INTERVIEWEE: CLARK CLIFFORD (Tape 7, Side 1)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

April 24, 1970

F: This is an interview with Secretary Clark Clifford in his office in Washington, on April 24, 1970. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Mr. Secretary, you became the Secretary of Defense in time to get involved in the problems of late spring-early summer of 1968. Particularly, I'm thinking about the assassination of Martin Luther King and the riot that broke out in Washington afterwards. I would like for you to detail what was the problem as seen from the vantage point of the Defense Department. What was the problem of collaboration, cooperation between the various agencies that look after the District?

C: My comment will be rather brief on it, because it was turned over to those who had previously had experience in this field. Our major concern at the time was to keep the riots from spreading out of the area where they started, which was in roughly the downtown section of the District of Columbia. What we did was, as soon as we had information in that regard, we had to wait until we received a request from the city government. We did receive that request from the city government. We'd already been making arrangements to get troops here. We brought troops here just as quickly as we could and some of them, a certain number of thousand we brought right into the district. Then we had a very substantial reserve we kept outside the District, because we didn't know how extensive the trouble was going to be.

One very important facet of the operation was that the troops in this instance were instructed not to shoot at rioters. I believe that under the conditions that existed under this particular riot it proved to be exceedingly wise, because if you get to a point where there's a confrontation and those conducting the riots find themselves being shot at, and some of them being killed and perhaps some innocent people being killed, then a certain hysteria grips a city and it becomes infinitely worse. This was bad enough as it was.

But I think the manner in which these troops conducted themselves was very good. They were helpful to people. They created a nice impression. They guarded government buildings and all in such a manner as not to be offensive. When it was all over I signed a number of commendation letters to those men who had really been in specific charge of the effort--

F: Did you make any attempt to bring in a certain quota, percentage, of black troops, since so much of the rioting was in the black sections of Washington?

C: Well, I think we were limited to some extent. We brought in some black troops.

F: But no great effort.

C: No, and the fact is that we had to draw on the troops that were within a reasonably short distance away, so we took pretty much what we could get.

One interesting development was that after this happened, in order to be ready for other possible developments I asked that a command center be set up in the Pentagon which would be developed to handle this kind of problem in the future, because we were slow getting into operation. A lot of these troops have to be brought by plane. Unless you have an organization all ready ahead of time this is a very difficult logistic problem, getting the planes at the right Army Camp at just the right time.

F: At this point, it wasn't a manner in the sense of punching the proper button and everything automatically going into action? You really had to work it out?

C: We really had to work it out. We had some experience with it but not enough. The troops--we got some of them here fortunately right away. Others were much slower than we anticipated because we couldn't get the transportation. So I asked that a new organization be set up. Space was provided. A new command center was created in the Pentagon. A general officer from the Army was put in charge of it. Other aides were established. A new communications system was put in. So I might say, rather ruefully, in the event that there had been another serious one, we were five times better equipped after this first one happened than we were before. But that organization has remained in effect in skeleton form, so that in the event trouble should begin to develop in this area, then the skeleton could be fleshed out very quickly. They're prepared to do an excellent job in the event it happens again.

F: Now you said in this area. If it happens, say, in Seattle or San Antonio or Chicago, could you move just as efficiently?

C: Well, we were particularly equipped through this new center to handle problems in this area. But we still would be much better off with problems that arose in any area, because we do now have a command center and we do now have a man who is in charge of this type of problem as far as the military is concerned. We do have a better schedule of how to get men to all different points in the country--how to get the planes there on time. There's infinitely better planning. So I would say that the benefit would spread to all areas of the country.

F: Well, who decides that it is worth moving? Does this come back to the Secretary of Defense still?

C: It does. First, the request has to be made by either the mayor of a city--. As I recall it, I think the mayor of a city first indicates to his governor that the matter has gotten out of

hand. Then the governor gets in touch with the federal government, ordinarily through the White House, and really I think it is a presidential decision. The governor asks for assistance from the President if he finds that the city police aren't able to take care of it. If he, the governor, either has found out that his state resources are not up to it or he doesn't think they are going to be, then the governor calls the President--or gets word to the President--and asks for federal troops. Then it's up to the President to decide. If the President makes the decision, he would usually do it in consultation with his senior advisors. If he makes the decision, then he instructs the Secretary of Defense to move; then the machinery really goes into action.

F: I well remember Harry Truman's delightfully forthright statement when he took the atom bomb out of the military control and put it into civilian, he didn't want some dashing lieutenant colonel making a reputation out of pressing a button. So, you're doing the same thing here.

C: This is really a civilian decision.

F: Did you have any problem in working with the various groups that are concerned with Washington because you have a peculiar situation here in that you have a national city, in a sense, a national park?

C: My recollection is that there was a good deal of vacillation on the part of the city government as to just how they were going to handle it. That was resolved, however. As soon as it was resolved, then it became our problem when the local District government made its request to the White House for federal troops.

F: Where is the command post in this case? Who coordinates? Does it come out of the White House?

C: Well, yes. After the President--

F: I can see people getting in each other's way--holding back.

C: After the President made the decision in this case, then my recollection is that perhaps Mr. Califano was the key man at the White House. We designated a civilian at the Pentagon who would be liaison with the White House. The Justice Department designated a man who would be liaison between the Justice and the White House. There was a group of four or five individuals who constituted the overall policy determination committee. Their authority, of course, came from the President but they kept all of us informed as to how dangerous they thought it was. They indicated how extensive they thought it was going to be. They had suggestions as to whether or not we ought to get more troops. We relied on their judgment as to when the time came to withdraw the troops. It really worked out quite efficiently, and could have been an infinitely greater catastrophe than it was.

F: You weren't faced with any difficult alternatives yourself? These decisions were more or less made elsewhere and your job was supervisory?

C: These decisions were made in the White House and it was our job to get the troops there to do the job when we were asked.

F: To go back to that Cronkite interview we mentioned before we started, in this case it was "implementation" that concerned you.

C: Yes, yes.

F: That was the word that was used in that.

Looking back, do you see anything that you should have done that you didn't insofar as the rioting was concerned?

C: Only that we could have gotten troops here more quickly. Although these men conducted themselves very well, certainly training of ordinary military personnel in the handling of civil disturbances of this kind could be substantially improved. It could have been then. I believe since that time a good deal of progress has been made.

Men have to be trained in riot control. I know that they had a bad situation in Detroit when they called troops out at one time. The troops were just not trained in riot control at all, and it just became chaos. Part of the function of setting up this command center in the Pentagon for all future riot problems was a program for better training of military personnel in riot control.

F: One of the problems in riot control, of course, is that your troops, being human beings, have their individual flare-up point. You nor I have any idea where ours is. We can place it in the sanctity of our office, but where would it be on a front line if someone were hurling garbage or dirty names, or something? What do you do to impress on your troops the fact that they have to remain in a sense serene through all of this?

C: The main accomplishment in that District of Columbia problem was the specific instruction that went out that the troops were not to fire their weapons. Now that's the best--

F: This was a hard and fast order?

C: Absolutely hard and fast. The troops were not to fire their weapons. That was the most important instruction that was given so that you don't have the type of confrontation that just leads to armed insurrection which has happened in other places.

F: Well, now, you had Watts, and Detroit which you mentioned, and Newark, and this one

here as major ones; do you learn something out of each one? It's a hard way to learn, I realize.

C: Yes. It's a terrible way to learn. But, yes, and they had a bad one in Baltimore. But I'm sure something is learned from each one. I think that probably the most fundamental lesson that was learned was that the more vigorous the action on the part of the troops in attempting to suppress activity the more dangerous the whole situation becomes.

Now, that's contrary to what some believe. I've heard some people say, "Well, what you ought to do is that anybody that you find engaging in illegal behavior at a time of that kind should be shot." Well, I think one experience we learned was, if those would be the instructions that would be given you would have an infinitely more serious problem on your hands. Because you know of those situations that have happened, for instance, in Negro areas where a policeman would shoot a Negro; then it goes all over the neighborhood and in an hour you have the incendiary type of situation, because a black man has been shot or a black man has been killed. It develops into the most violent kind of reaction.

In this instance, instead of these men engaging in combat what they really were doing was trying to bring it down to a level. They were cautioning people against doing things. They were getting young people off the streets so they wouldn't get involved in it. They did take a good amount of abuse. Some of them got hit with rocks and so forth, but [by] the exercise of considerable self-control and by strict compliance with instructions, the difficulty was kept to a minimum.

F: You're sort of building a fence around the area rather than trying to snuff it out.

C: Yes, and another part of it is this--the calling in of federal troops under a condition of this kind should not be used as the means of penalizing the people or punishing them for what they're doing. That should be done by the local authorities. I mean the local authorities should be there within the protection of the troops so that if a man is caught in the act of burning a building, it's not up to the federal troops to decide his guilt and punish him at the time. He may not be the right man, or the punishment may be much too severe. If you find a man running out of a clothing store with a handful of clothes, it's not up to the trooper at the time--that is, the federal soldier--it's not up to him to decide that that man's committing a crime and he's going to punish him. It's up to the local authorities to do that. Now that became very confused in many of these riots. By the time it got to the District of Columbia I think we had learned enough so that we didn't get in that posture.

F: Do you think you made progress in getting over to the people the fact that the military was not conducting a punitive expedition?

C: Unquestionably; unquestionably. Because any number of letters came in later not only to

the department but to the newspapers, commenting upon the generally courteous and thoughtful attitude on the part of the troops, that they were there obviously to maintain law and order, and they went about doing it. But theirs was not a punitive expedition, and it created really quite a nice attitude. I remember some people were suggesting that the troops really ought to be kept here all the time because they were friendly boys and they helped people and all. We said, well, we weren't quite up to that!

F: Do you have a sort of hard and soft line within the military command in the Pentagon in something like this? Those who do subscribe to the old thesis that your purpose is to snuff it out?

C: Yes, and that was all straightened out by instructions that were being given. There are those who feel that violence must be confronted with violence, and we were approaching it differently. You are confronted with violence. Instead of returning violence with violence, return it with something else and attempt to diminish the violence on the other side. There were those over there who felt that the thing to do was to teach these people a lesson. Well, the trouble with that is that sounds all right, but you may start with a riot that involves two square blocks and then you say, "Okay, we'll teach these people a lesson." By morning you've got a riot on your hands that covers ten square blocks and then pretty soon the whole city is in flames if you want to talk about it that way.

F: Do you think you made any converts or you just have to tell them what the order is?

C: I think what you do is you make those decisions and issue the orders. I have no doubt at all but what the excellent results obtained from the District of Columbia experience certainly had a substantial impact upon those who would have chosen a different course of action. Because they could see the excellent results that were obtained.

F: Do you have any reason to believe that your experience here after the Martin Luther King assassination is one reason that you didn't have an outbreak--real outbreak--following the assassination of Robert Kennedy?

C: I think so. I think it had something to do with it. If during that period there had been a sense of deep resentment that had been--

F: Kind of waiting to get back at you.

C: Right. Carried along through that interim period, then the Robert Kennedy situation could have been worse than the Martin Luther King [situation]. The fact is that most Negro leaders here in the District of Columbia had a very real sense of appreciation for the manner in which the military personnel conducted themselves. They knew it could have been done differently and they dreaded what might happen with troops coming in. Instead it helped restore order and there was a general feeling in the whole community that these

young men had done an excellent job. So there was perhaps, on the part of the thoughtful leaders, a sense of real appreciation. Under those circumstances, it wasn't that kind of posture in which militant leaders could stir up blacks to say, "Okay, we've got a score to settle with these federal troops." There wasn't that at all, and as a result I think it was kept pretty much in a minimum position. Then I think the local police had learned quite a lot in the Martin Luther King riots, too. So I think that whole situation proved to be a benefit to all concerned in how you go about handling this type of civic disorder.

F: Did you find Walter Washington a good man to work with?

C: Excellent, top grade, top grade. Reasonable, sensible--

F: Doesn't panic?

C: Exactly. [He] remained thoughtful during the period and personally made a great effort to persuade people of his own race the degree of damage that they were doing to themselves if they damaged their own city. I think his presence here contributed substantially to minimizing both of these occurrences.

F: I presume, also, that you and Ramsey Clark were in general philosophical and emotional agreement on all this.

C: I would say generally so.

F: So there was no collision of any sort there between Defense and Justice?

C: There was no conflict there. For instance, neither one of us felt--that I remember former-Governor Agnew of Maryland felt when they had the Baltimore flare-ups and he ordered out state troops and ordered them to shoot and if necessary kill anyone burning and looting. That made something of a hero of him in some of our Southern areas, you see, but certainly as far as Ramsey and I were concerned, we approached it from an entirely different standpoint. We had no ideological or philosophical difference at all. We worked through this very beautifully.

F: Did you absorb much criticism for your stand, allowing for the fact that everybody stands off as critic, but I mean was it more than usual by people who thought you should have taken a harder line?

C: I didn't think so.

F: You mean you do think that once in a while you do get a point across with them!

C: Yes. You see, some of these other riots had been worse. Watts was a worse riot; Detroit

was a worse riot.

F: Were you involved in those at all?

C: No, but the fact is that when Detroit came up I was in Southeast Asia on a trip and read about it out there.

But this was accomplished in such a manner that the loss of life was minimal. People had become acquainted enough with the terror of these riots to know that, generally speaking, that what you do was attempt to quell them and not make them the basis for armed combat.

F: Within your knowledge, do foreign military groups show an interest in what we have been developing as a sort-of technique here? Is there any studying of the American example or conferring with the Defense Department?

C: I'm not familiar with any details. I know there is an exchange of information that goes on with allies that we have in Europe. I've heard some mention made of it. The French had some very serious problems in Paris. My guess would be that we would probably get some observers over there to see how they did it. My guess is they probably had some observers over here. That type of matter isn't mentioned but there is a lot of interest in what goes on in another country and how it's handled. I would be sure there is an exchange of information in that regard.

F: Now Resurrection City was a peaceful operation with certain incendiary possibilities that never burst into flame. But it was a definite problem. It's in no sense a riot. It's a gathering of a lot of people. What was the Defense Department role in this?

C: I don't have a very distinct recollection. I don't know that we were ever called in because it was peaceful and the local police watched the area.

From the standpoint of those who promoted it, it was an abysmal failure; they had terrible weather problems. Rain came, and it just became a quagmire. They had some very unsavory characters in the group and there were knifings and rapes that went on within the confines there, so that it didn't turn out to be what it was supposed to be.

F: I presume you had observers in there.

C: Well, we kept a very close watch on it, and we had forces ready on a moment's notice in that regard, because it had in it the possible seeds of real violence.

F: Were you involved in any of the pre-Resurrection City negotiations as to site, purpose, and so on insofar as it affected the White House?

C: No, I don't recall being in on those. I do remember that at one time they were supposed to leave by a certain date and some of the leaders said they weren't going to go. I thought Justice and the White House did that very well. My recollection is they just moved in marshals. They just started in and they just moved the people out of there. Out they went. The city had to tear down all those old shacks they had built and clean it up and resod it and one thing and another, so it looks all right now. But we were not involved in it to any great extent.

F: Let's talk briefly about one other problem you had in this line. That is Chicago and the Democratic Convention in '68 which was, of course, primarily Chicago's problem, but which was also a party problem and a problem--at least a potential problem--for the Department of Defense. Now then, did you get some feeling in advance of the Chicago Convention that perhaps the Convention should be moved? Was this ever strongly considered in top Democratic echelons or was it fixed and this was where it was going to be?

C: Well, I can remember back, oh, it could have been a year before the Convention was held, of sitting in a meeting when that subject was discussed.

F: Was the President there?

C: I think so. I believe there were three locations that were being considered, Chicago and Miami and then either Houston or Dallas.

F: I think it was Houston, the Astrodome.

C: That's right, it would be Houston. Those were the three that were involved. For whatever it's worth, I remember stating my position. I was in favor of Chicago.

F: For convenience?

C: For a number of reasons. One, I thought Houston would be quite bad because I had no doubt in my mind whatsoever but that President Johnson was going to be the nominee again. I thought it would be quite inappropriate to hold a convention in Houston, both from the standpoint of party and the standpoint of the country. That wouldn't make any sense at all.

F: Did you have a feeling that you sort of had to--to use the vernacular--to shuck off the Texas image wherever you could?

C: Well, I'm not sure I thought of it in just that way. But I wouldn't have thought of it as a good idea, for instance, in 1948 for the Democrats to hold their convention in Missouri. President Truman was a Missourian, and I don't think you go to that state. You've already

got that state. You assume you have. You want to get some benefit out of it. I think I probably felt it more strongly this time because there is a feeling in many parts of the country that Texas is kind of a law into itself, so I was certainly opposed to Houston. Then, as far as Miami was concerned, I offered the thought that it seemed to me to be completely outside the image of the Democratic party which we want to present. We're the party of the people. You go down to Miami Beach and these big rich hotels and have your convention in the glitter of Miami, I thought it got away some from the image.

F: It gives a sort of fat-cat appearance.

C: Exactly. I thought that was a great place for the Republicans but a poor place for the Democrats. Then Chicago has a very real appeal because of its central location. I've known about politics long enough to know that a lot of delegates have some difficulty in getting their transportation to a convention. It's pretty tough if you live in Washington or Oregon or Montana to go to Miami. That's pretty rough. Or even California--all the Western states, so I thought it should be Chicago. I did not know at that time what lay ahead and afterwards I thought, golly, I remember so well, for whatever it was worth, casting my vote in favor of Chicago, and I felt some sense of responsibility later on when all the trouble came. But my voice was not an important one; it just came up for discussion.

Of course, I do not know what the situation would have been in Miami if the Democratic convention had been held there. Now the Republicans did have some trouble, but it was controlled. Whether or not, under all the circumstances that existed, we might have had just as much trouble in Miami I do not know. It is a very real possibility, because you remember at that time things were rough as they could be in a number of areas. A number of young people were just determined to make trouble, and they could have made it any place.

F: Why do you think they made it more for the Democrats than they did the Republicans? Because the Democrats were nearer to their thinking?

C: My own view of it, and I'm not sure that you can attach too much importance to it, but to a great extent the trouble in Chicago, I believe, was due I believe to the Viet Nam war. The young people were incensed over it and they had a real issue at the time. Through that period casualties were continuing to run pretty high. I believe that that was one of the major reasons for the trouble. Of course, it was the Democrats that were being held responsible for the war in Viet Nam and not the Republicans. I'm sure there were a number of other reasons but in my own opinion I think that's the foremost reason.

F: Once the decision was made to go to Chicago, so far as you know, was there ever any looking back and thinking as you got closer and you could see trouble impending you ought to change?

C: Yes. I wasn't in on that to any extent. I remember the subject coming up maybe two or three months before the convention as to whether or not it should be changed even that late. There was another factor, and I think the telephone operators were on a strike in Chicago and there was great concern--

F: And also a taxi slowdown, not a strike.

C: --and announcing they were going to strike when the convention came. Those were problems. Then I think there began to be some indication--young people announced the march on Chicago and that kind of business--and I think there was some consideration given to moving it. But I believe that by that time the problems in moving it were just too great.

F: You don't think there was any sort of overwhelming commitment of President Johnson to Mayor Daley to take it in there?

C: I wouldn't know. I don't know about the relationship between them, but I'm sure Mayor Daley fought to keep it in Chicago. I know their relationship was a good one and a pleasant one. I suppose that would have some effect.

F: As you get closer to the convention, do you get real intelligence at the Defense Department that the promise of trouble is real and considerable?

C: Yes. But not through our facilities but through the FBI. The FBI, I think, kept quite a close tract on it. The FBI reported to the White House and to the Defense Department that there was a possibility of real trouble. I have a recollection--I can't be sure of the details--but I have a recollection that Mayor Daley asked the governor for federal troops. I believe the request flowed from the governor--

F: That's Governor Shapiro?

C: Governor Shapiro--flowed from him to the President. My recollection is that whereas we didn't send federal troops right into Chicago, we had them located very close by. For instance, there's a Great Lakes Training Station nearby. It seems to me we had troops there and located at some other strategic points nearby that they could be sent in in the event of trouble.

F: Well, now, once the convention got underway, were you in a sort of a constant touch with the city and state officials in Chicago?

C: No, I wouldn't be, but the proper persons in the Pentagon would be. They would get daily and sometimes even hourly reports as to what was going on there, so that we could keep up with it and be prepared in the event that federal troops were needed.

F: Did you think that, from your viewpoint, that the handling of the crowds was about as good as could be done?

C: I don't know enough about it.

F: You're not really involved in that.

C: I wasn't really involved. We had the machinery set up and it was the responsibility of those who had been assigned to the job to keep fully informed. If an emergency or crisis came up, then I'd be brought into it. But it was up to them to handle it.

F: Did you ever discuss with the President the possibility of his going to the Chicago convention?

C: Yes.

F: When did this occur?

C: Oh, I think it was a few days before the convention and even after it started.

F: He went on down to the ranch, you know.

C: Yes, I remember that; I don't know whether he went down before the convention started or not. He may have done it just a day or two before it started.

F: He did.

C: My own idea was, and I think I may have mentioned it before he left, then I think it may have come up in a telephone conversation, I rather favored his appearing at the convention. He was the President; he was the leader of our party. I thought it would have a unifying effect on the party. I hoped that he might be able to make the trip from the ranch to Chicago to the airport, get complete protection there, fly by helicopter from the airport to the convention hall and get complete protection there, and go in and make a whale of a Democratic speech. That's what I had hoped. The decision was made otherwise. I don't know whether he ever really seriously considered it or not.

F: You weren't privy to the reasons why he did not go?

C: No, I suppose only generally. But I know that was my attitude at the time, and I know I recommended it and a different decision was made.

F: When you talked with him at the time, did he ever seem to be considering fairly strongly going to Chicago?

C: I couldn't tell.

F: Non-committal.

C: I thought so; I'm not sure just how much we got into it directly. I know only that that was my feeling at the time. I was stating that opinion to anybody who asked it. I thought he ought to go.

F: Did you go to Chicago?

C: I did not.

F: Did you play any real political role in the convention, behind the scenes or anywhere?

C: Not a particle.

F: You let the thing go its own way.

C: I was completely out of politics which I think the Secretary of Defense has to be. And he had not--neither he nor Vice President Humphrey called on me in any way. There's a long-standing tradition, which I think is an exceedingly wise one, that the Secretaries of State and Defense stay out of political campaigns.

F: Let's shift the emphasis a bit now. Were you involved at all in inflation fights?

C: Yes, from time to time. Oh, from the time President Johnson came in at the end of '63, I suppose as early as '64, I would be called into meetings on questions that would involve price increases on the part of industry, wage increases on the part of labor. I know I sat in at the meeting on important strikes that were either going to occur or had already occurred so the President used me rather steadily in that capacity. [In] '64-'65-'66 and '67 I attended a number of those meetings. Then in '68 he continued to use me.

I know going back as far as President Kennedy's concerned, that would be in the spring of '62, steel announced a substantial increase of maybe $6 or $7 a ton across the board in what President Kennedy thought was a direct violation of an agreement he had. They had a bitter confrontation and President Kennedy sent Arthur Goldberg, who was then Secretary of Labor, and me to New York. We went to the Carlisle Hotel and were locked in a suite all day with the U.S. Steel people and came out of that suite about five-thirty in the afternoon and they made a public announcement that they were rescinding the price increase. It was a fine victory for President Kennedy because it put industry on notice all over the country that they were going to have to take the government on if they came out with an unwarranted price increase.

President Johnson, of course, watched that with interest and then when he went in, if anything, he made a greater effort than President Kennedy, and I believe a substantially more effective effort. I believe President Johnson made an enormous contribution toward holding down inflationary pressures in the economy. I regret the position that President Nixon took on coming into office. Within the first month or so he announced that he wasn't going to engage in jaw-boning, which I think was--. First, policy-wise, I think it was tragic. Second, he deprecated and denigrated this very effective policy that had been utilized for eight years by referring to it as jaw-boning. Unfortunately for all the rest of us I think President Nixon is reaping the crop that he sowed. I think he asked for trouble when he announced the government was not going to interfere in price or wage disputes of any kind. I mention that not just to utter a criticism about President Nixon but to demonstrate the contrast, because I think President Johnson did a superb job in this regard. It's one of the really substantial contributions that he made and we see what happens when a President will not concern himself with it.

F: What were Johnson's contributions--just constant vigilance?

C: Constant vigilance and more. When it was known that a price increase was coming, he would do whatever he could to head it off, by calling these men down to Washington, sitting down with them personally, or having them meet with the Council of Economic Advisors, or having them meet with Califano. If they would go ahead and put in an increase, he would really lower the boom on them. We had situations where there would be an increase in steel and he would instruct the Secretary of Defense to buy foreign steel, if that's the way they were going to act, and to hold up domestic steel purchases. He'd bring all of the power of the government to bear on situations of this kind when he felt that increases were unwarranted.

On wage disputes, oftentimes he would call the parties to the White House and put them in a room and stay right with it. He worked at it day and night and it paid enormous dividends. I remember, during the time I was at the Defense Department, General Motors announced a $110 increase for their automobiles. That was the average increase. Well, he went right through the roof, President Johnson did. He called Roche and the other top officials down. They spent a couple of days in St. Louis. I attended one of the meetings. God, it was a hard-nosed meeting. When it was all over--just to make the story short--they went back to Detroit and announced they were rescinding the $110 increase and it was going to be $50. Well, that was reflected clear through industry generally. The other automobile companies had to follow with it.

By doing this all the time, industry was put on notice that, by God, they had better be able to justify price increases. The government was not going to let them get all the traffic would bear. I can't tell you the tens of billions of dollars that President Johnson saved for the American consumer by his eforts in this regard.

F: Was there much of a fight over the putting on the surtax? I'm not talking abourt the congressional fight, but the decision to go for it.

C: Well, I would have to admit I just wasn't too involved in it. I just know that it was a matter of deep concern.

(End of tape)

INTERVIEWEE: CLARK CLIFFORD (Tape 7, Side 2)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

Continuation--April 24, 1970

C: On the surtax I would say I know I sat in some meetings; I did not take a very active part.

F: Did you get much opportunity to observe the President in his relationship with the Federal Reserve Board, and I'm thinking particularly of Mr. William McChesney Martin, who personified the Federal Reserve Board, and was himself as independent, I guess, as the President?

C: My contact with that was slight. I recall during the time that I was in the Defense Department of attending a meeting and Bill Martin was there. Interestingly enough at that time, I don't remember what the issue was, but Bill Martin took a position on it. As we went around the table and all spoke, I remember supporting his position on whatever the issue was at the time, because I thought that he had stated it soundly and it seemed correct to me. You're right; I know him to be a very independent-minded man. I'm sure that he and President Johnson disagreed from time to time. I think each had quite a lot of respect for the other.

F: They never got to where they couldn't communicate?

C: I never found that at all. At this particular meeting, because I remember very well in the Cabinet Room I thought that the relationship between the two of them seemed really quite good.

F: Was the Defense Department used any during your period at the head of it to keep the economy as cool as possible? You have, of course, the largest budget by far, or largest slice of the budget, and the government is a key factor in the economy. I wondered whether the President saw this as a place he could cut quietly--cut back on the amount of money being pumped in.

C: Well, I just remember in the preparation of what would be the '69 budget, I was there during '68--

F: Getting ready for a successor's budget.

C: That's right. We had meetings on that and the President was anxious to hold it down. I remember meeting with the President on it. I remember meeting with the Budget Director. I think they started out with pretty substantial cuts in mind; we didn't want any.

The Secretary of Defense is the advocate for his department. We ended up by each compromising, and I think the President felt reasonably satisfied with it. That's about the way we felt. We came down a good deal and he went up some before we finally agreed on the figure.

F: Did you assist or advise with that last State of the Union Message?

C: Yes. Yes, I tried. I attended some meetings. That would have been in October, November and December, somewhere along in there. Yes, I attended some meetings on that State of the Union Message.

F: There was a strong feeling in some quarters that the President was trying--particularly after it was known that Nixon was going to be President in November--that he was in a sense committing him to certain programs by the message. Was it then, to that extent, a political maneuver or was this what he thought was necessary?

C: I don't know. I don't know enough about what was in the President's mind. I think the President felt deeply about a number of programs. I think he not only wanted to demonstrate continuing support for programs in which he believed deeply, but I think it would be only normal and even appropriate for him to attempt to guide the new administration along the lines the President felt were right for the country.

F: Did you ever work with the President in any of his pollution or conservation programs? The Defense Department wasn't involved.

C: No. No, I don't have a recollection of getting in that.

F: I would like to take just a moment to talk about his personal relationship with President Truman. We talked earlier about Johnson as a rising young man under then-President Truman, but I'm thinking about his being President now, and President Truman being an aging man in Missouri, and just how close they did become, and how much if any he leaned on him or utilized his experience.

C: President Truman was fond of Congressman and Senator Johnson. I can remember back--and of course this goes back close to twenty-five years--I can remember back when President Truman used to have a group together to go down to the boat and play poker over the weekends. A very modest poker game it was, but it gave the President and his friends an opportunity to be together and exchange comments and pleasantries and jokes and reminisce and so forth. From time to time Senator Johnson would be included among that group, and there weren't any persons in that group except those with whom the President felt entirely and completely comfortable.

F: I would guess myself that President Johnson wasn't much of a poker player.

C: Well, I think he didn't play very much. He didn't play much. I don't think he was very interested in it, but, of course, if you went down the river with the President, you had to play. But he was pretty canny about it. I don't remember him being much of a loser in it.

Skipping then to when President Johnson became President, he continued, I know, to have a great affection for President Truman. He felt that he had been courageous; he felt he made a great contribution to the country and to the Free World with the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; he felt--President Johnson did--that President Truman's reputation increased each year, and that his stature rose.

I remember going out with him one time, fairly early in President Johnson's term, to some ceremony that was held at the Library. It had to do with the founding of Israel. They were honoring President Truman. President Johnson took a load of us out in the plane and President Truman was most appreciative. I remember their standing together, talking and reminiscing together. It was a very pleasant occasion.

I remember on another occasion word came to President Johnson that President Truman was ill. He spoke to me about it. He said would I look into it and see what I could find. I got a little more information and reported back to President Johnson that President Truman wasn't in too good health but I doubted that anybody could do very much about it. President Johnson did look into it and he had in mind that he might bring President Truman up and put him in Walter Reed Hospital. I know he had in mind that Mrs. Truman could live in the suite there, and President Truman could get a number of tests. He made the offer) and I think President Truman just preferred to stay where he was out there in Independence.

Then one time I know that President Johnson was concerned over the degree of protection that former President Truman had. They live in this great big ramshackle frame house, and President Johnson was concerned that he might have a fire there sometime. He wanted some Secret Service personnel to be out there. I think President Truman turned that down.

But right until today that relationship is a valuable one and quite a sentimental one. Now I don't know that President Johnson called on President Truman very much for support. If he did, I would think that President Truman would be ready at any time. As you know, President Johnson did call on President Eisenhower for support. President Eisenhower just stood there like a rock every time President Johnson needed him. He was available, and was very helpful to President Johnson. So I think the relationship among those men was excellent, and remained so to the very end.

F: Have you seen much of President Johnson since he left here?

C: No. The fact is I had not seen President Johnson since he left Washington until his return here about ten days ago. At that time I think I saw him on three separate occasions and had the opportunity, particularly at C. R. Smith's, of having an awfully nice talk with him about a number of matters and having a nice talk with Mrs. Johnson. That's the only time I had seen him since he left on January 20.

F: Do you get the feeling that he is out of politics?

C: Well, I wouldn't know that. I thought he looked awfully well. I was delighted with the way he looked and I thought that he had come through that health problem well. He had gone in the hospital, you know, maybe six weeks or so ago, with some kind of a heart flare-up, but they got that under control. I thought he looked very well and his weight was down. He didn't seem to indicate while here that he was taking any interest in national politics. Whether he's taking any interest in state politics, of course, I wouldn't know.

F: For the record, and I think to close, there's no personal controversies the pundits would make out between you and the President over this matter of the stopping of the bombing halt, or anything else that went on in '68? It hasn't soured your relationship?

C: Well, I have not understood it, the whole matter. I do not know whether the article that I wrote for Foreign Affairs was a matter of concern to the President. It never entered my mind that it would be. I thought that there was a very real value in writing it. I hoped to make some contribution to the policy of the country on Viet Nam, about which I feel so strongly. I stated it as I had recalled the matter had happened. I did not think it was controversial. All it really consisted of was the detailing of the change of mind that took place in one person--that is, the author of the article. My hope was that that might lead others to change their mind, too, so that we might find a quicker way out of Viet Nam. Now there are those who obviously disagreed with the conclusion that I reached on Viet Nam. I wasn't conscious that the President had any real different feeling about it than I. I have not understood the effort on the part of some to try to create difficulty between the President and me.

F: But you felt none when you saw him a couple of weeks ago.

C: Well, I still am at a loss to understand much of the background of the whole matter. I got reports as to comments that had been made. I know only one thing. I haven't at any time made any comment that would indicate a controversy between the President and me. I think that's undignified; I think it's demeaning. I worked for him; I was in his Cabinet; I hope he feels that I was loyal to him, and I certainly don't intend to get into any public controversy over it.

F: Thank you, Mr. Clifford.

(End of tape)

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Clark M. Clifford

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Clark M. Clifford, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

3. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

4. The donor retains to himself during his lifetime all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. After the death of the donor, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.

Signed: Clark M. Clifford on May 28, 1971

Accepted: James B. Rhodes, Archivist of the United States on May 28, 1971

Accession Number: 74-79

Original Deed of Gift on File at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 2313 Red River, Austin, TX 78705