

INTERVIEWEE: GENERAL CURTIS LEMAY

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

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F: This is an interview with General Curtis LeMay who made his home in Newport Beach, California. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz. General, just to get started. Incidentally, I'm a World War II veteran so I have been following you for a long time. When did you first become acquainted with Mr. Johnson? Was it in his senatorial days or was it later than that?

L: Yes, I first met President Johnson when he was Majority Leader of the Senate.

F: Yes, did you see much of him in those days or was it strictly an official function?

L: Well, as much as you would normally see anyone in the official functions around Washington. I would see him occasionally because I appeared before Congress a great number of times. Even before I was stationed in Washington while I was commander of SAC, I went in to appear before congressional committees many times. This is a practice that I understand has fallen by the wayside and I think this is bad because--

F: I would be very interested exploring that a little bit with you. Why do you think it had fallen by the wayside?

L: They are fallen by the wayside because of the demand of the Secretary of Defense in the McNamara days that he had control of everything and speak for everybody and most people just threw up their hands and gave up. No one much agreed with many of the things that he was putting into effect, but the penalty for opposing him was more than they wanted to pay.

F: McNamara had been gone for three years and yet this system prevails. Do you think it's going to continue?

L: Things moved rather slowly in our form of government, but I think that the commanders in the field appearing before the Congress to state their own

case of what's required to carry out your mission gives the Congress information that they wouldn't get otherwise. They get another opinion other than the military staff and below a civilian staff department of defense.

F: Did you appear before Senator Johnson's Senate Preparedness Committee?

L: I can't remember. I appeared there so many times, but I'm sure I probably did.

F: But you have no clear cut memory of his presiding?

L: No.

F: As a committee chairman? When 1961 came along you had of course a new team in Washington. Now did you have any relationship at all with the Vice President during this period when you first became head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

L: He appeared at some of the meetings that we had, but remember when President Kennedy came in, the organization was changed and the highest security council in the land that was composed of the President and the Secretary of War and so forth was disbanded. It wasn't used at all, and most of the communication with the President was done through the Secretary of Defense and very seldom did the Joint Chiefs of Staff appear over there. Only occasionally did they go; more often the chairman of the Joint Chiefs went over, but I feel that many, many times the chairman didn't fully brief the Joint Chiefs on what was going on.

F: Was this because he felt that certain things should not be given any larger circulation, or just because he himself was busy and didn't take the time to go further into what had happened?

L: Well I'm sure it was a little bit of both.

F: Mr. Johnson didn't sit in on any of these sessions, or seldom sat in I should say.

L: Yes, he did I think. Quite frequently at the start, but to a lesser extent later on.

F: Were they fairly free discussions? Everybody has his own say?

L: Yes, initially.

F: They gradually got a little tired. Were you aware at all of Mr. Johnson's participation in the Bay of Pigs problem?

L: Well the Bay of Pigs problem, I wasn't in on parts of it. My first contact with it came in a Joint Chiefs meeting while I was still Vice Chief of Staff with the Air Force. And General White was out of town on a trip overseas visiting some of the bases. And I attended all the Joint Chiefs meetings in his place just when he was gone of course. In this particular meeting there was an item on the agenda which I wasn't cleared for, which surprised me, and I think it probably went through the President. I had to get cleared before I could discuss it. After 20 or 30 minutes of delay I finally was cleared and we proceeded with the item, and it was on the Bay of Pigs. And a member of the CIA appeared to brief the Joint Chiefs on the question at hand, which was to effect that they wanted the Joint Chiefs' opinion on changing the landing beach in Cuba of the invasion force. Now wait a minute before I can participate in this, I would like to have a little more background in this. And I found out that some time before the CIA had presented to the Joint Chiefs three landing beaches and asked their opinion on which one was the best one to land on from a military standpoint. And as far as I knew this was all they knew about so called invasion, and they had given an opinion. Then CIA changed their mind and decided that they ought to have a beach that had a landing strip on it, or close by.

So they picked a couple of others and they wanted to know which was the best of those. That was the item on that particular day. I said, "Well I need a little more information. What's the size of your landing force?" Seven hundred men was the answer. "And are you planning on taking Cuba with 700 people?" Yes. "Well I don't quite understand this. I know Henry Morgan took Panama with 700 people, but this seems to be a little bit different. I presume that things are well enough organized inside Cuba to be simultaneous uprisings over the country, and it will give some chance success." In blunt terms I was told this was none of my business.

F: I see.

L: All they wanted was an answer to a question which beach was the best. And that's all the information I could get, so we came up with the answer of a purely military standpoint of which was probably the best beach to land on that had a landing strip. And that was all that took place. The next time the subject came up that I participated in--now remember, no Vice Chief of any of the services was aware of this item. Only the Chiefs of each of the services was aware of what was going on. How much detail they knew I don't know, but it was very sketchy I am sure.

F: To a great extent it was politically handled.

L: This was not a military operation--not a military operation, and the Joint Chiefs had nothing to do with the planning of it, control of it, or anything else. I'm sure that all that happened was they ever asked a couple of questions, like which was the best beach to land on. They were aware of what was going on, but the details I don't think they knew anything about. It's true that there was some military participation along the way because the CIA had military people from all of the services assigned to the CIA, but working for the CIA and not reporting back to the military at all.

They were working as individuals over there because they had some background training that the CIA required to carry out their work. Also from time to time for various things that they were doing, they would ask for people from military services with certain specialties which were furnished, but we didn't know what they were doing. So there was military participation, but as far as being a military operation with military planning and military control, no, it was not an operation of this sort. Well the next I heard of the operation is the time of the actual invasion. As a matter of fact, a couple of days before there was a Joint Chiefs meeting which General White was absent that I attended at which it was brought up that the activity was going to take place a couple of days later. Landing at daylight on the beaches, and there was a preparation to be made which they wanted to destroy the Cuban Air Force with the Air Force such as it was that the invasion force had of which was few B-26's. They can be gathered off of every junk pile around the world as a matter of fact. They didn't want any of this thing to be traced to the United States. That was our greatest fear that they find out the United States had been dabbling in this. There was an attack to be made on the Cuban Air Force on the ground--surprise attack by the invasion Air Force two days before, and they cooked up some sort of a story that two of these B-26's with Cuban markings on them would take off from our base down in Central America and bomb the air fields in Cuba. And then Cubans would land over in Florida and say that they were Cuban Air Force people that had defected, and they had participated in the bombing and so forth. This got tied up and wasn't very well executed. The whole mission wasn't very well executed, and they failed in destroying the Cuban Air Force, and only one of them got to Florida. But they didn't fool very many people,

I am sure. Anyway they failed in the mission of destroying the Cuban Air Force, but decided to go ahead with the landing anyway. The landing force was supposed to have air cover during the landings which meant that they had to take off around midnight in Central America to get up there by daylight. And the night before, this air cover was called off because of the failure of the story they had worked out looked too much like American participation, so they called it off. No one knew anything about this in the Joint Chiefs of Staff until the morning of the invasion when there wasn't a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And I knew this was coming up so I went down early to try to find out what was going on, and I found out then about 15 minutes before the meeting that Secretary Rusk had called it off, or he said the President had called it off. Maybe the President did call it off, but the story I heard was from Pre Cabell (General Charles P.), who was the deputy of CIA and at the time he was an Air Force General Officer and was a deputy of the CIA. And when the air cover was called off, he knew the implications of this, of course, and went personally to Rusk, who gave him the same cavalier treatment that most military people got from the administration, to the effect that: "Well, the President is now dressing to attend a party. If you want to interrupt him, you can go to him, but he has already made the decision to call this off." Well I think Pre made a mistake by not going to him, but here again he had been butting his head against a stone wall I guess for a long enough he didn't think it would do any good. Anyway it had been called off. Mr. McNamara was supposed to be at the meeting that morning at the Joint Chiefs, but he didn't come down. Mr. Gilpatric came down to represent him. As soon as he came in, I went right to him before the meeting ever started and said: "Look you have just cut the throat of every man on the beach down there. Without

this air cover, there can't be any success." And he said, "Well I didn't know anything about it." Said, "Well it is done." Sure enough the invasion force did catch them by surprise, and they were doing quite well until they ran out of ammunition. And of course what happened the Cuban Air Force came over and sunk the ships that had the reserve ammunition on them, and when they ran out of ammunition, that was all; the whole force was captured of course.

I sat in on the critique of the operation for General White too in which the President attended, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, CIA, and all the rest of them. And it got around to the point that the lack of air cover was what caused the failure. Secretary Rusk was asked about the cancellation of air cover. The President turned to him to see what his answer was. He said, "Well, I didn't know anything about the importance of this," and that ended the discussion. All these articles that you have seen that have been written by the great brains of the Kennedy Administration, including Robert Kennedy, on the Bay of Pigs as to the bad military advice and the betrayal of the military to President Kennedy is just a bunch of hogwash because it was not a military operation. The Joint Chiefs as far as I know were not asked to participate except as I mentioned, and it was not a military operation--it was a civilian operation from start to finish.

F: No one in Cuba doubted where it came from or would have I think under any circumstances. What do you get that this feeling that this is just kind of a bunch of amateurs wanting to--that they were playing toy soldiers?

L: Well, I try not to exaggerate but everyone that came in with the Kennedy Administration and is the most egotistical people that I ever saw in my life. They had no faith in the military; they had no respect for the military at all. They felt that the Harvard Business School method of solving problems would solve any problem in the world. They were capable of doing it; they

were better than all the rest of us; otherwise they wouldn't have gotten their superior education, as they saw it. And the fact that they had it entitled them to govern the rest of us, and we shouldn't question their decisions. I try not to exaggerate but that's exactly the case. So all during the administration we found it impossible to get experience or judgment cranked into the solution of any problem. As a matter of fact, I have had a man tell me, "No, General, this is not the kind of weapon system that you want to use, this is what you need." This man was in knee pants when I was commanding the division in combat. He had no experience on the use of weapons at all. And certainly the military are not without knowledge of the use of computers and other methods of gathering statistics and solving problems and so forth. But war is an art, not an exact science, and you are dealing with people, and judgment and experience are very valuable in solving that kind of problem. And we couldn't get those factors ever ground into the solution.

F: Did you have anyone in the Kennedy Administration that you could use as a sort of a pipeline to get on to the President, or were you in a sense completely shut out?

L: No. The Joint Chiefs of course had access to the President, but this is the right by law. But you're practically taking your life in your hands when you do this. The Secretary of Defense didn't like it, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff didn't like it either. I did talk to the President on these issues, and I'm sure he understood my feelings on the thing. And how many times the others saw him alone I don't know. I never asked and they never mentioned it. But we were all unhappy with the situation. Mr. McNamara was always very careful to tell the Congress that he never arrived at any decisions without consulting the Joint Chiefs of Staff and this was probably true. What he failed to mention was that many times this



consultation took place after the decision was made and the order was issued. As many times when we received a paper of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for consideration which we would consider and give our opinion on, when we knew the decision had already been made and orders issued several days before.

F: That must have really bred some resentment because you had to do the work without any feeling you'd get heard. Did you get to observe the Vice President at all during this period? Did he ever volunteer any opinions or did he sit and listen when he was in on the conference that you attended?

L: Well I'm sure he participated occasionally. But--

F: He had no great impact though?

L: The national defense council was never convened as such. At most all meetings I attended in the White House the Attorney General was present but rarely the Vice President.

F: During this period the paring down the B-70 came up, as you know, and finally discontinuance of the B-70 program. Back when Senator Johnson had been chairman of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee, he had backed the B-70, and now he is Vice President and the administration is not going to and I gather this too that the Joint Chiefs except for you pretty well backed Mr. McNamara on this. He was the only one who....

C: Not necessarily. At one time I actually had Mr. Gilpatric sign on the dotted line to proceed with the B-70 during the absence of Mr. McNamara. And I think we pretty well got to the civilian elements of DOD sold on the B-70.

F: Now Congress had directed Mr. McNamara to go ahead with the B-52.

L: Well they had voted the money. Three times as a matter of fact they voted the money to proceed on my recommendation, over the recommendation of the Secretary of Defense. This particular time Mr. Gilpatric signed off on it while Mr. McNamara was gone. I think we had most of the people in the Department of Defense--I'm talking about the civilian not professional--all agreed to the B-70 program. But when Mr. McNamara came back, he immediately cancelled it. So it looked to me like we had everyone to agree except Mr. McNamara himself, but finally there was so much delay in the program that it was too late to do anything about it. Because if we would start new with the knowledge we had gained during this delay period, we could have built the B-70's with the same performance characteristics about half the size and weight. There is no use going on with it. So we dropped it and started work on another one.

F: Did you have any opportunity at all to notice whether Vice President Johnson who was very close to Congressman Vinson was able to sort of smooth over this semi-confrontation between the administration and Congress on this.

L: I don't know whether they were together or not, but I presume that they did. Mr. Vinson was very much respected by all members of Congress--both houses. He had served upon the defense committee for 50 years before he retired. He knew little bit about it!!

F: We've interviewed him incidentally. I was afraid he might get over the hill before we made it, but we did get it. Did Secretary Zuckert back up the military on this? Or did he tend to go down the line with Secretary McNamara?

L: I'm sure that he believed much of what the military was trying to say, but he would never battle very hard against Mr. McNamara. This is true of all the civilians in the Pentagon.

F: Is this because of the power of the Secretary of Defense or because of Mr. McNamara's own personal projection about this?

L: No, because the absolute ruthlessness of these people. They wouldn't stand for any opposition.

F: Incidentally, I think that Secretary McNamara once served under you in World War II. Did you know him in those days?

L: Yes, he was in the analysis section for a short period of time with my headquarters over in India and also in Guam when we moved over there, but only for a short period of time and then he went back to Washington. I did not know him then.

F: You had no particular reason to....

L: I don't....I never came in contact with him, no.

F: Then you get into the Cuban military crisis in 1962. We had this problem, you know, of how much of SAC is on alert and what percent is in the air. In other words, were we ready to go, or were we playing around as we did in the Bay of Pigs again with inadequate potential response as to what might occur?

L: Well, about the time the administration came in, '61, SAC normally had one-third of their available force on the alert, a percentage of people. The centers of your resources that you could keep on alert depended on many things and that's the training of the people you had, the status of the equipment you had, the need for the alert and so forth. But of course you can't keep 100% on the alert because your people have to train and keep in practice or they deteriorate. You have to maintain the airplanes. You have to use some of them for training and so forth. So just the stage of the life of the airplanes which really means how much work you have to do on them to keep them in commission is one of the vital factors and how many you can keep on the alert over a period of time. So we had started out in the early days of SAC with a small number on the alert and we've worked up to 30%

which we considered adequate at the time, but we had a capability of doing much more.

As a matter of fact one of the first things I had told Mr. McNamara to make him aware of Air Force potential, potential of the Strategic Air Command in particular, was that we had the capability of putting 50% on alert maintaining it indefinitely. And he ordered this done. As a matter of fact this was one of the things he claimed credit for--increasing the strength of the country. Actually it was there all of the time if you wanted to do it. He told us to do it, so at the time of the Cuban missile crisis it was normal procedure to have half of the force on the alert at all the time. This wasn't easy. It meant that everybody in SAC was working 70-90 hours a week. Of course, this is normal for that command anyway and had been for several years. But at the time of the missile crisis of course practically 100% of the Strategic Air Command was on the alert. You can't maintain this for very long, of course, but that means that everybody is on the alert. And you're not going to have any flying at all, any training. Airplanes are sitting on alert loaded with bombs ready to go, so you can't maintain them. But we got every airplane in commission except those that were undergoing major overhaul--ready to go, so SAC was practically 100% on alert.

F: Did you get any feeling that President Kennedy was somewhat awed by Secretary McNamara?

L: Somewhat.

F: Awed that Secretary McNamara sort of had an undue influence on him than most secretaries. Did he listen to him more?

L: He had a great deal of influence over him. Yes. Mr. McNamara was a very impressive man. He had a tremendous memory. And he could quote figures

and statements and paragraphs from documents and things of that sort and have all that right at his finger tips, which is a very impressive performance.

F: What Mr. Johnson? Do you think that he listened unduly to Secretary McNamara?

L: Well that I can't answer. I wasn't close enough to Mr. Johnson to know. But it's very difficult to argue with Mr. McNamara. He would overwhelm the audience with what he called facts and figures and so forth that may or may not have been correct.

F: But you don't have anything to balance it.

L: But to back up the questioning of it at a meeting where there was just talking going on was quite difficult.

F: During this last Kennedy year when Johnson was still Vice President, he handed his TFX award to General Dynamics down in Fort Worth. Now there is a lot of criticism that this was given to General Dynamics, despite the fact that he had this lower Boeing bid, because of Mr. Johnson's own Texas background and so forth. Did you get the feeling that this did play a part in it? In other words this was a political decision rather than a sort of hard and fast and military efficiency decision.

L: Well I can give you the full story on that because this happened while I was in there. For several years the Air Force had a requirement for a tactical fighter but could never get it funded. Mr. McNamara just flatly said no. The Navy also had a requirement for similar type airplane to fly off carriers. And the answer was no to that. At one meeting Mr. McNamara said, "Well if the two of you could get together and build one airplane to fill this requirement, well maybe we could come up with the funds for that."

Well this is not the way to do it, because it shouldn't surprise anyone to know that this has been tried long before Mr. McNamara came around. Everytime we tried it, it turned out to be the wrong decision. We usually wound up by spending more money for less desirable airplanes--it just never worked out. So, we all felt that this wasn't the way to do it. My staff came to me one day and said, "Look, we have been trying for years to get this requirement filled and haven't been able to, and it doesn't look like we are going to be able to get it done in the future. Mr. McNamara said however that we could get together with the Navy and both of us fill the requirement with the same airplane, why he may consider it. We have made some preliminary studies of the situation and it looks like the state of the art is such that we can compromise our requirements and build an airplane that the Navy can use and we can use, that will be better than what we have. It certainly isn't as good as we could build if we stuck to our own requirement. And it won't be as good for the Navy as they could build following their own requirements but it will be better than each of us have now. This is not the way to do it, but if we don't do it this way we won't get anything."

"So let me talk it over with George Anderson, who was then the Chief of Naval operations, and let them take a look at it and if they agree, why we'll see if we can't get together and work out something." Well, I talked it over with George and his staff, and they finally agreed we could build an airplane that will be better than what each of us had. Considerably better than what each of us had. And granted that's not the way to do it. Our experiences in the past had been bad in this, but we felt we had to have something in this category, and we couldn't get it any other way, so let's try it and give it to Mr. McNamara and see what he says. So we did work with the Navy to come up with a compromise requirement and we compromised the performance of the airplane.

F: You are making an economic decision not a tactical decision?

L: No it wasn't an economic decision because we didn't expect it to be any cheaper. We expected it to cost more, but we felt that we had to have it, and this was the only way to get it. Now I'm not speaking for George Anderson on this, but I expected it to cost more because everytime you try to makeshift on a design of anything, you usually run into problems and you never come out economically on that sort of solution. It just doesn't work out, and I'm sure that George felt the same way, but we didn't discuss the economics of it much. What we were worried about was just getting the equipment because we needed it very badly. We presented it to the Secretary and we finally got it through. We were funded, so we went the normal procedures in selecting the source of a new weapon system.

Over the years the Air Force has worked out a system for evaluating proposals on our new weapon system. Unlike the Army and the Navy that had some systems developed and built in her arsenals, the Air Force never did. We depended on civilian industry to produce our weapon systems. I think this is much the best way of doing it. We got a better product at less cost to the taxpayer too. So we would give a proposal to a number of contractors who had the capability of building it and were interested in doing it. And let them come in with their proposals. Generally, we want this, and this is what we should do, and then they would take that design, design something using their own ideas so forth, and came up with an answer. This is general in nature. No detail design, but just a general design. And usually they spent their own money on this. Sometimes we would give them a contract to do it in the later stages but a lot of their own money was spent on it. They would come in with their proposal and we then evaluated the proposals.

Now really there were three evaluations going on at the same time. One was done by research and development command, which is the systems command now. And they looked at it purely from the technical standpoint with technical people. Would this airplane in fact do what it was supposed to do? Would it fly as high as supposed to go? Would it fly as fast? Would it carry the load and so forth, from a technical standpoint? We worked things out where they come up with a numerical score on this evaluation--on all evaluations for that matter. We had a numerical score. Each one of them were scored.

The material command would evaluate their proposals from material standpoint, a business standpoint. How much floor space did the company have to devote to this project at this particular time period? How did they come out on their cost analysis the last time around? How good is the management team? Things of this sort because very often they had to procure articles, so they evaluated the company and the proposals from this standpoint. And there was still a third one going on, usually by the using command or if it was used by several commands those were interested in using it. And it was simply in answer to the questions: how good a tool is this to carry out the mission that you are assigned and they would come up with a numerical score on that. Well this was all worked out in detail. I won't run over the details upon it where it was practically a form test. You had forms that you filled out answering certain questions that applied to all weapon systems. If there was anything special this, of course, went into the solution too. And this came up to the air staff and the air staff around it to any additional items or questions that might apply particularly to this weapon system. And here again, I put this numerical score. It was just that simple. Added it up and let the highest score win the competition.



This has worked out fine. Our contractors had confidence that when they won they won fairly and equally, and they had the best product. And there was no question about it. If they lost there was no beefing about it. They understood that they didn't have the best proposal, and that was the reason they lost. This all went out the window with the TFX selection, because the first evaluation Boeing won by a mile and no question about it. I so recommended to the Secretary of the Air Force and he endorsed it on up to the Secretary of Defense and the answer came back that, no, we think you made a mistake. We think you ought to do this over again. Well there was a choice of two engines that could be used in this airplane at this time period, and the Air Force felt that we would like to take a look at what Boeing could do with the other engine anyway, so we would do it over again. So we asked Boeing--there were only two bidders at this time, General Dynamics and Boeing--and we asked them to do it over again each using the other engines and see what would happen. This time Boeing won by seven-eighths of a mile because a little intelligence had leaked into General Dynamics what we might like that Boeing had and so forth, so they crawled a little bit closer. Secretary of Defense said that was the wrong answer too. The upshot of it was that we did four evaluations on this. And each time General Dynamics got a little closer of course but Boeing still won by an overwhelming margin.

F: Had you gotten to thinking by now they were trying to tip it toward General Dynamics? Or was there some other reason behind this?

L: Well it never entered my mind. No. I wondered what the flap was all about; it never entered my mind what was actually going to happen. I couldn't foresee anything like this happening.

F: Just these bureaucratic delays, as far as you were concerned.

L: Yes, well we were having a staff meeting at the Air Force Headquarters in Washington one morning and the Air Force Secretary came in, and he told us that he made the decision that we were wrong and we should give the contract to General Dynamics instead of Boeing. Well none of us believed this because the Secretary hadn't made any decisions of this magnitude since the Administration had come in. As a matter of fact the Secretary of the Air Force was more of a figurehead than anything else as far as getting anything done is concerned. We didn't believe this.

F: This is the Air Force Secretary?

L: Yes. As a matter of fact it amazed everyone that he would say that. And I think that he really lost the Air Force right then. No one believed that he'd made the decision. It had been made higher up.

F: Why do you think it was made?

L: Well, I don't know, I can't prove anything or did try to prove anything. I'm sure it was a political decision. Except I can try to analyze what you do about the situation. I know that reading the newspapers that Mr. Crown was a big contributor to the Democratic Party, the biggest stockholder in General Dynamics and what the Texas delegation trying to get the work down in Texas and things of that sort, I'm sure it was a political decision. One that has cost the country a great deal because Boeing was by far the best contractor. And looking over the years at all the work General Dynamics has done for the military and that Boeing has done for the military, Boeing has always done much superior work than General Dynamics. Let's take a look at the airplanes that we have. Generally speaking Boeing is a better contractor. Now remember we had compromised the performance of this airplane in order to get it on the carrier to carry

out both missions, we had compromised the performance not only in the Air Force field but the Navy field too. So we could have one that we could use. And I think that if Boeing had built it we would have had a reasonable airplane that we could have used. But General Dynamics didn't do a very good job on it. The airplane as it now stands is well equipped. The avionics are good. The Tactical Air Command now has the capability of carrying out her mission in bad weather and at night that they didn't have before, using the avionics that are on board. They are tremendous and from that standpoint it's a good airplane. They have got a capability they didn't have before, but the airplane, performance-wise, the airframe didn't even come up with a compromise specifications, and it's not there yet. I'm very doubtful now we'll ever get it there.

F: Basically you need a different plane for the Air Force and for the Navy. You do take something off the top.

L: That's right, the design of every vehicle of course is a compromise. You can't have it perfect in every detail. If you want high speed, you can't get high ceiling. If you want high ceiling, you can't get the speed out of it you'd like. In other words you can't be perfect in everything. You have got to compromise. Give a little here to gain something there. That's always the case in the design a new weapon system. But the more requirements to throw into it, the more you compromise it down. It is kind of coming down to the least common denominator of the thing. And the Navy requires things that we don't require in the Air Force. For instance, we like to have the shortest take-offs and landing distance as possible, but it's not critical like it is in the Navy. They have to fold their wings to get it down the elevator. They have got a weight restriction due to the impact on the deck, deck loading and things of that sort. And their landings, we don't have any of these sort of things so we can ignore that to get something

else that we want. They have to give up these other things they want in order to get it on the carrier. It's that sort of thing.

F: You had your term extended by President Kennedy. Was this any surprise to you?

L: Mr. Johnson was president when my tenure was extended. Actually my extension wasn't recommended by the Secretary of the Air Force or the Secretary of Defense. As a matter of fact I was told this by Mr. Zuckert. And I didn't expect it to be because George Anderson was fired, and I fully expected to be too. However, I was over at a cocktail party to celebrate the birthday of NATO, and Mr. Johnson had invited all of the NATO ambassadors and their military representatives at the White House for a cocktail party on NATO's birthday. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was gone. I was a senior member of the Joint Chiefs present, so I went over to represent the United States military. And after things had gone underway the President pulled me off to a little anteroom and asked me who was available to replace me as Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Well I wasn't about to recommend anybody to give them a kiss of death. I certainly didn't agree with what was going on in the administration, and they knew it, and anyone I would recommend they probably wouldn't take into consideration for appointment. So I said, "Well, Mr. President, we have got a dozen people who could do with a job for as Chief of Staff of the Air Force," and I started running off some names and their qualifications.

"Then well how about something for you? Now how about being an ambassador?" They'd just sent Anderson to Portugal as ambassador. And he said, "I need a roving ambassador around some of these countries upon the Russian border to keep them bucked up or try to help them and so forth and I particularly want to get them to buy this F5 airplane," which was made by

Northrup designed for backward countries. It was a simpler airplane, but it wasn't a first line airplane and wouldn't compete with the Russian first line airplanes. I thought well, first of all, I don't see any reason for stopping doing something I know how to do to take on a job that I don't know how to do. I don't have any experience as an ambassador, and as for selling these F5 airplanes, I can't do that. I couldn't face my counterparts in these foreign countries because they're airmen too, and being airmen, are well aware that this is not a first line system. It's a second line weapon system, if you want to get these people to fight first line equipment with. And I haven't recommended it in the past; I have been against the F5 in the past for that reason, and I just can't go to face these people and say, "Now it is a good one," I said, "No. If you haven't got anything that I really can do, why let me go on to retire and go into industry." And he said, "Well, you haven't made any commitments yet have you?"

And I said, "No, I have no form of course until I retire."

And he said, "Well, give me about ten days."

Well two weeks went by; I guess it was about two weeks. I was down on the Joint Chiefs. We were having an exercise of some sort and the telephone rang, and it was the White House asking me to come over. So I got somebody to replace me and went over there. It was late in the afternoon about 5:30 then. And I saw the President and he said, "Look I got an election coming up, and I don't know what is going to happen there. I don't think your military career ought to be interrupted until your retirement date, so I'm going to extend you until your retirement date." Which was about four months short of two-year four-year tour that the chiefs normally serve.

"Mr. President, if that's what you want I'll certainly do the best I can, but I'm sure that in coming to this judgment you've taken into account the fact that I don't agree with what your Secretary of Defense is trying to do."

And he said, "Yes, I understand that; just go back over there and do what you think is best for the country."

"Well that's certainly easy to do, and thank you very much for your confidence."

Well, by this time, it is about 7:30, so I didn't go back to the Pentagon. I went in to see the Secretary the next morning and saw the Air Secretary and told him who his next Chief of Staff was going to be. He didn't know it. Mr. McNamara didn't know it either. So I was of course grateful to President Johnson for his confidence in me to carry on. But in sitting down and trying to figure out....

F: Johnson didn't break the news to McNamara?

L: No, he surely didn't--he let me do it. But I remained more skeptical all the time of being in a rat race in Washington. I wonder how much of this was confidence in me and how much of it was political and not wanting a big battle in the Congress, because he just as in effect fired Admiral Anderson, which caused a little stir in the Congress, not much.

F: Anderson though wasn't as noticeable as you.

L: Well, and he had done a little....I kept my nose clean. My duty required me to tell the Secretary of Defense what I thought, required me to tell the President what I thought. The law didn't say so--the law says that the Congress has the duties to raise and support armies. And I thought they ought to have any information they required to carry out this duty. So when they asked me a question, I told them the truth and in detail. Yes. I went over and presented the Secretary's program, that this is what we

are proposing. But when they asked the proper questions, which they knew how to do, I would tell them how I felt. They asked me, "Well you are supporting this program that the Secretary sent over here."

"Yes, I am supporting it."

"Well then arriving at these figures, did you agree with all of them during the discussion period?"

"No I didn't."

"What didn't you agree with? Why?"

I told them why the other chiefs wouldn't go into the details that I would. Well I generally disagree with what the boss wanted this way, so I now agree with it. Something of that sort. I gave them the information that they were looking for. "Yes, there is another opinion, and this is it, and this is why I believe this is the correct one."

And as I say the best thing the best compliment that I ever had paid to me while I was in the military service was paid by the Congress on these three occasions when they accepted my recommendation over the Secretary of Defense on the manned bomber system.

F: Did you get any feeling that the Secretary McNamara was trying to get you out? Was he staying out of this?

L: Certainly I--

F: You don't agree with him, that one thing.

L: I didn't agree with him in his line of thinking and so forth. He did know, however, that I carried out his orders to the letter once he made his decision. But he did know that I disagreed with him. He did know I would say so in the proper places. Which I did.

F: Did President Johnson urge you to speak up in opposition to the Secretary or did he prefer that you more or less follow the departmental line?

L: Well when he appointed me again, he in effect told me to do this. I told him that he took into your judgment in making this decision that I didn't

agree with the Secretary of Defense on what he was trying to do. And he said, "Yes, you keep right on what you have been doing and what you think is best for the country," which I had been doing. So the answer to the question is yes.

F: Although you and President Johnson didn't see eye to eye did you have the feeling he listened when you talked to him, that he took into consideration what you were saying?

L: Very seldom did the chiefs get to see the President because with the top echelon wiped out that was normally at regular meetings with the President, it was only when the President decided to have one on and invited the Joint Chiefs was there, and most of the time the Joint Chiefs didn't go, just the chairman. And I have a feeling we didn't get fully briefed on what went on over there from the chairman. I didn't agree with the chairman. It was Maxwell Taylor at that time. I didn't agree with him either.

F: Did you get the feeling sometimes that Maxwell Taylor was being more political than military in his role?

L: Yes. Maxwell Taylor was Chief of Staff of the Army under Eisenhower and when General Twining was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the Joint Chiefs didn't agree with Taylor then on what he was trying to do with the Army. But that time when the argument got too hot and heavy, General Twining would just bundle all up and go over and sit down and talk to the President. The President didn't agree with Taylor either, talking about President Eisenhower, so that was it. Taylor wasn't getting any place with his wild ideas, so he retired. He came back with the Kennedy Administration as a civilian advisor, President's Assistant as a civilian. And then he was put back in uniform, a retired officer as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

F: He tried to keep the Joint Chiefs at a distance from the President? He became the one man who had access?



L: We would have our discussions with the Joint Chiefs for various things, and I very seldom agreed with Taylor on most of the basic questions. And I'm talking about really basic questions. And I'm talking about really basic questions when he said, "Go away LeMay," in effect that "Your airplane is obsolete. Missiles they are going to shoot them down like flies and even we're going to have hand-held missiles that each individual soldier can shoot down airplanes with." And I tried to explain to him why I didn't think this was so, which was very difficult to explain if you get actually in battle against the new weapon system what the outcome is going to be. But I pointed out similar things in the past and I never could convince him. Except we got over in the war over there, and the Russians put the missiles in and we fought against them, and they didn't shoot airplanes down like flies. Most of our other differences were worked out about the same way. Well anyway to point out that General Taylor had his differences with the Joint Chiefs under General Twining as Chairman while President Eisenhower was in office. Then he came back as a civilian and then went back in as Chairman of the Military, and he still had his differences with the other members of the Joint Chiefs. So I question whether we ever got all of the details in on some of these meetings that he went to. I know that I went on, and I never could understand during the Vietnamese war exactly what the goal was, what we were trying to do. Basically we went in there because the Vietnamese asked for help. This is part of the Truman Doctrine, which was promulgated at the time of the attack on Greece. In effect President Truman said, "Look this is as far as you can go. We recognize that we are at war with Communism, and we're not going to have it out with you full scale war to see who wins or loses now, but we're not going to let you expand anymore. And any country around the periphery of the Communist world that comes under your attack, if they ask us for help, we are going to help them." And we

offered help to Greece; they wanted it. The Turks were under attack at the same time; pressure from Russians to get possession of the Dardenelles; and we helped them. NATO was formed and so forth. So, it was part of our policy at the time to help contain Communism, not to go to war with it and defeat it but to contain it. And this was part of our policy we're carrying out in trying to help Vietnam. Because the treaty at the time the French left was supposed to settle the problem over there. That Laos and Cambodia would be neutral, that North Vietnam would be Communist, and South Vietnam would be non-Communist, and that was supposedly the settlement. North Vietnam never did honor the treaty at all. They immediately started attacks against South Vietnam, internally to start with and later on overtly with all her troops. So when we started to help them the first help we had to give them had to be underhand. We couldn't get them anything that could be traced to the United States, although we had openly said we were going to do this, they didn't do it openly. We had to give them under the table.

F: Do you think you fooled anybody with your under the table help?

L: No I don't think so. Least of all the Communists. We may have carried the rest of the world in doubt, but I don't think we ever kept the Communists in doubt. But first we just put advisors in there in civilian clothes. Then we finally put advisors, more of them in military clothes. We gave them airplanes. Put airplanes off of the junk pile and taught them to fly them, airplanes that could be gotten any place in the world--couldn't be traced to the United States. And we put our own people in there flying those airplanes. They went to the greatest subterfuge. Supposedly we were supposed to be there training them. They weren't in combat. Actually they were in combat, I don't know how many missions, just by dumping the Vietnamese in the back seat of the airplane--not that

he was going to do any good back there--but supposedly training him. But we weren't training him; we were in combat and had to have somebody along. That was the subterfuge that was required. But, as I started out to say was, I never knew exactly what they were trying to do. And later on it dawned on them we were following Maxwell Taylor's idea of not really going in there and winning the war, but just committing enough force to try to hold them in place. And say, "Look little man you are foolish for trying to defeat the great power of the United States, quit this now, and let's stop the fighting." Well this won't work between two individuals in most cases, and it certainly didn't work and wouldn't work against the Communists. They're willing to go on and expend lives and so forth for generations if necessary. It was not the way to go to war. They expected to win just like they won in Paris against France, and they'll still win like that, it looks like, not militarily so. We were never able to do the things from a military standpoint that would win the war and never able to hit the proper targets. We've dropped many, many, many more bombs in North Vietnam and in South Vietnam than we ever dropped on Germany and Japan during World War II, but we dropped them in the wrong places, destroying a few wooden bridges out in the jungle, or trying to get troops out of the jungle or something of that sort. I've seen trucks in villages parked bumper to bumper. I've seen pictures of them--I've never been up there on a mission personally. Most of this came after I got out, but I've seen these nonsense pictures taken since I got out of trucks bumper to bumper in villages sat there until dark waiting to get on the road, because in the villages we were forbidden to hit them. I've seen supplies piled many many times high on the highest building in the village because we wouldn't hit them there. Forbidden to do it, forbidden to hit the military targets that would pay dividends.

The biggest one of all was close the port of Haiphong. And I don't mean bomb it. That's only one way of doing it. But to stop supplies going through there. We never did really get the targets that we should have gotten. When we did go up there, it was late after the Russians had gotten in and defended the place, so it made it a little more costly. We could have done all of this for free in the early days without any opposition when the Russians build up the defenses why then it's a tougher chore to do. But the military actions that have gone up over the centuries of how to fight a war were completely violated from start to finish. This business of just putting in enough strength to hold them is no way to fight.

F: Did you have to get this point over to President Johnson?

L: No, I think he was afraid of the Chinese or the Russians coming in and the war escalating. But when you go to war, it's pretty serious business. And the military doesn't go to war, all they do is fight it after you get in and we were even forbidden to fight this one. So it was a very frustrating experience. Once you go to war, I think then the moral thing to do is to get it over with as quick as possible. To me this means using every resource of your command to accomplish that end; get the war over as quick as possible with the least cost in lives and resources of both you and the enemy. We didn't do this.

F: Do you think that McNamara influenced Maxwell Taylor or Maxwell Taylor was the influence on McNamara in this case? Who is the chicken and who is the egg?

L: I think McNamara was Secretary of Defense. He made the decisions. I don't think he trusted Maxwell Taylor any more than the rest of us because he had

the military background. He has absolutely no respect for the military at all--none. As a matter of fact he had little respect for anybody, completely ruthless and unprincipled people.

F: Along another line what do you think of the Army, Army helicopters for a close ground support.

L: It's not the vehicle for that purpose, and I think it has been proven in this fracas over here when we haven't really had the worst enemy of the helicopter to contend with--which is in anti-air or in any enemy air at all. Yet they've had enormous losses, and the losses that they have had really don't show up on paper over there, because they don't count a helicopter shot down if they didn't go out with one of those big train helicopters and pick up the name plate off of it and carry it back and rebuild something around it.

F: As long as they rescue a portion of it well they are....Where were you at the time of the assassination?

L: I was in Washington at the time--the Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

F: You were at work on that particular day?

L: No, I was off some place, at the actual time of the assassination, I was called back.

F: Yes, what was the situation that you found when you got back to Washington? Was there a little bit of tenseness or was it pretty well decided that Lee Harvey Oswald was just after one man?

L: Well there wasn't much of a flap. Everybody was a little concerned that they didn't know what made the attack, the assassination, so they wanted everybody present for duty. That's the reason they were called back.

F: Was there any great difference between working on the Joint Chiefs under Johnson than it had been with Kennedy or did the fact that you had the same Secretary of Defense insure the continuity?

- L: No, I didn't understand exactly what was going on. For several months before the President was assassinated they were rumors, and then they got to be a little more than rumors, Vice President Johnson was going to be dropped for the coming election. And all the Kennedy team was finally got to openly to giving to the Vice President to the back of their hands, and it was rather embarrassing for the country around Washington because it was so apparent. Then bang, all at once he is President.
- F: Yes.
- L: And I believe all of this hard feeling grew up around the flight from Fort Worth back was brought on by these people who had really been vulgar in my opinion and snubbing the Vice President who expected to be stepped on like the cockroaches they were, and he didn't do it. As a matter of fact quite the contrary. From all I got the President was extremely polite to Mrs. Kennedy and the family and bent over backwards to do everything he could to soften the blow if that is possible. It isn't, but he certainly was a Southern gentleman in every respect during this period. And I think this rather surprised these people because they expected the same kind of treatment that they had given him and he didn't give it to him. Why, I don't know; I really don't know because well I can understand in having to face an election and I can understand him being a smart enough politician to know if he threw out all of the Kennedy crowd and put his in, this might split the Democratic party at the time in the next election and so forth. So I can understand him keeping these people around until the election was over, but then he won the election--he won it with the greatest majority that any President has ever had, but he still kept these people around. The same people that had treated him so miserably during this period just before President Kennedy's assassination.

F: This is curious.

L: Yes. I could never understand, never could figure it out yet. The only answer I could come up with is that knowing the vindictiveness of these people, knowing the moral standards of these people, how ruthless that they were, they must have had some threat over the President that he knew that they would carry out.

F: Did you get the feeling that he was satisfied with Secretary McNamara's performance as Defense Secretary?

L: I don't know that I can answer that question. It would seem that if he wasn't satisfied, why he would have gotten a new one early in the period. Afterwards I think he was actually dismissed finally. Things got so bad that he had to get rid of him, but he did it in such a way to make it look like it was a normal progression.

F: Did you ever get any idea where he stood on this manned-bomber vs. missile controversy?

L: Well I don't know that there was a manned-bomber vs. missile controversy, one being "either," "or." We never believed that in the Air Force or any place else. We thought we needed both. We needed both. As a matter of fact, I get credit for being the big bomber General. Can't see anything beyond the blinders. When I was in the research and development business after the war started all in the big missile programs, the Atlas and the Navaho and the basic facilities that gave us the missiles, we had to have them, still like we have to have them and that we need both, we need both.

F: There was it seemed to me at this time an outbreak of increased emphasis on missiles and loss of flexibility of the manned equipment.

L: It became apparent to me that McNamara's goal was to try to build a strategic force that was equal to the Russian force. Sort of dragged his feet until

the Russians built up to what we were equal. These men believed that if we were equal in strength then there wouldn't be any war. Well this is an indication of how impractical these type of people are. To me this is the best way of guaranteeing a war because you can only have peace if you have a mutual respect between people, and if you don't have that and one is plotting against the other, then eventually when he thinks he can get away with it, he will come attack you. This has always been true in history in the past. If they have got something you want and if he thinks he can get it, he goes and gets it. This is just a human history. Even if by some miracle you could design these two forces where they would be equal, will everybody think they are equal? You can't control men's minds. Then, if by some miracle you can design these two forces, how long are they going to stay equal? One is an opened society; the other a closed society. When is the closed society going to come up with a breakthrough on some weapon system that will give them a tremendous advantage that you don't know anything about? You're handicapping the open society by such an arrangement. So I believe this is what Mr. McNamara was aiming at, although he would never admit it any place along the line. He wouldn't admit it now, I am sure, but that was what it was aimed at, and I honestly believe that he thought about 1000 minuteman missiles would be enough for this.

F: That's interesting in view of the fact that the big run on the missile gap was 1960, which may or not have been an actual gap.

L: Well there wasn't any. We may have been at one time a little behind in missiles because we didn't do too much about them early in the game. We were doing a little something about them, but mainly we had to catch up



on everything. Remember at the end of the war we were ten years behind the Germans in technology at that time. Aerodynamics, rocketry, missiles, everything, we were ten years behind and had to catch up. As I say, I was running the research and development effort for the Air Force at that time, chief officer for it on the staff and we tried to get some of these German scientists over to the United States. This was resented and objected to by our own scientists. They didn't want them over here, but we brought them anyway. The only way we could get them in was as prisoners of war. Now we would go and talk to these people and, in effect, we'll hire them to come over and work for us, and "We'll see that your family is taken care of back here. We'll see that they have a place to live, food, and taken care of." We had quite a time convincing some of them that we would do this. But we got a lot of them to come over. Von Braun was one who came over at this time, Dornberger, who had commanded Peenemunde. But the Russians got a great number of them because the research centers were back away from our bombing and closer to the Russians, so they over-ran most of them. We got a few B-1 missiles, but the Russians got most of them, and they got most of the scientists that were working on them. And they carried right on with that program full blast, moved everything right back into Russia, and carried on with it. We got some of them, but we didn't carry on with the full field development program. We had to get all of our ducks in a row under a very strict budget and we had a lot of other things to do too. So the fact that the Russians started early carrying on with the B-1, which was based on carrying TNT, was for this reason that the Russians came up with much bigger missiles than we did, because when we finally started our missile program, we started it with atomic warhead on it and this was a lighter smaller weapon--smaller payload--that we could carry. Therefore the rocket that we built was a

smaller rocket than the Russians built. And this is the reason we were behind in the payload that we could put into orbit if you want to measure it this way. And it took a little while to catch up on that. And you could say for awhile we were behind in basic rocketry, because the fact that the Russians got more of the technical people that knew something about it and kept right on going over the program, while we had a little lag. But in overall strength there wasn't any big gap or anything of that sort, and when we finally put the money into it and got all of our people ready to work, very soon it became apparent that there wasn't any missile gap at all.

F: Did you ever get the feeling that President Johnson ever considered closing the Port of Haiphong or some sort of progressive bombing system of the means to make war?

L: No quite the contrary, because there seemed to be a deadly fear amongst the people that we would do something that might make the Russians mad at us, the Chinese mad at us. And a war would escalate.

F: We were trying to be polite.

L: And every target that we hit up in North Vietnam was personally chosen by the Secretary of Defense on this military-made recommendation they had a lot of targets; and he would pick out the ones that could be hit, and the President would approve the target list. Not only approve the target to be hit but how many airplanes you would throw on it, and what type bombs would be on the airplanes. Down into that much detail.

F: That's time consuming, among other things.

L: In other words every squad was being moved back in Washington and out of the field and halfway around the world.

F: Was there much resentment in Vietnam among the people who were fighting the war?

L: Certainly, certainly, but we had present now in the military services the finest professional force that the country has ever had. They're largely disseminated now because so many people have gotten so frustrated and disgusted that they are leaving the service in droves. There is hardly anyone left with World War II experience anymore. These very high command experience, they're all gone. These people certainly knew that this was not the way to fight a war--they are the ones that are risking their lives to do this. Well, to give you an example, I was never so proud of the Air Force awhile back when I saw a television stint that Bill Stallard had done, a television show of some sort. It had a special name, but I have forgotten it. What it was basically was an interview of a flight of six tactical airplane commanders that had just come back from a mission against North Vietnam. At this time we were really short of pilots. We could never convince McNamara we were short of pilots, and we were short. This flight was composed of a Colonel Flight Commander and all of his wing men were Lieutenant Colonels that we'd scraped up off the desk jobs to get out there. And the essence of this program after they had talked about what they'd done up there and done, was that, "This is what we were told to do. We went up and we did exactly what we were told to do and what we were given to do exactly, but we sure as hell don't think that was the way to do it," and that was perfectly apparent.

F: Did you ever see President Johnson after you retired and have any more contact with him?

L: No.

F: Did you get any reaction at all from the Johnson forces when you went on the American Party of the ticket in '68?

L: No I got into this political racket for a definite purpose. Well, somebody was urging me to get into politics, starting right the minute I retired. As a matter of fact before that right after the war Governor Lausche of Ohio wanted to appoint me to the Senate to fill a vacancy created when Senator Burton was made Supreme Court Justice. And I almost did it because I was thinking then we were battling for a separate Air Force, and I thought I might be helpful in the Senate getting it done, but I didn't want to resign from the military forces just to do it. As a matter of fact, I had agreed to do it before we found out that you couldn't hold a seat in the Senate and a commission in the regular Army at the same time. That's the basic law of the land, so I wouldn't resign in order to accept this. But ever since I retired, somebody has been trying to get me into politics, and I have never been interested in politics. Most military people are not--quite the opposite--as a matter of fact, I felt so strongly about it that I didn't even think that military should even vote. I changed my mind on that, however, but that was my feeling and emotion regarding the military. I wasn't interested in politics, and I said no these things. But coming up to the 1968 election, I firmly believed that if we didn't get a conservative government in the power in 1968, that we probably would never have another chance. And I firmly believed this. I think that we were just that close to socialism or communism. So, I was in favor of Mr. Nixon being the best choice that we had, and when the Wallace people approached me I gave them the same answer I had given all the other people about going into politics; that no, that I firmly believed that we had to have a conservative administration or we would never have another chance of getting one and that I felt that Mr. Wallace's support in the North particularly would come from the conservative side of the picture. Therefore, it would be defeating my

basic principle and they said they understood that but that they were going to be out in California every week from then on to election and would I mind talking to them from time to time? I said, "I don't mind that," and I did talk to them from time to time. And it got up to about the last of July. The last time I talked to them I was going over to Hawaii on a vacation and still saying no. "Although if the Republican convention comes up with something like nominating Mr. Rockefeller or one of the other left wing Republicans, I may change my mind," And they said, "Well, we'll wait."

I said, "Well, look, you can't wait; you are too late now in getting the candidate announced," and they said, "Well we have got a substitute candidate."

Well they had the Republican convention, and on the first ballot Mr. Nixon was nominated, and I gave a big sigh of relief that I'm now off the hook every thing is all right. So I came back after the vacation, and the campaign started, and Mr. Nixon didn't say anything. And I'd been briefed by all of the people that were either in or close to the Nixon campaign that he was going to say the right things and do the right things if he were elected. I was convinced that he was a conservative candidate the country had to have if we were to stop this drift towards communism. So when he didn't say anything, it worried me a little bit so I would get on the telephone and start asking them questions, and I got answers that satisfied me, which were into the effect that look, if the election were held now, it would be a Nixon landslide. Remember, the Democratic party blew wide open at their convention, completely. Talk about the news media and so forth being biased and so forth, it was perfectly apparent; these reporters were trying to get Ted Kennedy into the act. So instead of reporting

the news, they were politicking over the television. Well it blew wide open so it was a Nixon landslide. "Look, he can't get another vote by talking now. All you can do is lose votes by talking, so it was best in a political sense to say nothing." This made sense to me, and so I was satisfied. A little while later this lead ballon went up--the proposed cabinet for Nixon composed of every left wing Republican in the book, none of which had supported the Republican party in 1964 when Goldwater was running. And this shook me, and the only answer I could think of was, well, Nixon had made so many promises to get nominated that he is going to be hamstrung here. So I started asking some questions on that, and I didn't get satisfactory answers. Well, things changed around a little bit this time, and Mr. Wallace had broken up into the unions up North. Well the national unions still said Humphrey, but people in the fields said, "To hell with that I'm going for Wallace." In view of this other thing and a few other questions I had, it looked like I had to go and help Mr. Wallace. So I hadn't had one final talk with him. I didn't feel that we ever had a chance to win the election. It never entered my mind that we could possibly win, but my question was: could I move some people over to the right a little bit by getting out some truths on war and things I was qualified to talk about. I didn't feel qualified to talk about a lot of things that a normal politician waves his arm about at election time.

F: Whether he qualified or not.

L: I hate to say I didn't have the guts to get up and talk about those, but I did stick pretty close to things that I did know something about it. And my only hope was to get people moved over to the right a little bit, but I wanted some sort of guarantee from Mr. Wallace, that if it did go into a tie or was necessary to help Nixon, that he would. And I got that

assurance that Mr. Wallace wasn't about to let Humphrey get elected, if he could help it. And he assured me that his members of the electoral college were definitely committed to him personally and would vote the way he wanted them to and that he largely thought the power he had in the House would do likewise, in case it went into the House of Representatives. So this assurance I felt then that I probably could be more help to the conservative side than I would harm by going up with Mr. Wallace, so I did it. Not that I wanted to get into politics, and I firmly knew what I was getting into to start with and I expected to get cut up pretty badly. I did get cut up, but not as bad as I expected to be. The very first press conference they had when we announced it went off as I expected, but, of course, I'm not naive enough to know that, if you are going to do any good in politics, you have to have the news media, each newsman practically on your side. But here I jumped into a completely hostile press, completely hostile press because Mr. Wallace is not the racist that the newspapers had made out. Really a pretty good honest citizen, graduate lawyer, served in the House of Representatives of his state, judge in his state before becoming governor and true he has got the old southern backwoods electioneering type of stuff yet, but he is a different man when he is talking to say a dinner party of 50 people or something of that sort. With ten thousand out there, he is a different character altogether. But he is not the racist that people point out. But he firmly believed that if you can't correct one evil by creating ten thousand more evils.

F: To go back a moment to the Department of Defense. Did you get the feeling that it became sort of over-unified and over-organized and lost its freedom in a way that knocked heads? I realize there is certain wastefulness in this head-knocking that has gone on; the same time I wondered whether he didn't at least knock out some of the hard type dirt that collects.

L: Well, I have some strong feelings on the Department of Defense and its organization. The Congress passed a National Defense bill that set up the Department of Defense. And we started out in operation as a civilian head. We started out with a very small staff, I think Mr. Forrestal allowed us about 300 people. Look what we have now, particularly the build-up under McNamara. The first drawback that was apparent in this set up is the Secretary of Defense we had, himself. That's the first weak point. Because having the three services--the Army, the Navy and the Air Force--they are always battling for money, always battling for prestige, and you want this, you want this. It means that they have a solution for the National Defense problem that they are fighting for against the others. And you have the Joint Chiefs supposedly to come up with sound military advise to the President, and you have disagreements in the Joint Chiefs. Of course, you have a lot of agreements, too, but you have disagreements. Now as many of the problems that the Joint Chiefs disagree with there is more than one solution to the problem. Who knows which is the best solution? Who knows?

F: You can't treat programs parallel and then pick one. You've just got to pick one and then hope.

L: Well you've got two paintings up here. Both masterpieces. Which one is the best? All right, I can pick one and say that it is the best, or my grandson at age five can pick one and say which one is the best. Or I can get someone who has made a study of art all of his life and let him pick one and then you take your choice. The five year old kid may come as close as anybody else. It's a matter of what you like or what the mass of people are going to like, say, ten years from now which might determine which is the best, or this might be the best now, this one might be the best ten years from now according to a vote of the masses. There is no



clear cut answer to some of these things. When you have these disagreements, the Secretary of Defense is supposed to solve them, come up with an answer. He didn't feel he had the talent to come up with an answer. He was afraid that if he picked the wrong one that it might really be bad for the country. So he didn't make any decision. He would get another group put together to study the problem and make recommendations on it, but never got around to getting it in before he left office and had gone someplace else. So these people wouldn't stand up and do the job and make a decision, that was the problem. Didn't have any such problem with McNamara; there wasn't any doubt in his mind that he knew what the right decision was. It usually wasn't either one of the argument between the services. He had no faith at all in them coming up with the right answers. So he brushed them aside and built his own establishment to come up with these answers. And cutting out military out of the picture to a large extent.

F: Coming out I wondered can you economize in wars? Seemingly a lot of decisions are made on a dollar and cent basis rather than a military basis.

L: Well.

F: Or is it bad economy to economize?

L: Not necessarily. The dollars and cents is something that always worried the military. Ever since I've been in, and I'm sure that ever since we have had a military, dollars and cents has been the number one headache of the soldier. You never had anything to work with or enough to work with--never. Now I'm sure it's true that the military wanted all they could get if you're going to go into battle. You want more than enough if you can get it; you're never able to get it. So, sure, the military wanted more maybe than they actually required. How much is that? How much is actually required? This is a matter of judgment, and you can get all

your calculating machines out and so forth and so on and come up with your answer, but your answer is only as good as the input. And who can read the other man's mind as to what he is going to do at the last minute, which drastically affects your requirements. You counter it. It is a matter of judgment. So money is something we have always considered. And your choice of any weapon system, you always consider the money because it boils down to how many we are going to get. Now if we can only get this number of these gadgets, then which is the best. Or if we have this number, which is the best; and sometimes there is a difference. So, dollars and cents have always been taken into account in the military. And to a greater extent than anywhere else because it never had anything. Christ, I've seen the days when we didn't have enough money to pay the troops. I personally had a 30 day vacation without pay because we didn't have money to pay the troops. I grounded all SAC once because we didn't have any gasoline to fly the airplanes. I flew right down to a wall reserve of what we needed to conduct a campaign against Russia if we actually got to war. "OK, stop flying."

F: That must have been--

L: I know about money. Every soldier knows about money. So it always has been taken into account. But the thing that we objected to in the McNamara regime is the lack of judgment that went into the solution of these problems. They used a computer, completely the Harvard Business School manner of solving the problem, and would not grind in the judgment factor and the experience factor.

F: They never saw it done.

L: Of course I'm of a generation that did not get the normal education that anyone in a military career normally has of going to a company grade school and staff school and war college and national war college. I didn't get

that. Before the war, I was too young to go to war so-called tactical school, which is the only one we had before the National War College. I did get a three months get-rich-quick course shortly before the war, but that's all. I didn't have the rest of this. I do know this: What I did get most of it was 180 degrees off of what I found when I got out where the lead was flying around. So things changed. I'm not talking about the basic principles of war, but some of the things that were being taught in the schools were over 180 degrees off. The best thing I got out of it was how to do staff problems, how to do some thinking--work things out. The basic information such as what is in your head and make proper use of it to do some thinking--do some thinking. With this computer use we got computers in SAC long before they had them in the Secretary of Defense's office. As a matter of fact, it was the Air Force and military money that developed the computer from the start. We had it early before it was in business at all. We learned some lessons that business learned. We expected to save manpower by having this computer. It turned out that we never did save any manpower because we found it would do so many things that we didn't dream of using for. But we wanted this information, and we had to have people to make use of it. And this is true in business. I was on the National Geographic Society; I had been on their board for years. We decided to go to a computer, and one of the arguments that the staff was making when they presented it to the board was how much manpower they were going to save by doing it. I pointed out our experience in the Air Force and we never saved any manpower. And, sure enough, they didn't in National Geographic either. As a matter of fact, it cost us manpower because of the many other things that we wanted to do after we got the computer. Well, you have to grind in your experience and your judgment in

in the solving of these problems because you're dealing with people on the other side of the fence, and you can't always predict people.

F: That goes back to the painting too. Once you have put all the strokes into the painting, and once you've fed all the information into the computer, you still have to have somebody to evaluate what comes out. And the computer is not a replacement.

L: I'll have a statement. And that's to the effect that I want it clearly understood that none of this will be used during my lifetime or the lifetime of people I have talked about somewhat in an uncomplimentary manner. Perhaps they were trying to carry out their duty as they saw it, but I think history has proven that they were wrong and disastrously so in many cases.

F: It's like you were talking about awhile ago. You can't play it both ways at the same time. If we had gone and finally decided to commit to Vietnam, and would have gone in and wound it up like we did, say, in the Dominican Republic, where it was over with in a little while. And we got a lot of criticism and now it's forgotten. With this it would immediately have died down and have been forgotten. In other words--

L: I think one of the most frustrating things that I was faced with up there was the basic intellectual dishonesty of a lot of these people. Well, the flap they had in the public relations affair, where a first public relations officer under McNamara--what was the name--Sylvester.

F: Yes.

L: "Well, the government has a right to lie to the people." And they were certainly lying right and left, because I would sit there and know something about a subject--or thought I knew something about it--knew everything that the Joint Chiefs knew about a problem we had or a subject that we had, and as far as we knew it was top secret. And the next morning we would see

it in the newspaper, and no one had told us that the security classification had been changed and there it would be. But the answer would be 180 degrees off from what the truth was. In many cases they didn't come right out and lie, but they would if it was necessary. Most of the time they would work around the edges to come up with the wrong answer, and if you take individual statements and go down through the line and say, "Well, that one is true; this is 90% true; this is 40% true; this one isn't true;" but when you got down to the end, it would come out 180 degrees off. Well, that's the way it was mostly handled in the newspaper. Time after time. This came out of the administration although I know newspaper people did this to meet their own ends too. I used to have a cocktail party for newspaper men every Christmas time while I was Chief of Staff, not because I wanted to do it, but because my PIO told me I ought to do it, so I did it. And it came one time the day after one of these particularly horrible things happened in the newspaper. And I got a couple of newspaper men I had known them for a long time off in the corner to have a couple of drinks and said, "Look, I have known you for a long time, and I have to admit that you are not the smartest people in the world I have ever met, but you are not the stupidest either. And you have been over to the Pentagon for a long time, and you know your way out to the can. Now my question to you is after all this screaming you do about a free press, about getting the truth to the people, and how necessary it is and so forth and the 'holier than thou' attitude that you take. Why did you print that article yesterday? Because I know that you know that it is a damn lie." And they squirmed around a little bit and finally one of them says, "Well if the Secretary or the President says something then that is news, we have got to print it." I said, "Nuts. This may be an answer you give to a journalism student or something like that but don't

give it to me. I know why you did it. Because right now, nobody will talk to you in the military services any more. It's not like it used to be where you could go around and talk to everybody and every once in a while you get an honest difference of opinion and so forth, and you treated it as an honest difference of opinion, didn't play it up as a mutiny within the services and so forth. They won't do that any more because they wind up out of the service."

F: Yes.

L: "Nobody will talk to you any more. The only place you can get any information is this mimeograph sheet that Sylvester handed out to you. And if you don't print it, then you don't ever get that anymore. And not only that, if your newspaper owns a television station, the FCC then decides they might look over your license again and see whether it would be renewed. The income tax people decided that this is a good time to reaudit your books and so forth and a lot of other things happened. You really got problems on your hands." And one of them says "Pardon me I need another drink," and that ended the conversation.

F: You must have a real problem there. You've got to walk that line between security and the democratic process, and I don't suppose there is any solution to it.

L: Well, yes, there is a solution to it, but to make a basic statement we haven't got a perfect government, but I'm constantly amazed at how good it is--how good it is. Constantly amazed at the foresight of our forefathers who produced the thing. And I just can't understand how so much detail is taken care of and how good a document it really is. It's a source of amazement to me because we have the checks and balances there

that keep us on the right track. It's slow, ponderous, yes, but the chekcs and balances are there and maybe we can improve on it, but I think we ought to do an awful lot of thinking before we do.

F: Thank you, General.

GENERAL CURTIS EMERSON LEMAY  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE (RETIRED)  
1046 PESCADOR DRIVE  
NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA 92660

received  
3/1/76

Dear Mr Middleton,

I am returning the copy of the interview I gave you for B Frantz. I have only made corrections where I considered them absolutely necessary. I have never thought much of oral interviews for historical purposes because in my case at least I have never been sure that my statement would be interpreted by the interview the way I intended it.

I still stand by the statement I made on Page 45. I do not want any of the interview made public as long as I am alive or any of the people I discussed are alive.

Sincerely

Curtis Lemay



GENERAL CURTIS EMERSON LEMAY  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE (RETIRED)  
1048 PESCADOR DRIVE  
NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA 92660

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Curtis E. Lemay