

INTERVIEWEE: ALAN S. BOYD (Tape 3)

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

January 11, 1969

M: This is the third session with the Secretary of Transportation, Alan Boyd. The date is January 11, and the time is 2:30.

To continue where we left off again, I was asking you about the forming of your department, and I'd like to know if you had any trouble getting office space.

B: Well, it became obvious that we would have to move. The various elements in the Commerce Department were overcrowded, and even though we had limited space over there in my office as Under Secretary for Transportation, it was still good space on the fifth floor. So we started looking around right away, and I talked to Bozo McKee, who was Federal Aviation Administrator, after having been advised by Allen Dean that there was additional space available in the FAA Building. We worked out a deal with General McKee to take over the seventh floor, which necessitated moving the Bureau of National Capital Airports out of the building out to Fairfax, or Falls Church. I made a commitment at that time to General McKee that I would not seek any additional space from him in the building, and that started an argument pretty quickly, because the people on my staff didn't think I had done right by them.

But, anyway, we moved over, oh, I think about the first of February to this building, and I had an office which was an Office Director's office--small suite, very comfortable, satisfactory. We worked up plans for the Assistant Secretaries, trying to give them equal space, and

allocated them essentially the same footage on this floor. We set aside an area which was to become the Secretary and Under Secretary's suite. An improvement was undertaken by GSA.

I got a call one day from Drew Pearson, wanting to know about the three-quarters of a million dollars that we were spending to prepare this elaborate suite for the Secretary. Happily, those figures were nowhere near right--they were preposterous. This was one indication to me though that possibly some of the people in the FAA, who had been moved, were not happy.

I believe I told you who the Assistant Secretaries were and where they came from.

M: Yes, we went through that.

B: So we started operating over here, trying to get ready to operate, to begin business on the first of April. One of the things that had to be addressed immediately was where did jurisdiction end? In other words, what jurisdiction flowed from the functional statements of each of the Assistant Secretaries. And as I think I mentioned before, when you deal on a functional basis operating administration concept, there is bound to be some overlap. And there is no really precise way I know to say, here's the line. Well, every one of the Assistant Secretaries, with the exception of John Sweeney, was just damn well interested in seeing that their line was pushed as far as it could be pushed, which led to some ill-will. Also, there was some friction between the Assistant Secretaries and Allen Dean, the Assistant Secretary for Administration. They all felt that Allen was the consummate bureaucrat who knew all the rules and all the angles and who had his hands on the power levers as far as the department was concerned in terms of space, typewriters, file cabinets, positions, and so forth. And that he

was trying to use that to build up his own empire, which was not correct, although Allen is certainly not adverse to strengthening his own role. But this leads you, really, to the philosophy, it seemed to me that it's a lot better to have people who are pushing than people who have to be kicked. We haven't ever really settled all these functional disputes. We've developed a modus vivendi, and I think all the Assistant Secretaries respect each other and they get along pretty well. But we get a lot of things hanging in the air, and they will be as long as we have this sort of a setup, regardless of who the people are. Now, the friction will come at different places in the future, because we've done some reorganizing to try to minimize all this, but I don't think it's possible to ever get a clear-cut division.

M: Have the various agencies that came into your group been attempting to maintain their autonomy? Are they hard to control, in other words?

B: I can't generalize on that. The FAA has indicated constantly that it would like to retain its prerogative, but I've never had any revolt from them. They've been down at the mouth a lot and have indicated, when we've had sort of "hair down" discussions, that they didn't think we had any business being involved in such things as air traffic control, and they didn't have time to educate a bunch of economists on how to run an air traffic system, which is indicative, I think, of their feeling. I think a number of the people in the FAA tend to be very myopic about the Aviation Administration, and some of them don't yet understand the relationship of aviation to total transportation. I don't say that as a criticism, I think it's a fact. Well, you've got people thirty or thirty-five years in the agency--you can't expect them to all of a sudden say, "Well, gee, now I know. We're all part of a big system!"

M: How about the Coast Guard?

B: The Coast Guard--no trouble at all.

M: Did they seem happy to be in a Department of Transportation?

B: They're delirious with joy.

M: Why is that?

B: At the Treasury Department, the Coast Guard was the "poor relation." The Commandant of the Coast Guard reported to an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. He got to see the Secretary of the Treasury once a year on a formal occasion, and so far as the Coast Guard knew, and I think probably rightly, assumed that the Secretary of the Treasury really knew nothing about the Coast Guard, it's problems, its potential, or anything else. On the other hand, since they moved into Transportation, we've pushed them around a little bit.

I guess the first minor thing that came up was I had a briefing from the Coast Guard on marine sciences, oceanography, and it was the worst briefing I ever heard in my life. And I told the Commandant, I said, "This just won't do! This fellow may know all about it, but he hasn't told me a damned thing. I've sat here for two hours." And I think that hurt their feelings a little bit, but I told the Commandant, I said, "Look, here you are, your breast is churning to have a major role in oceanography, and I want you to. I want to help you. But you've got to sell! And you can't sell this way, with this very dry, detailed, minutiae that you're handing out here. I think I'm fairly intelligent, and I sit and listen to it for two hours, and I don't know what the hell the issues are! And I've been paying attention! You can't sell me anything that way, and what I learn, I've got to learn from you." So they really went to work and they brought some new people in--different people, and trained them.

And then we kicked them around some on research. They didn't have any research operation. And we made them get one set up. They're delighted now. I'm not sure they're as delighted as I say they are, but they're really tickled. We pushed like hell to get more aircraft and more ships for them, because we believed they needed them. We just haven't said, "Whatever you want, we will try to get," but we have gone through their operation from top to bottom except for Viet Nam. I'm sure they appreciate that we understand what their problems are, and we've fought their battles just tooth and toenail. And those are the reasons why they're happy.

M: Does the advent of the Coast Guard taking over ice-breaking functions fit into this?

B: Yes, but that was prior to this. That was done, oh, I don't know how many years ago, but I think in the late fifties.

M: And, as I recall, they also have done some experimentation with a possible sea-lane across the polar icecap?

B: Yes.

M: Did you have anything to do with that?

B: Yes. That hasn't gotten too far yet, but there'll be a great deal more movement in that area. And we've encouraged them to work, for example, with the oil companies who are now trying to develop a Northwest Passage. And we have seen to it that the Commandant of the Coast Guard has sat in on all the major policy decisions of the department, whether or not they had anything to do with the Coast Guard; and the Commandant and his staff know that if they want to comment on anything, whether it's highway safety, environmental aspects, conservation, road building, air traffic control, we're delighted to hear from them. Those are the reasons, I think, the Coast Guard is very happy to be with us. We don't always buy everything

they're selling, but they've been very straightforward, very helpful. And we've got Coast Guard people scattered all over this office of mine. They know what's going on here, there's no doubt they're wired in, and we did it intentionally.

M: I have read that there was some friction with the highway people over the Highway Trust Fund, and possible plans to use that more broadly by the department. Is there anything to that?

B: You have to refine your question, Dave. The answer is that we have not attempted to invade the Highway Trust Fund for mass transit, which is the bugaboo these bastards (excuse me) keep raising in the highway community. Not at all. On the other hand, we have tried to expand the uses of the Highway Trust Fund in the highway area, e.g., the Highway Act of 1968, where we were able to get Congressional approval for what we call the "Topics Program," which is a program that we use Highway Trust funds to provide off-street loading facilities for buses and things of that nature. So to that extent, the answer would have to be yes, but this constant carping about trying to invade the Highway Trust Fund is, in Harry Truman's phrase, a real "red herring." And I'm convinced that a lot of it comes from some people who sit here in Washington as hired lobbyists for the cement, limestone, and steel, bituminous, roadbuilders and so forth, not all of them, but some of them in that category, who keep writing back to their constituents about how this evil department is laying all these plans and how they have to work so hard to thwart it. And it's a figment of their imagination. But, gee, don't you know it makes them look good out in Kansas City?

Now, the relationship between administrations and the Office of the Secretary: Highway Administration, we've had some difficulties with;

Rail Administration, none; St. Lawrence Seaway, none. The big issue, and it's one that will never be resolved, is the difference between policy and operation. In theory, the Office of Secretary is concerned with policy, and not with operation. And the administrations are concerned with operations and with policy, to the extent it affects their administration, but they don't make policy for their administration. They initiate policy proposals. We make the policy in the Secretary's office. This leads to the obvious situation where no matter what the administration does, they say, "This is an operating matter; there's no policy in this." And in the beginning, due to that suspicion and also due to a great deal of zealousness on the part of the Assistant Secretaries, they took the position that everything the administrations did, whether it was buying a keg of nails, was policy decision. So they wanted to get into everything, in addition to which, since a number of my assistants and I had been associated with various of these agencies in one way or another in the past, we knew a fair amount about them. And some of the fellows had very strong feelings about the competence of the people in the agencies. This led to friction. In addition to which, another thing which has created all sorts of friction is that none of these people are really used to having somebody like Cecil Mackey around, making them justify what they say. And, boy, this has burned them up! I tell you. Because so often, they don't have any justification for what they say. I don't mean they're just irresponsible or anything like that, but take the FAA, for example. We get these requests, "We need 10,000 more air traffic controllers; we need \$400,000,000 more for this," and so forth and so on. And Cecil kept saying, "Well, give me your justification." And they come up with this, that, and the other about how the traffic is growing and this and that, and he says, "Well, yes,

but in 1963 you started the NATS system, which was to automate the air traffic control system, which would give you more productivity. That's the basis on which you said you wanted to automate it. Now, how come you need these people?"

And then they fall back, "Well, the growth has been greater than we expected." "Well, how much greater?" And then, "Where is it? Is it all over the country?" And then they say, "Well, our experience tells us," and you know they're in a corner then. And they say, "You don't understand, Cecil!" And then Cecil says, "Well, of course, I don't understand, that's why I want you to tell me." Oh, boy, I've had some of these people just come boiling in here about "that so-and-so Mackey." He has just had them by the short hair, and they don't like it. And I wouldn't like it. Hell, I'd rather much be telling Cecil what to do than having him tell me, or ask me what I was doing.

M: Would you agree that this is part of the function of the department and it's part of the rationalization for bringing it all together?

B: Oh, absolutely. This is the guts of it. And I think that a lot of these people were very unhappy when they realized that we meant business. They thought, in the beginning, that they could sweet talk us and that I would be happy to ride around in a big black limousine and testify before the Congress and go make speeches to the Chambers of Commerce and stuff like that; and if they coddled us, you know, and treated us nice, we wouldn't bother them.

You know, somebody told me something once about Martin Luther King; a fellow who was a friend of his said Martin was a revolutionary, that he scared people to death because he acted as if he thought the Constitution meant what it said. We're revolutionaries in the same sense, because we've taken the law at face value.

M: Is it fair to say that a major portion of your time has been spent in getting this department moving and working?

B: That's right. Organization has been primary. Second has been the matter of trying to develop an emphasis on the human aspect. Transportation is a service industry. What we've tried to do is imbue these programs we have and the people who operate the programs with the idea that cities are for people, that transportation is for people. And that, to me, is the most important aspect in the establishment and the operation of the Department of Transportation. And we have really pushed on this.

M: And when you say for people, you mean for their safety, for their--

B: Safety is part of it, sure.

M: --for their expeditious transportation--

B: That's part of it.

M: Any other dimension to this?

B: Well, let me put it this way, as I have in some of my speeches. We see our goal as one of making the transportation system conform to the needs and desires of people, rather than requiring people to conform to the transportation system, which is what we've got now. And that involves such things as where the hell do you build highways? Or, to put it in another set of terms, we've tried to impress the people here with the idea that they should be as much concerned about the man who lives by the side of the road as the man who drives the car. It's a simple concept. Difficult to put into effect.

M: Thinking about your overall organization that you've set up, what else needs to be done for the Department of Transportation?

B: You're talking in organization terms?

M: Yes, to complete the organization. Or do you feel that it is complete?

B: Well, there are two glaring gaps at the moment. One is the Maritime Administration, and one is lack of a viable research operation. That is building and will come about in time.

M: Your Urban Mass Transit was transferred to your satisfaction?

B: No. We tried to strike a compromise with HUD on that and I think by definition compromise is a bad solution. This is proving to be a bad solution. It's nothing critical, and it'll work out in time, but it's not the way it ought to be. A lot of this involves personalities. When I leave here and Bob Weaver has left, Bob Wood leaves HUD, Charlie Haar leaves HUD, John Robson leaves here, there will be a whole new set of players, and they'll be able to work out agreements without all of the animosities which we have generated, just as a result of sort of pulling Urban Mass Transit out of HUD's hide. And you couldn't expect them to be very happy about it.

M: That was a major program of theirs.

B: No, not really, but it had a lot of sex appeal.

M: When you say you need more research facilities, what do you mean by that?

B: Well, we really need, I would guess, instead of the approximately seventeen professionals we've got in the Office of Transportation, Research and Technology, we need about a hundred professionals. And we need an awful lot of money. We're dealing with some very complex systems, and we're dealing with interfaces, which people don't understand too well from a technical point of view. We were able, as a nation, to fly Apollo around the moon and we did it at the cost of billions of dollars. Here we've got a railroad industry which is, in my mind, the backbone of the American transportation system. The railroads, for any number of reasons, spend a total of maybe \$7,000,000 a year on research, and they're dying on the vine.

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It's not doing anything for them. I'm convinced that we could do a heck of a lot to improve the rail transportation in this country, but we can't do it just by beating these presidents over the head and saying, "Yes, we know, you're only making 2 percent on your investment, but gee, you ought to put a couple of a hundred million dollars a year in this research business."

M: Well, do you see it as the role then of DOT--the Department of Transportation--to do this kind of research, say, for the railroad industry?

B: Some of it, yes. Look at what we've done for the aircraft industry. Of course, a lot of it has been through Defense. But I don't think that's too significant. We're going to have to do more of the same in Aviation, on the civil side now, as DOD phases out of manned aircraft.

M: Well, then, you would agree with the supersonic transport development?

B: Yes, I think it's a good development.

M: And that the government ought to finance this experimentation?

B: Yes.

M: Would you agree then that it should be turned over to industry, once the way is pointed?

B: Sure, I think the government ought to get its bait back, though, if it's a viable program.

M: And would you extend this to, say, the nuclear ship Savannah?

B: Yes. Of course, that's a different proposition, because the government did finance that completely. I urged the construction of three nuclear ships, merchant ships. The Savannah is sort of a Neanderthal in nuclear propulsion terms.

M: You mean it's already obsolete?

B: Yes, sure it is. And the Savannah was built purely and simply to prove the feasibility, not to deal with the economics.

M: There was some attempt to put it in dry dock, was there not, or to take it out of service.

B: Yes.

M: Were you in favor of that, or against that? Or, did you have to take a position?

B: I never got caught. I would have shed no tears if it had been put into dry dock. Given the crimp in our budget--this was when I was at Commerce, but at the same time I thought it would be helpful if we could keep it going, because it is a fine training operation. And assuming we should get the appropriations to build three nuclear ships, then we're going to need a good training base. Once you lay up the Savannah, then the cost of putting it back in operation is going to be rather substantial. So your net savings would be rather minimal, as I recall.

M: I're preparing to go into a series of questions about your job as Secretary and your relationship to the White House and the President. Do you want to hold this until next time?

B: Yes, I think we'd better.

M: Okay.

B: I'm sorry as hell I'm running late.

(End of tape)

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By Alan S. Boyd

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