly often -- there wasn't any routine about it -- but once every week or two I would invite somebody to lunch that I wanted to get to know better, or perhaps had some reason for wanting to establish relationships with, or sometimes just as a courtesy. I can remember a great many people whom I had to lunch in the office -- people like Averell Harriman, Max Taylor, Jim Webb, Stu Symington, several other senators as a matter of fact; and, incidentally, before I forget it, I had during the course of 18 months probably five or six big parties -- stag parties usually -- either in the Pentagon or on the *Sequoia* (the Secretary of the Navy's yacht

which he was very generous about lending to the Secretary of the Army) for members of the Congress, particularly those who were on the Armed Services Committees or the Defense Subcommittees

[-102-]

of the Appropriation Committees. This was not lobbying, in the sense of trying to butter them up and sell them something that they might not otherwise have bought, but rather it was to establish the kinds of relationship which could lead to much more free and frank discussions of things of mutual concern. For instance, it had the effect, I think of giving Army witnesses a slightly more courteous reception when they appeared at formal hearings before Congressional committees. When you know somebody, you are more apt to give him an opportunity to state his case with his best foot forward than if you are listening to and questioning a person that you never saw before, and as everybody knows Congressional Committees can be pretty rough on witnesses. But they were rarely rough in the sense of being rude -- they would ask the same probing questions but in a different atmosphere -- they were never rude to me or to the members of my Secretariat or to the senior officers whom I had taken some pains to get them personally acquainted with. This simply made the business go more smoothly, and I think it was actually in the best interest of the Congress itself and not just of the Army. Furthermore, in informal conversation on social occasions you can often get things across more clearly than when you're talking for the record and every word you are saying is being transcribed and you're not really talking to anybody man-to-man but are more in the position of someone who's stating the official line. Certainly the members of the Congress seemed to enjoy these informal get-togethers and stated more than once that they themselves felt they had benefited from them. However, as I say, there weren't more than perhaps five or six occasions were several senators and congressmen would be with us, in the course of my 18 months, except for some semi-formal receptions; and of course the innumerable hearings on the Hill. The Legislative Liaison group of the

[-103-]

Army staff, which works directly for the Secretary, rather than through the Chief of Staff, because Congressional relationships are supposed to be conducted under civilian supervision rather than military -- and this is right and proper -- that group did a fine job. They had a small group of bright young officers over on the Hill all the time, and they ran many errands for members of the Congress, got to know them and their own staffs, etc., and helped them get information from the Pentagon on a daily basis, which is necessary for the proper running of the whole operation. Despite the fact, however, that there was constant liaison on a face to face basis anytime a member of Congress would want is, there were still thousands of letters which were addressed to the Secretary of the Army in the course of a year from members of the Congress, and have I described before how we handled these things? Very few people in the Congress -- sometimes a freshman Congressman -- might expect personal attention from the Secretary to any matter he wrote about, but the old hands knew better. It would have been a physical impossibility for the individual with the title, Secretary of the Army, to read all the



mail that came into the Pentagon addressed to the Secretary of the Army. In fact, even just the mail that came from the Hill, from the Congress. The latter was handled in the Legislative Liaison branch, and there was a sort of pecking order, I suppose you'd call it, with regard to who would sign the reply. I won't go into detail -- I'm not sure I remember it accurately in detail and it's probably just as well that there be not too much detail generally known -- but the upshot was that the reply to a letter from the Speaker or from the, say, Majority Leader or the Minority Leader or from the Chairman of an Armed Services or Appropriations Committee, would be signed personally by the Secretary, who would usually do a little double-checking of both the language and the content to be sure that he could stand by that reply, and

[-104-]

this would work all the way down to the point where a letter from a freshman Congressman who is not a member of any committee of direct importance to the Department would get his reply, courteous and factual and pretty prompt, to be sure, but probably signed by let's say a Lieutenant Colonel who had looked into the facts and signed off on it. In other words, you have to have a lot of people composing and signing replies when you have thousands of letters to be replied to. It's generally thought that there's a sort of unwritten law in the Pentagon that Congressional mail must be answered within 48 hours -- this is not really always possible, but it does get priority attention, and this is as it should be because the Congressman after all represent the people of the United States and each of them represents a great many people. But you'd be surprised how much correspondence comes directly from the public and from people in business, from local Chambers of Commerce, Governors, etc., etc. In one way or another the military establishment does affect the lives and jobs and so on of very large numbers of people in this country. Every soldier has a mother or nearly everyone does, or a wife, or even a number of other people who are keenly interested in him, and their letters are always answered, whatever they may be. Anyhow, though it takes a lot of work, I don't think we want the government to operate any other way.

Now, since you have given me free reign today, I'm reminded that there were four rather major reorganizations of the Army or parts of it either completed or launched while I was the Secretary. The period 1961-62 was a time of taking new looks -- this was in general the natural result of having two people like President Kennedy and Secretary McNamara in their particular jobs -- neither of them had the temperament to accept things as they are just because that's the way they are, and the whole spirit of the New Frontier I think was

[-105-]

perhaps involved here too. In any event, there were, as I outlined in my letter to President Kennedy when I submitted my resignation after a year and a half, four different areas which were given a complete new look during my tenure, and I was to a considerable degree involved in each of the four, though of course so were a good many other people.

One was the reorganization of the Technical Services. This was really undertaken, I must say, on the urging and almost insistence of McNamara and Gilpatric, but the curious

thing was that it did not meet with the kind of pig-headed resistance on the part of the Army itself which McNamara and Gilpatric had anticipated. As a matter of fact, the only thing I had to insist on was that the Army be given a chance to work out this reorganization itself and not simply have some kind of arbitrary scheme imposed on it. The reason was not any particular feeling of sensitivity that the Army's feelings might be hurt, although I was constantly concerned about morale, and I still think it's a terribly important thing in any human organization -- or an organization of humans -- but the fact is that the people in the Army knew more about what they were dealing with, in my judgment at least, than anybody in the office of the Secretary of Defense could have; furthermore, they were the ones who would have to make the new organization work if it were going to work. I've always had the sort of philosophy myself that good people can make any kind of organization work and poor people can't make any kind of organization work. Of course, if you get good people and good organization, you've got the best. In any case, if you have good people, you ought to require them to put the arms and legs on any organizational plan rather than try to mastermind it from on high. The upshot was that I was able to obtain the concurrence of McNamara and Gilpatric to have the Army itself take a look at the organization of the

[-106-]

Department of the Army with particular reference to the Technical Services. The Technical Services themselves, particularly the senior members, looked upon all this with a good deal of apprehension, but they were cooperative in nominating and releasing really able officers in the middle grades, Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels, and Brigadier Generals, from spots all over the world, for six months of intensive study of the best ways of improving the organization. The old-line Technical Services were thought to be tremendously powerful, and I am still convinced that McNamara and Gilpatric felt that they had to "break down" the Army Tech Services if they were ever going to get hold of the Army and make it function the way they wanted it to. I think it was perhaps something of a surprise to them to find that the Army itself, with the exception, as I say, of a few of the top people in the Tech Services, did not take the negative attitude one would expect a vested interest to take. The Tech Services, of course, are those branches of the Army which -- I think I can illustrate best just by naming some of them: The Quartermaster Corps, The Signal Corps, The Corps of Engineers, the Ordnance Corps, the Transportation Corps -- these are the branches which curiously enough down through the years have been most sought after by the top graduates of West Point. These are the branches which provide the supporting services -- they are to be distinguished from the so-called combat arms, such as Infantry, Artillery, Armor, and so on, which do the direct fighting. They have a special appeal to bright young men who see them as opportunities for service with a good deal of intellectual content and challenge and also as places to get experience which could be useful in or out of the military service. Down through the years it had been mostly the Technical Services which had had the relationships with industry which some people had been a little bit afraid of. You remember President Eisenhower

[-107-]

made some remark about the military-industry bloc in our society that had to be watched carefully. It was this part of the military, not the fighting part of the military, but the technical people who designated and procured and disseminated the weapons and the equipment and supplies and all the rest -- who had the relationships with industry -- and they had a system which it was pretty difficult to tinker with, simply because it was so highly systematized and staffed by such able people. They usually knew what they were talking about, and I've never seen reason to question their motivations. Instances of attempt at personal gain were so rare as to be absolutely phenomenal. But the problem was still that they were so compartmented -- they had built up so much in the way of tradition and special ways of doing things and so on, on their own -- that not only the civilians but the people on the General Staff (as distinguished from the Technical Staff) sometimes felt that the Technical Services were not as responsive as they ought to be. For one thing they tended to be a little bit too perfectionist -- in the design of a new weapon, for instance, they'd sacrifice time for efforts to get the most perfect possible weapon of whatever kind it was. The same thing was true in vehicles; from the point of view of the man who was designing the vehicle, he wanted one that would perform, had great endurance, and all kinds of capabilities in all kinds of terrain, and this, that and the other. Well, it takes more time and more money to produce a perfect vehicle, and sometimes the combat people would rather just have one that would work pretty well and for a reasonable time, as long as they could actually have it.

Many underlying considerations led to this reorganization and it was pretty sweeping -- the beautiful thing about it was that not only did the Army plan itself but it did not result in one of the things the Tech Services

[-108-]

had most feared, namely, the stunting of career opportunities for officers in their particular branches. On the contrary, as we kept telling them it would, it really broadened those opportunities; as he got up toward the top, for instance, a man in the Signal Corps could qualify for a position much broader than let's say just being Chief Signal Officer or something of that sort. By the same token it provided the opportunity for combat officers to get into command and staff positions in the new types of supporting agencies which came out of the reorganization. The Technical Services, you see, had developed some rivalries with regard to equipment -- the jurisdiction over kinds of equipment. Just a plain radio was pretty obviously within the bailiwick of the Signal Corps, while the artillery piece was pretty obviously within the purview of the Ordnance Corps, but suppose you have a tank with radio equipment and various guns, or a helicopter with radio equipment and armament and seat belts. The old-time Tech Services weren't really set up for the more complex kinds of weapon systems and equipment, and there was a good deal of scrapping around back and forth as to who would do what. Under the reorganization, broader categories which cut across the Tech Services were established -- the Mobility Command, for example. The mobility command was responsible for development of any kind of equipment that had to do with moving the Army around -- the Transportation Corps, which formerly, let's say, had complete charge of certain kinds of vehicles, had people in the Mobility Command but so did

Ordnance and Signal and so forth and so on. Each Tech Service had previously had its own test and evaluation groups, and these now were combined. There was a new Combat Developments Command established which by now is working very well, whose job it is to look ahead and develop on the basis of research whole new systems of equipment. Whereas the Ordnance Corps, let's say, would have been trying to perfect a weapon that in turn might be mounted on a

[-109-]

tank and then controlled by radar, and therefore three or four Tech Services would have to get into the thing sooner or later -- the Combat Developments Command just automatically does the coordinating because it's got all these people in it from the beginning. Well, this has been a pretty long and still not too lucid explanation of one of the four reorganizations of 1961-62. The others I'll touch on much more briefly.

There was a reorganization of the Reserve Forces brought pretty far along while I was there! It was called a realignment. This is being done again now, I notice -- the current thing is perhaps a logical development of what McNamara was after even back then, though less wise, in my opinion. The more recent effort is usually called a merger of the Reserve into the National Guard -- a somewhat oversimplified description, though perhaps not too much so. What we were trying to do when I was there was simply to develop an overall reserve force, of both Guard and Reserve units, which would fit in with , make possible the rapid implementation of, our contingency plans, with selected units at a very high state of readiness and phased on down so that over a period of x-months after a mobilization might be required, an orderly buildup would still be going forward. There were then and probably still are arguments about how long a time after M-day, mobilization day, there should be plans for and even more importantly, in a way, not only how far ahead should plans go, but how much should be done in advance to make possible the implementing of those plans. This gets into classified stuff and I've forgotten as to some details what's classified and what's not, so I'll not get into details, but the point is that the element of judgment has to enter in sooner or later. I've always, I'm afraid, had the feeling that Mr. McNamara tends to cut things a little bit too fine with the application of his "cost-effectiveness" techniques -- they're just great if you don't really have to

[-110-]

fight, but if you do, you want the margin to be -- you want the odds to be a lot better than 51-49. Anyway, we did reorganize the Reserve and Guard a good deal -- we did designate certain units as high priority and laid plans to give them more nearly full equipment and full manning and what not, and to cut a lot out of the rest, and this sort of things has to be done a step at a time no matter which direction you're going. As I say, I'm a little concerned about the direction we're going now, but I'm not close enough to the thing for my judgment to be very useful.

The third reorganization was the beginning of the reorganization of ROTC -- the plans were made and the concepts worked out and so forth while I was there, and I actually

took the responsibility of turning the Army staff loose on a new ROTC program. I'm told that my predecessor just wouldn't do this -- he was absolutely committed, emotionally I think, to the importance of compulsory ROTC for freshman and sophmores in the more than two hundred institutions where the Army had units, and he just didn't want any compromise with that principle if it could possibly be avoided. I took the position that what we really wanted was the most effective kind of ROTC program from the point of view of production of highly qualified young officers for the active and reserve forces and therefore I told the staff to do away preconceptions and work up a program which would best achieve those ends. The Air Force had been at this for some time, but the Army had been, as I said, holding back. When we let the Army loose, so to speak, there soon emerged a new program which after a certain amount of give and take went to the Hill, and in '64 finally the Congress did pass the first new ROTC Act since about 1916.

The fourth reorganization was what came to be known as ROAD,

[-111-]

“Reorganization Objective: Army Divisions.” This was particularly interesting because the Army divisions had really been reorganized less than ten years before under the leadership of General Maxwell Taylor, the then Chief of Staff, and they had been reorganized from the old “triangular” divisions of World War II into “pentomic” divisions. This had been the result of General Taylor's own concept of a division able to fight in a nuclear situation where tactical nuclear weapons were being used. The basic combat elements of the pentomic division were five “battle groups.” The Army had not been terribly happy with the pentomic division; it had a lot of bugs in it, but perhaps most importantly, a battle group just didn't have quite the punch, the power, the beef that is needed in a non-nuclear situation certainly. Moreover, the whole concept of defense had been undergoing a change from the notion that the next war would be a push-button nuclear affair, to the notion that it very well might not be and certainly shouldn't be, and that nevertheless, we must be prepared to meet serious situations short of nuclear war or the free world will be nibbled to death by ducks, so to speak; in short, the notion had revived, after the weakness of “massive retaliation” began to soak in, that we might have to fight a conventional campaign someplace, maybe even in Europe. In fact, with Khrushchev's ultimatum in the fall of 1961 to get out of Berlin, the whole ROAD concept picked up some steam because it was perfectly clear that if we did have to fight in Europe, we'd be fighting against an enemy that had very powerful conventional forces. Without going into all the technical military reasoning about ROAD, and that's not really my province anyway, there were some interesting things about the getting this particular reorganization carried through. In the course of a reorganization, any division temporarily loses some of its effectiveness; thus, in the transition

[-112-]

between pentomic and ROAD it was felt that a given division wouldn't be as effective as either the pentomic or the ROAD and this of course would be true for some period, and so, with all of the tensions that existed at the time there was a certain amount of justification for

proceeding rather slowly with the reorganization even though there was a degree of urgency to achieve its results. McNamara was sold on ROAD, I think, the first time he heard about it -- he seemed to be, although it was carefully explained to him that a ROAD division would require more fire power, more vehicles and weapons, and somewhat more, a few more men, than the pentomic, and all these things translate into money. This helped him be cautious about it, I suppose, but he still seemed to be ready to go on it until he found that General Taylor had heard about it and was not very enthusiastic about it. As I mentioned a minute ago, Max really was the author of the pentomic concept in the first place, and by this time he had come back to Washington and was sitting over in the White House as the President's Military Representative. I think it was in the course of the preparation of the budget for fiscal '63 which was going on in the late fall of calendar '61, that McNamara was finally persuaded by us -- as a matter of fact, he'd apparently been persuaded by us at the beginning of the Berlin crisis to put into the third add-on to the fiscal '62 budget some money to implement the ROAD concept. When he took that over to the White House, however, somehow or other the President was persuaded by General Taylor to ask some questions -- Taylor didn't presume to advise against ROAD directly -- that was not supposed to be his role, but he did write out a series of questions which the President sent over and said he'd like to have the answers to. I guess McNamara got the message that there was something less than enthusiasm somewhere in the White House, but he did go ahead and

[-113-]

let us put in a little bit of money for the conversion of two divisions, on a sort of experimental basis I suppose. We kept pushing in the preparation of the regular '63 budget to put in the funds to go ahead and complete the reorganization, and now I've forgotten whether we ever got it all in that year or not, but the reorganization did proceed slowly over the next couple of years and by now I believe all the divisions have been converted to this newer concept. As I say, that one would have been easy if it hadn't cost some money and if there hadn't been a certain amount of delay. I'm not suggesting General Taylor was wrong in wanting to be absolutely sure before making such a drastic change, but rather commenting that Secretary McNamara's initial enthusiasm didn't lead him as sometimes it might to stride right on down the path without caring where the chips might fall. Gee, that's a mixed metaphor!

You asked me about how we were able to achieve an increase in the size of the Army between January, '61 and the time I left. This is an interesting story in itself. Immediately after -- in fact, even a few days before the inauguration in January of '61 -- Secretary Designate McNamara had put together a Task Force whose purpose was to take a look at the budget which the Eisenhower administration had sent to the Hill a few days earlier and see what recommendations the new Administration might have about it, the Defense budget. The President himself had laid heavy emphasis, and so had Secretary Rusk (in the now famous leaked memorandum from Rusk to McNamara, the leaking of which infuriated McNamara) on the thesis that we had to build up, and build up rapidly, our conventional capabilities. The President had decided firmly that he had to have a "third option," that the two options of inability to respond on the one hand or total nuclear response on the other were just

[-114-]

insufficient, that he needed realistic, usable force with which to work to restrain the Communist ambitions, not just the scarcely credible threat of massive retaliation which had become the by-word under Eisenhower and Dulles.

So the main purpose of this first Task Force was to look at our capabilities for non-nuclear defense, for dealing with less than total war. That Task Force, headed as I recall by Paul Nitze, recommended a substantial increase in the size of the Army, which had been cut down drastically since Korea indeed, at the time there were really only eleven combat divisions in the entire Active Army. The Task Force recommended quite a good-sized increase -- the total authorized strength of the active Army was then just 870,000 officers and men. I've forgotten the recommendation of the Task Force, and maybe it's just as well, for in any event all that we got out of it was an additional 5,000 -- and these were all earmarked for the Special Forces, for training for counter-insurgency and guerrilla type of activity. There was nothing whatever for beefing up the conventional strength, and there was very little put in that first budget add-on for new equipment and so forth, although the modernization of Army weapons and equipment, which had been growing increasingly obsolete and obsolescent for years, was a major Army objective. We just weren't able to shake Mr. McNamara, even though his own Task Force had recommended an increase in the size of the Army and cited a number of modernization needs. That chilled me, rather early in the game, and I never really got back on McNamara's wave length.

The Army Chief of Staff had already let it be known that he thought 925,000 was the minimum that should be in the active Army in times like those, but 875,000 was all we were allowed to ask the Congress for. There were one

[-115-]

or two efforts by the press and by the Congress to get me on the spot I remember, and in parrying them I turned out to be something of a prophet. For instance, I was on a TV show called "Issues and Answers" somewhere around February or March of '61 -- they threw at me the direct question as to whether the Army disagreed with Mr. McNamara on this 875,000 and specifically whether 925,000 authorized strength was what the Army felt the Nation needed. I ducked it by saying that I didn't want to get into the numbers game, that this matter was still under study, which it was, at least by me, that I rather expected there would be additional add-ons through the Spring and Summer as the new Administration's studies made more progress and that I wouldn't be surprised if we ended up with *more* than 925,000 -- and somehow I got by that question. That was a bold and rather desperate statement in all the circumstances -- you will of course appreciate that I had to try to keep up the Army's morale on the one hand and yet stay in a posture on the McNamara team from which I could have a chance to help the Army. Well, of course in the end we did end up with more, much more, and I'm very glad that I didn't say publicly that we'd settle for 925,000, although that had been actually the official Army posture for the previous year or more. Studies did keep going, and in addition we kept pushing. We said the very least we've got to do is convert the

three training divisions into combat divisions, which would give us 14, but we didn't get anywhere on that. There came a second add-on and virtually nothing in it for the Army, some more for air-lift and sea-lift and so on, but we were still having a hard time, and I was getting a bit desperate; and the Army, whose morale had been dealt studding blows three or four times in the years after Korea, was becoming highly skeptical that the new Administration really had any better insight into the kinds of

[-116-]

options needed than the previous one had had. It was, ironically, not McNamara but Khrushchev who saved the Army and me. A third add-on came that fall, incredibly at the "last moment" before Congress was to pass the budget, and it came as the result of Khrushchev's statement which appeared to be and was meant to be, I'm sure, an ultimatum, about Berlin. It was at that point that I guess the President finally realized that he simply didn't have enough active Army. All of a sudden all the arguments we'd been giving Mr. McNamara, having been reinforced by Mr. Khrushchev, became real to Mr. Kennedy. He stepped into the picture and that changed McNamara's decision fast, even though Bob's change was far more grudging than the President ever knew. We had to have a quick call-up, of course, to reinforce Europe and Berlin, but at the same time the President told Bob flatly that thereafter he didn't want to have any more of this calling up Reserve and National Guard people on a partial basis in numbers which could reasonably be expected to have been on active service in the first place. So it was around October or so of 1961 -- ten months and many heartaches late -- that we finally got permission to strengthen the active Army. We had had to call up two National Guard Divisions to active duty, and a number of other troops, more than 100,000 in all, right out of civilian life, some of them serving for the third time, having served in World War II and Korea. This just wasn't very popular because these people and a lot of Congressmen knew perfectly well, as I did, that if the Army's own protestations about its need had been headed, the call-up wouldn't have been necessary. That was the beginning of really serious doubts on the Hill that McNamara was a superman, I think.

Anyway, with the help of Kennedy and Khrushchev we finally got an authorization for a substantially higher strength than either the 875,000 *or*

[-117-]

the 925,000 -- during that winter we had more than a million men in the Army, in the active Army, and by the time we let the Reserves and Guard go home -- the last of them came home in August of '62 as I remember -- by that time we had beefed up the active Army to somewhere around 970,000, something of that sort, and had got an authorization not only to convert the three training divisions to combat divisions, but to add two more divisions which would give us something like a reasonable basic capability of meeting emergencies in more than one place in the world at once without committing our entire strategic force at home.

It was always hard to persuade Bob McNamara that there might be an emergency in more than one place at once -- he has an extremely stubborn trait of trying to force facts to fit his own conclusions and beliefs, and he's usually brilliant in the effort. I can understand his



reluctance to over-prepare, of course; being in constant readiness for a larger scale of danger costs more money and he's very averse to spending money and we all agree with that. But sill money is not quite as important as human life or even as the ability to support whatever policies the President may feel are necessary to the security of the country and the free world, and I frankly doubt that the strength of the Army would have been raised to his day if the emergencies actually hadn't come forth. We wouldn't be any more ready now than we were -- and that would have been disastrous by now. The difficulty is that it's always *far* more costly and *far* more dangerous to prepare to respond to an emergency after it occurs, far more risky than to be ready for it. Not only is it obviously more costly to do anything on a crash basis in terms of money, but the fact is that the emergency is more *likely* to occur if your ability to respond to it is not evident. Too many wars have started in the past because of miscalculation of this country's ability to respond, the miscalculation being based

[-118-]

on the fact this country obviously wasn't *ready* to respond and the enemy figured this could only mean that we didn't want to respond and wouldn't. This business of national defense is much too serious to be played with, and while I'm not suggesting that McNamara plays with it, I am suggesting that he tends to lean a little bit that way -- he treats it as an intellectual challenge to himself to outsmart the professionals -- he tends to cut things a little bit too fine. He tends to be a little too optimistic about how things are going to turn out -- he underrates the enemy just as he underrates his own generals and colleagues. He figures that money not spent will be money not wasted. This is fine -- military force is a terribly expensive thing and utterly useless if you don't need it; but if you do need it, and to me it is the prime lesson of at least post-World War II American history that you do need it for deterrence and not alone for direct response, then you've got to have it. Within some kind of reasonable limits, at the very least it is surely true that the deterrence of war is far *more* economical than the fighting of war -- and if deterrence fails, the ability to defend effectively is far *more* economical than a long war.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, we've just gotten through a large category which we might title 'organization' this is the second of the three major categories here in your interview, and we turn now to something we might call policy, and we start here of course with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Mr. Stahr, I understand you made a speech about that.

STAHR: Yes, I was invited at the instance of some of the American delegates to address the NATO Parliamentarians Conference in Paris in November of '61. Secretary of the Army I wasn't very directly involved in policy of that kind, but more in the development of the forces necessary to the implementation of any given policy. This is the role of the Services as distinct

[-119-]

from the command chain these days, and while the Services as such make some contributions to policy, in general they are implements of policy, and should be, rather than the makers of it. But in the case of NATO, I decided to accept this invitation. I've forgotten all the reasoning that these Congressmen had about why they wanted me there, but that doesn't matter. The most interesting thing about it really is a little side light it throws on some of the clearance procedures around the government. Everybody's heard about the fact that a government spokesman is apt to be very guarded in what he says. We all remember Admiral Burke was rebuked semi-publicly because he'd been rather outspoken about something, and Curt LeMay every once in a while would speak his mind in public to the great dismay of the State Department and others. So I sat down with my staff and talked a little bit about what I might say over there. We also hit on the notion that I might ask the President if he'd like to send a message to the NATO Parliamentarians Conference which I could read and this was done, and incidentally of course his statement got a good deal more attention than mine -- this I anticipated and of course wanted. Mine I intended not to get much press coverage, though it got a good deal of attention at the Conference itself. The reason was that I had been kind of dissatisfied with the editing that had been done on my draft by the people in Art Sylvester's office; Art was Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Information, and still is, and he had a group of people whose job it was to clear speeches that were going to be made by anybody in the military establishment, civilian or military. They were operating apparently on what they considered to be guidelines from the State Department, and that's right and proper, since the State Department has the primary responsibility for foreign policy and the Defense Department doesn't; Foreign Policy is a

[-120-]

ticklish thing and can be messed up by the right people making the wrong speeches sometimes. But I thought they had really taken all the guts out of the speech I wanted to make and I protested and was told these were all in line with State Department policies, these changes and deletions. The deadline was fast approaching; as I remember, I was to leave for Paris on Sunday and I didn't get this draft back until Saturday morning, maybe it was Friday night, and I didn't have time to get very bureaucratic about all this so I called Dean Rusk and found him as I rather expected I would on Saturday afternoon in his office; I told him I had this speech coming up and I had some problems about some of the language and could I come down and talk to him personally about it for a few minutes. He said, "Sure, come on," so I did and the really curious thing was that he not only agreed with me that some of the changes that had been suggested left the speech sounding kind of watery and hardly worth delivering at all, but he actually strengthened a number of things beyond what I had originally proposed. Sometime somebody ought to dig up my draft and then the draft with all the red lines through it and then the final draft, and, realizing that the final draft had the personal approval of the Secretary of State and indeed some of the language was suggested by him, one could write a pretty interesting little article for some periodical. The thing was, I think, that down in the bureaucracy of the State Department and down in the bureaucracy of the Defense Department there is a natural and on balance probably desirable mental attitude of extreme conservatism. If the censor is going to be responsible -- in effect he becomes

responsible after the censors the thing -- he's going to extreme lengths to be sure that the old maxim is given effect, the old maxim that you can't hang a person for what he didn't say. That maxim is of course not completely correct in itself, but in any

[-121-]

event it explains why an awful lot of speeches that you hear from people at medium and lower levels in government really don't have much content or much inspiration in them. I do think perhaps I was a bit -- I may have been a bit -- audacious in going directly to the Secretary of State, but there just wasn't time to let the bureaucracies argue with each other for a week or so. My recollection is that there was a certain amount of grumbling around in Sylvester's office, but I don't remember anybody's ever calling me on the carpet about it -- the only person who could have would have been McNamara, and I guess they never bothered him about it. I don't know, however, that some of the people in my office were called in and asked why they had tampered with the censored draft and when they explained they hadn't tampered with it, that I had changed it personally, I think they were about to jump on me, but I let the word get back that I had cleared it with the Secretary of State and I didn't see any point in quarreling with the underlings in the Department of State, and I guess they dropped it. The press, as I say, picked up the President's statement, which I quoted and which took up the first page or so of the release on my speech, and that's about all they had space for on the wires.

Turning to another topic for a moment, I didn't have any direct connection with SEATO but I do remember -- I've forgotten whether we've discussed this before -- but I do remember something interesting from one of the very rare meetings when the Chiefs and all four Secretaries met together, in this case at what was basically a meeting of the Joint Chiefs to discuss what recommendations the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs should take to the White House regarding what we ought to do about Laos. We actually -- somebody drafted a paragraph -- and each of us was asked to edit it. I remember that I

[-122-]

took the position that we should not send American forces aone into Laos, that if we went -- I felt that we needed to get some force in there -- but I felt it should be a SEATO force. I didn't like the American presence by itself; in fact, I think we should have multi-lateralized our side in Vietnam much earlier than we did, and we should still be trying perhaps to do more in this direction than we have. But that's another story. For some reason or other, I couldn't sell this SEATO approach to McNamara; he was concentrating on the basic question of whether we should send anything in there at all, and I'm pretty sure our final recommendation is classified, at least as far as my knowledge of it is concerned. I'm not the one to say what it was, anyway. I believe I've already mentioned that at the Security Council meeting the Chief of Staff of the Army pointed out the Army Surgeon General's estimate of very heavy casualties in Laos from tropical diseases, which I am quite sure gave President Kennedy some pause. But I was a little disappointed all the time that we spent so much of the discussion both in the Pentagon and, it seemed to me at least, in the Security Council, on the

subject of what the U.S. should do, and we didn't seem, to me at least, to be involving our Allies sufficiently and taking advantage of the fact that they had commitments too in the Far East, particularly the SEATO countries. I don't mean they were ignored, it's just that it seemed to me there were three alternatives, not two: 1., don't send American troops; 2., do send American troops; 3., send American troops together with, and only together with, the troops of Asian allies. Most of the arguments were just on the basis of the first two alternatives, or so it seemed to me.

Now, on a somewhat related topic, my only direct connections with the Rio Pact or with the Alliance for Progress, or any of that sort of thing,

[-123-]

were peripheral, except (as I've already mentioned) my keep and official interest in Panama. I met socially a lot of the Latin American Ambassadors, and I was a very good friend of Chep Morrison, who was our Ambassador to the OAS, but I didn't fool around with foreign policy except to try to help make friends. You asked me earlier about relations with Great Britain and France as seen from where I sat -- I didn't get very deeply involved in those either, though the Army was keenly interested in certain things in France because our supply line to Germany went through France and there were always some problems about the French permission to do this, that or the other, and we employed a great many French civilians in the zone of communications and supply. I did -- when I was in Paris on the way to Berlin in May of '61 -- I did stop and have a very pleasant hour or more with the very able French Minister of Defense, Pierre Messmer. We talked about a good many things -- though we were really just getting acquainted and weren't attempting to settle anything in particular. This was the time that the so-called Secret Army was giving them fits in France about Algeria, there were plastic bombs and this and that, and I remember he told me that there was a serious morale problem in the French Army because of differences on national policy and that some very fine officers were going to have to go. I met him again later when he visited this country; in fact, I escorted him at his formal review of the Guard of Honor that was put on for him outside the Pentagon, and then he came to my office for a more or less formal chat -- and I privately spent 15 or 20 minutes chatting with him. He brought up in some way or other, very diplomatically (I think he was trying to feel out with me and others, the sentiment -- not the policy, but the general sentiment -- in our government)

[-124-]

the matter of our possible assistance to France in developing its nuclear capability, and he made the point that France was as good as anybody and that we had helped Britain develop nuclear capability and why wouldn't we help France; France was going ahead anyway, and why put the strains on relationship? I ducked around that one, of course, saying that was out of my field.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, you had something to say about Mr. Profumo.

STAHR: Well, Dr. Ferrell, this one is just for amusement, rather than for historical significance. I suspect that by the time historians start digging around in the Kennedy Library, few people indeed will remember who Jack Profumo was and even fewer who I was. At any rate, in the spring of 1962 I received an official invitation from my counterpart in the United Kingdom, the Secretary of State for War (who held approximately the same position there that the Secretary of the Army holds in this country, because by then they too had a Minister of Defense), inviting me to come over to England to pay an official visit, inspect the British Army or at least some elements of it, some of their installations, and generally establish some personal relationships and some official relationships, because there was a great deal -- there is always a great deal -- of room for cooperative work between the U.S. Army and the British Army, and many joint projects and plans, and this, that and the other. Having gone to Oxford in my youth, and not having been back since I left in 1939 -- not even having been back in the British Isles -- and feeling that indeed since I had visited officially Berlin and Vietnam and NATO headquarters and a number of other places around the world, including Korea, Japan, Taiwan and so forth, I certainly shouldn't reject an invitation to visit Great Britain, I accepted. From that point on a good deal of correspondence went back and forth between my aides and Mr. Profumo's aides,

[-125-]

and quite a "visit," to last about three days as I recall, was laid on, in considerable detail. It included either tea or dinner, I've forgotten which, with the Queen -- that will give you an idea how the whole thing was set up. Along about the first of May -- I was scheduled to go over in June -- along about the first of May I accepted the appointment at Indiana University and President Kennedy accepted my registration, as I described earlier, effective July 1. I suddenly thought about this upcoming visit to England and so I sat down and wrote Mr. Profumo and said, in effect, "Look, although in June I will still be the Secretary of the Army I will also be very much a lame duck, and it really seems a pity to me for your government to go to all this trouble and expense and investment of your own time and energy to entertain me as beautifully as these plans call for when within a couple of weeks thereafter I'll be out of office and you'll have to start all over again with my successor. I'd still love to come, but I would suggest that you hold open the invitation and I will urge my successor whoever he may be to take advantage of the first opportunity he may have to come over." Well, to my partial dismay, though since my letter was honest it was neither a surprise nor a real disappointment, Profumo answered saying that perhaps I was right, and so the trip was canceled. My wife has always kidded me since about all this, because she has said what a wonderful opportunity I passed up by being so noble -- I might even have met Christine! That's really about the end of the story, because it is well known that only a few months after this non-visit Mr. Profumo had to resign his post in circumstances quite embarrassing to the Harold Macmillan cabinet, and I suppose that even if I had stayed in our government and had established some good cordial relationships with Profumo, they still might not have had any lasting constructive effect on U.S.-British relations.

[-126-]

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, I understand that you went to West Berlin and had some experiences there.

STAHR: Yes. None of them were unique, but maybe the more interesting point is that they probably were typical. I went to Berlin in late May of 1961 after spending some time in West Germany. I went through the corridor on the official train of the Commander of the U.S. Army-Europe, General Bruce Clarke. He and I and our wives slept on this very pleasant pullman overnight through the corridor and woke up in Berlin the next morning. I was there two or three days and I remember one of those days was Memorial Day, May 30, 1961. I traveled a good many places as Secretary of the Army and there was some but not great to-do made about it in most of them, but in Berlin I remember at the airport (Tempelhof) when we left, as well as when I arrived at the headquarters of the U.S. Commander-Berlin, who was then General Al Watson -- (a very able officer and who is now our Commander in the Ryukyus with headquarters in Okinawa, a very sensitive spot just like Berlin, and he's just the kind of man who can handle that sort of thing) -- both at the airport and at his headquarters there was a crowd, not a huge one, such as greeted more notable people, but there was still a crowd and a very -- not just friendly, but -- an almost anxious crowd. My major impression in fact was that the people of West Berlin in those days -- this may still be so, for all I know -- but certainly in 1961 -- needed constant reassurance. It wasn't like visiting any other place I've ever been -- there was nothing taken for granted at all about American friendship or American support or the presence of American troops -- there was an underlying feeling, at least it seemed so to me, of insecurity -- and when you made your few remarks to the waiting reporters and so forth, you could tell that no matter what else you might say, about the

[-127-]

weather, about why you happened to be there, or anything else, unless you strongly reiterated something that had been reiterated constantly by our government for years, that the Americans were there to stay and that the freedom of West Berlin was vital to the freedom of America itself -- that sort of thing -- they'd either keep pressing you or be terribly disappointed. You would think it had been said by then so many times, and indeed it was said a good many times afterward -- you remember the enormous cheer that President Kennedy got when he went over there even later, when he mentioned this same theme and said that he was a Berliner -- meaning that the freedom of Berlin was important to him and to all Americans and all freeman -- you remember the reception he got; well, on a smaller scale, I got the same kind of response by saying, in less dramatic terms to be sure, the same thing. I also had the experience which I'm sure many others who visited there had, of going down to the City Hall (it wasn't the old Rathaus -- that was in East Germany -- but Willi Brandt had set himself up in a perfectly decent public building in West Berlin and this was his City Hall) and signing the Golden Book -- which was a privilege granted to distinguished visitors or supposedly distinguished visitors -- and then going in and chatting with the Mayor for half an hour, maybe a little longer. I remember being struck by his vitality, by his determination, his

basic seriousness -- but with a nice overlay of cordiality -- a pretty thin overlay (I don't mean that underneath there was a lack of cordiality but) -- underneath there was a tremendous seriousness in those days. Even though we didn't have any specific, detailed problems to talk about person-to-person, there was an obvious desire on his part to convince me, even though I didn't need convincing and I had very little influence on American policy, to convince me that we had to stay in Berlin. He was very complimentary about

[-128-]

our troops there -- and he was thoroughly justified in that -- for actually the most striking things to me of my whole visit were the appearance, the demeanor, the spirit, the morale of the U.S. troops in Berlin. But Mayor Brandt, the first time I had ever met him -- I met him later in Washington at least a couple of times -- was obviously a young man on the go -- but not just personally ambitious, at least that's not the way I read him. He was in a genuine hot spot; he wasn't a bit afraid of it; but he knew he couldn't last a minute without help and therefore quite intelligently he lost no opportunity to insure that that help would stay there. And since the Army was the principal thing we had in Berlin -- and still do -- he wanted to be absolutely sure that the Secretary of the Army was committed to keeping it there.

I mentioned the morale of our own American troops; this struck me everywhere in West Germany. In '61 we weren't too far beyond the '48 airlift -- even though it had been a good many years everybody there remembered it. There had been at least one instance in between in which the Russians had made some heavy rumblings about getting us out of there, and of course, as we all know, within four or five months after I left Berlin was a major crisis, the first time that we'd had to call up our own Reserves and National Guard since Korea -- because the Russians decided again to tell us to get out of Berlin. That was the Berlin Crisis, so-called, of the fall of '61 somewhere around October or so which I referred to earlier. The people of Berlin when I was there were not just dreaming -- the Communists most earnestly did want us to get out. They assuredly did want to take over West Berlin; they built the Wall in August of '61, you will recall, which wasn't long after I was there. I wasn't dreaming when I sensed the tensions and the anxieties and the feeling of insecurity and the earnest, desperate almost, hope that America wouldn't change her mind

[-129-]

and leave the West Berliners to their fate. It's hard for us in this country to understand this kind of anxiety -- but it's an unforgettable thing when you run into it in other parts of the world as I have done at least four times -- I hope we never do have to run into it at home.

I've strayed a little bit again. I started to say that throughout West Germany I was impressed with the demeanor, the conduct, the discipline, the almost lighthearted but deeply proud spirit of the American troops there. There were more young Americans in Germany in 1961 in uniform than anywhere else in the world, except perhaps in the United States, and a small but very strong contingent was in Berlin itself. But in Germany we had the entire 7th Army and still do. At that time and possibly still, despite Vietnam, it is the most powerful Army that this country has. I'd been told, and found it to be true, that the closer you got to

the frontier the higher the morale and the greater the pride of the American soldier -- these soldiers were, 90% of them of course, just kids from 18 on into the early 20's. They were typical Americans, a pretty good cross section. They behaved themselves magnificently; they had a feeling of mission -- and you could understand it when you went where they were -- when you walked along that Czech border, for instance, which is one of the most horrifying things I've ever seen in my life -- I haven't been back to Berlin since the Wall was built -- but the entire Czech border between Germany and Czechoslovakia was for hundreds of miles a solid line of tank traps, barbed wire fences, observation towers with searchlights, a scorched earth strip, some tens of yards wide which no human being could get across without being observed -- and shot -- you just have to see that sort of thing, at least a fellow like me does, to have it soak in completely. This was not to keep us out; this was to keep their own people in, and all this had

[-130-]

been built through the years since World War II. The American public was never as conscious of it, as I remember, as they were immediately of the Berlin Wall, which again -- the Berlin Wall -- had the same purpose, and it is less effective in preventing escape, I suspect. But somehow this again symbolizes the drama attached to Berlin -- a wall in Berlin a few miles long can attract infinitely more attention in the Free World than a similar kind of construction hundreds of miles long which is not in Berlin. The Iron Curtain is *not* just an imaginary thing -- that whole Czech-West German border and the whole East German-West German border is still heavily fortified, is still patrolled constantly, daily, night and day, rain or shine or snow, and sometimes it gets extremely cold and the snow gets deep, and all the rest, in that territory. This is still there, it's a daily fact of life for thousands of troops on both sides -- but we at home never think about it. The soldiers who are there think about it -- they live with it -- they undergo considerable physical hardships, but their response is nothing short of inspiring. I've not known a single American, civilian or military, who has visited and observed the East German-West German or Czech border or has visited Berlin who hasn't been touched and really inspired, because these soldiers of ours have a feeling that the Russian is *not* nine feet tall when they get close to him, and the closer they get the less apprehension they have -- whether they have a reason to be less apprehensive is something else. Their response is not one of fear; it's not one of anger or aggression, it's just one of cold determination and complete confidence.

FERRELL: Mr. Stahr, we're getting toward the end of the interview and I have a few questions here now. As Germany and more particularly Berlin is a special Army responsibility and has a major importance to our foreign policy

[-131-]

one also has the case of Korea -- did you have any experience in Korea during your Secretaryship?



STAHR: I did indeed. In fact, I was over there around March or April in '62. I had seen a lot of the Koreans in Washington at their Embassy and at my office and around town. When I went there in the spring of '62, it wasn't very long after the establishment of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction headed by General Park Chung Hee, who since that time has been elected President, who was then the head of the Junta which had overthrown Syngman Rhee and had taken control of the government and had set out on a very ascetic course to clean up corruption, to vitalize the economy, to really get, as President Kennedy would have put it, to get the country moving. I was very much impressed with Park Chung Hee -- I am convinced to this day that he is completely honest; he's completely dedicated to his country -- he's not the bombastic sort. He is authoritarian in a real sense, but he's not an individual dictator in the sense that Hitler and Mussolini and others may have been -- he's not bombastic; he doesn't beat his breast and make loud speeches and put on big parades and assume the trappings of all too many dictators. As a matter of fact -- I don't know; I'm sure there are other people who can judge this better but, and maybe I'm naive, but -- I didn't get the impression that he was deeply concerned about personal power, but I'm quite sure he was deeply concerned that his country have a government which could function, which could provide the services that people needed, which could maintain -- because it must -- one of the largest military forces in the world and still along with it a viable economy. If you think he had no reason to worry about maintaining such a large military force, you had only to go up to the 39th parallel, which I did, and just look. You see, even to this day in 1965 and

[-132-]

certainly in 1962 when I was there, there are periodic meetings at Panmunjom -- the old tent is long since replaced with some kind of a shelter, a rather permanent shelter -- but there's never been a peace treaty; there's only been an armistice, only a truce and technically whatever war was in the early '50s still exists between the United Nations and North Korea. The Chinese were never officially a part of it -- you remember all their troops were "volunteers" and the United States never declared war; but the United Nations in effect did, and our commander there, the commander of the U.S. Eighth Army in Korea is also the commander of the United Nations Command and there are still troops there from several other nations besides the U.S. and South Korea. At the height of the fighting, you will recall, there were quite a number of troops in the UN command -- there still are troops from a good many nations, though most of them are small contingents and really sort of token, but it's interesting to note they're still there -- their own governments still support them and maintain them and station them in Korea. We have two highly combat-ready divisions of U.S. troops in Korea, which are committed to the U.N. command. I visited both of these divisions, including the First Cavalry (which has had an interesting fate since -- it had its name taken away from it to be given to my old Executive Officer's [Harry W. O. Kinnard] new Division, the First Air Cavalry, when it went to Vietnam) -- it was the First Cav and the 7th Division that were in Korea. The 8th U.S. Army was the overall U.S. command; the 8th Army was included with some foreign troops and quite a number of South Korean divisions in the U.N. Command. I've forgotten now how many divisions the South Koreans had in the field, but

several of them were up on the 39th parallel, in the hills and fortifications leading all the way from the truce line, the DMZ, the Demilitarized Zone, down to Seoul.

[-133-]

Seoul was still -- there was no way to move it -- it's still pretty close to the truce line and there was still killing in that DMZ fairly often, which reminds me of a story, a true story, which has a kind of poignant twist to it. Practically every night both sides send out patrols and put out security forces, put out sentries, guards, and what not. I was told, and I have no reason to doubt it, that quite a number of infiltrators (there was a lot of infiltration from North Korea into South Korea of agents who'd put on civilian clothes and try to sneak through and were sent into South Korea with a variety of missions -- some of them were never apprehended, I dare say, though some of them were, but of course every effort was made to prevent their penetration by constant patrolling of the demilitarized zone -- they'd sneak through at night, and the point of the story is that) quite a few of them who were actually spotted escaped (usually running back to North Korea but sometimes running on South) -- quite a few of them who had actually been caught red-handed and were then in point blank range of an American soldier, in an American patrol, escaped because the American boys just weren't able to pull the trigger. They *couldn't kill in cold blood* -- even though they knew that the man that they were trying to arrest wasn't about to be arrested and that he was an enemy. There is something poignant and admirable about this to me. One of the added insights into the American character one gains from this strange armistice is that although there were often witnesses, nobody was ever punished. You just can't punish a green kid (and most of our troops had never been in combat of course) for inability to kill somebody who isn't firing at him.

Well, also in Korea I met and talked with Tiger Soong who was then the Prime Minister. I met -- I was royally entertained by -- the Minister of Defense

[-134-]

(I can't remember his name I'm ashamed to say). I looked around Seoul -- and to the north I went into many caves in the mountains that had openings for artillery (and with troops actually living there for weeks at a time) pointing toward North Korea -- and waiting quietly. The whole line is heavily defended -- I doubt North Korea will try again to invade by land as long as we stay there. It was easy for North Korea to invade in 1950; it would be much more difficult now, but they do keep acting like they want to; there's just evidence day after day after day. With binoculars you can see the activity across the line and, as in Germany, this kind of thing is a fact of life day and night -- this is a horrible climate in winter, North Korea, and the northern part of South Korea -- day and night, year in and year out for literally thousands of Americans in Korea but again we just never give it much thought, and I suppose that's all right -- you can't think about grim things all the time without losing something that you're supposed to be defending in the first place.

This is what bothers me about Vietnam today. It's perfectly clear to any reasonable person why we're there, and it's perfectly clear what the consequences would be of giving up

on our commitments, the effect on the whole free world, whoever they be, however much they throw up their hands, the free world would disintegrate if a real basis for fear that America was withdrawing into the southern half of the northern hemisphere of the new world should take hold. If our word is not to be trusted, then not only we, but many other people, will have to pay terrible consequences. But even so, all of us wish and pray that North and South Vietnam didn't even exist; we are terribly disturbed that there seems to be no easy solution' it has cast a pall over our daily lives somewhat similar to the pall that people in West Berlin and South Korea live

[-135-]

with all the time. Of course it's much more than just a pall for those Americans who are actually in Vietnam. It's just a pity that there aren't any quick solutions and easy answers in this world where the matters of life and death are concerned, but it does take two to make peace.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-136-]

*File - for ref.*

1 May 1962

My dear Mr. President:

The Board of Trustees of Indiana University on April 27 invited me to accept the presidency of the University upon the retirement of President Herman Wells next July first. In order that I may be free to accept the Board's invitation, I request your acceptance of my resignation as Secretary of the Army, effective June 30, 1962.

Higher education has been for many years my career, and, as you know, I relinquished the presidency of West Virginia University in January 1961 only because I shared your conviction about the need for our country to develop a much stronger Army in a time of prolonged and serious external threat to the basic values of peace, freedom, and human dignity.

The opportunity to lead one of America's great universities comes to few men even once in a lifetime. Yet even now that I have been invited to lead one of the greatest, I would be reluctant to ask you to release me after a year and a half as your Army Secretary were it not that the Army has moved during that period to a distinctly higher plateau and our basic objectives for it have now been clearly mapped and moved far along the road to accomplishment.

I am extremely proud of the Army's progress during the past year. The number of combat-ready divisions has grown from eleven to sixteen; the number of ready-to-go divisions in strategic reserve has grown from three to eight; the size of the highly important Special Forces has been more than doubled; the overall strength of the active Army has grown from 870,000 to more than a million; our Army forces in Europe have been very substantially strengthened and the Berlin garrison reinforced; our Army's assistance to hard-pressed South Vietnam has been greatly augmented; the US STRIKE Command has been formed, and still other steps have been taken which will facilitate increased teamwork between the Army and her sister Services; advanced concepts for countering guerrilla aggression and other internal security threats to free nations have been evolved; the Army's budget

2 May 1962

Dear Elvis:

It is with regret and reluctance that I accept your resignation as Secretary of the Army effective June 30, 1962. Your personal dedication to the task and to the Army has been an inspiration to the men and women of the United States Army. You can take up your new and most important post at Indiana University with great satisfaction of a job well done and a service truly performed for the Government and the people of our country.

Your conduct of Army affairs has been an outstanding example of good management. Your policies of recognition of young talent, of examination and adoption of new doctrines and techniques, and emphasis on vigorous leadership for our Army marks your tenure as Army Secretary.

In an uneasy period of international tension, under your leadership the Army has effectively performed its mission. The improvements made are important ones; the sacrifices that have been made are appreciated deeply by the American people; and the pride and high esprit of the Army today is more than justified.

There is no way to compare the importance of the post you have just filled to the presidency of a large university. In a sense, however, you can contribute directly to the future of our nation and prepare new citizens for the greater challenges to come in your post. It is a worthy one and I want you to know that my personal wishes for success go with you.

I know that Secretary McNamara and your colleagues, both civilian and military, join with me in expressing our thanks for your loyal cooperation.

I have personally enjoyed our association. I sincerely appreciate your untiring service and the effectiveness with which you have met your manifold responsibilities.

With warm regards and best wishes.

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy

for the vital need of procurement of weapons and equipment has risen over sixty percent, and encouraging progress has been made in developing new weapons and equipment and in getting these into the hands of our troops.

But this is not all. During the past year the basic work has also been accomplished in the Army on four major organizational actions. A thoroughgoing restructuring of the Department of the Army Headquarters and of the major field and technical commands in the Continental United States has been planned, approved and moved well along toward implementation. A new and forward-looking concept for reorganizing Army combat divisions (ROAD) has been developed, and the two Regular Army divisions which were activated in January are being organized and trained under this concept. A modernized concept of reserve readiness was developed last spring and subsequently refined to take advantage of experience gained in the partial mobilization last fall. And a new ROTC program of great significance has recently been readied for consideration by higher authority.

These accomplishments in every case have been the result of enormous contributions on the part of many dedicated people. I relate them, therefore, not to claim any credit but to explain why I feel free to ask your leave to accept a most exceptional opportunity in my chosen field.

As I know you fully recognize, higher education is itself a matter of very great national importance. The presidency of Indiana University, so ably filled by Dr. Wells for the past twenty-five years, is certainly one of the most challenging and attractive posts in my profession. I count myself highly privileged to have it offered to me.

I also count myself highly privileged to have served in such exciting times in your Administration, under Secretary McNamara, with the leaders of the other Services, and especially with General Decker and my other splendid colleagues, civilian and military, in the Army. I hope

that I need not tell you how much your personal support has meant to me and to the Army. The Army has played a very large role in several periods of my life; I shall always be devoted to it, and I am confident that its progress will continue to have your strong support.

Most respectfully,

Elvis J. Stahr, jr.  
Secretary of the Army

The President

The White House