INTERVIEW II

DATE: May 15, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: DAVID E. McGIFFERT

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE McSWEENY

PLACE: Mr. McGiffert's office, 701 Union Trust Building, 15th and H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

McS: This is the second session with David E. McGiffert. Mr. McGiffert, when we stopped in our last session we were discussing Vietnam and your activities in decisions relevant to troop build-up from the period 1965 forward. I also wanted to bring in at that point the idea of the use of the reserve or the call up of the reserve during this period.

McG: We, of course, went through a series of build-up plans and the implementing of that portion of each plan which related to the army. I, at least, did not participate in the decision making involving questions such as, "Should we send more troops?" or, "Should we start or stop the bombing?" But rather [I participated] in the solution of questions such as, "If we decide to send more troops, how many more can we send and on what time schedule and what would be the effect of that deployment on our military posture elsewhere in the world?" As far as reserves were concerned, it is that last question which was really the most critical consideration. For the build-up through the end of calendar year 1967, we felt that we could meet the build-up requirements approved by the President without calling reserves, and still maintain in Europe and in the strategic Army Reserve in the United States sufficient forces to make up an adequate military posture to meet other contingencies.

1968 was a somewhat different story. Because by this time we had in the army as I remember it, nearly 300,000 men in Vietnam, and another 50,000 men in Korea who were on one year rotational tours just like the soldiers in Vietnam. The war had been going on for a sufficient length of time so that an increasing number of soldiers who had been to Vietnam were having to start to go back for a second and in a few cases even a third time. It became apparent to us in 1968, in trying to assess how to implement the decision to further build up the forces toward a goal for all services of about 550,000 for the army alone to I think about 370,000 that for the first time the calling of reserves would be wise and appropriate.

Because it would bring into the army officers and senior and middle level NCOs [non-commissioned officers] who had not been to Vietnam, particularly in the categories of skill where regular army people had had to go back to Vietnam for second tours, and thus partially would relieve this repetitive tour problem. It was also [appropriate] because we could no longer meet the deployment schedule which was the target for that build-up from the resources of the regular army without suffering a temporary, but nevertheless fairly prolonged and fairly drastic, decrease in the readiness of the army forces in the strategic reserve of the United States and to some extent the forces in Europe.

In the short term to have supplied all the build-up forces from the regular army on the schedule required would have meant decreasing the size of this strategic army reserve in the United States. It would have also meant spreading skilled manpower over an even larger army, with the resulting loss of quality in the lower priority units. So for all these

reasons we felt and the decision was finally made to call reserves, partially units which were earmarked for deployment to Vietnam and partially units earmarked to replace in the strategic army forces certain regular army units that were sent to Vietnam.

Now, calling reserves always produces a problem. It uproots people from civilian occupations; it brings into the army, quite frankly, many young men who joined the reserves in order to stay out of the army, out of the regular army, and therefore are not particularly happy as to what has happened to them. Also the reserves, when I say reserves I'm including the National Guard, I'm talking about reserves with a small "r," tend to attract in many areas a lot of college boys who go in as enlisted men and end up with their eyes open, doing jobs such as driving a truck and so forth which obviously is well below their educational level. Despite the fact that they were in a very real sense a volunteer for these jobs, probably in many cases volunteered because of draft pressure, they become unhappy when they get in the regular army and have to continue doing it.

So you get many complaints, and, as happened the last time and what has happened during this build-up, people going to court and so forth and so on. But [this is] just another indication, I think, that reserves are what their name implies. They are not a force which, in my judgment, you mobilize without really a great need to do so. On the other hand, I think the reserve units that have gone into Vietnam, as far as I was able to tell from the reports we received and from my visit to Vietnam last November, were performing very well indeed. There was no reason to think that as long as they have adequate training they can't do as well as any other army unit, on the average.

McS: Mr. McGiffert, during this period there has been great talk and controversy over the

nature of our commitment. It's also been said and written that somewhere in this period between 1966 and 1969 we reassessed our position, and determined that we would not seek a military solution on the battlefield and would try to achieve a negotiated political settlement. Were you involved in any of this analysis of the nature of our commitment?

McG: No.

McS: Can you trace any of the attitude which you looked at as it changed?

McG: Starting I think around the summer of 1967 when I took my first trip to Vietnam, I began to come to the view which took some time to become clearly defined in my own mind, that the real issues of the war were political, not military. I think Henry Kissinger probably summed up the military problem quite well in his article in *Foreign Affairs* last fall. He said for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong to win is not to lose, but for the Americans to lose is not to win. That really is the military problem, because as long as we maintain the current ground rules, which are essentially, "This is a war to be fought in the South," it's very hard to see how either side can win what would be conventionally called a military victory. At least it's hard for me to see that I think, to me at least, the significance of the President's speech of March 31, 1968, was the American government was beginning to step back from the thesis, however unarticulated, that a military solution was a feasible one.

McS: Was this idea credible to the military in the Department of the Army?

McG: Well, I don't think you can generalize about the military very easily. In the first place, they're given a job to do, or in military parlance a mission, and they're, by training, people who try to carry out their mission Since their mission was naturally to fight in

military terms, they tended to see the war in military terms, and indeed that's probably the way they should. That's their job. Looked at in those terms, I think it's possible to say that during most of this period there was progress. It wasn't startling progress, but there was progress. Gradually more areas of the countryside were relatively more secure than they had been before, the casualties inflicted on the enemy were very large and so forth. So that if, as General Johnson, the former army chief of staff, said, "This is a war which from a military point of view is going to take many years, not just the three or four in which we've already been engaged in but many years." Looked at from that point of view, I think the military could justifiably say, "We are making progress, albeit slowly."

Now, you talk about military pressure to continue in Vietnam That's a very hard subject to deal with, because again, it's very hard to generalize about what you mean by the military If you take the average colonel or lieutenant colonel in the army, you probably find him saying, "Gee, I don't like war. I wish this war were over, but I sort of hope it isn't over until I have my chance to get over there." Because having served in a command position during war is, and rightly so, considered a ticket to a better career in the service. This is a wholly natural institutional phenomenon. Whether it has any influences I really doubt, because I don't think it's the colonels and the lieutenant colonels who are really influencing the recommendations the Joint Chiefs of Staff make to the President, which are from the military point of view the principal sources of expression of military views. I really don't feel in a position to comment on what the JCS said, because my knowledge of that subject is partially lost over the passage of time and also never was very complete. So that I can't really pose as knowledgeable.

McS: Did you participate in any effort of analysis or review regarding the peace efforts?

McG: If you're speaking of the negotiations in Paris, no. I didn't have any participation in those.

McS: And prior to that?

McG: That and prior to that, no. In any policy sense, no. The army, ever since I guess about mid-1968 has with the other elements of the Department of Defense engaged in very extensive and in-depth planning called T-Day planning, which involves various scenarios for withdrawal, either full or partial withdrawal, from Vietnam. This is designed to overcome the tremendous inefficiency and waste which followed the Korean War and World War II. The attempt is to try to bracket the possible things that will really happen by a series of hypothetical scenarios. So that when a final decision is made, we have a plan which is hopefully relatively close to what the actual peace negotiations result in.

McS: Did you work on any projects regarding prisoners of war in South Vietnam?

McG: No. No, I didn't. One of my deputies sat on the prisoner of war committee that the Office of the Secretary of the Defense set up, and we occasionally discussed policy, broad policy questions. But I never got involved in any specific exchanges or anything like that.

McS: If you were to sort of capsulize what you thought were the most significant impacts on the military due to our commitment in Vietnam, could you tell me what these might be? This is just sort of a concluding question on this area.

McG: The most significant what?

McS: The most significant impact of the Vietnam War on the military.

McG: On the military establishment?

McS: Yes.

McG: I'm not quite sure what sorts of things you're talking about.

McS: Perhaps more simply phrased is, what has come out of our commitment in Vietnam? I'm applying this to your position as under secretary.

McG: Well, you're not talking I suppose, because I'm not really in a position to talk about, what it means for America's position in the world. I have my own personal ideas, but I'm not really a particularly expert witness on that subject As far as the army is concerned, I think that what the war indicates is that our army is one that is well trained and well equipped-- (Tape disconnected)

McG: --not an army which was particularly well adapted to fighting a guerrilla war or dealing with guerrillas in a country in which we don't speak the language and can't distinguish friend from foe by simply looking in their faces. On the other hand, [it is] an army which, because of its mobility, principally due to the helicopter, was able to fight effectively in a terrain which really defeated the French, who were tied to land lines of communication, and therefore[it is]an army which has learned a tremendous amount about the use of mobility both to move troops and artillery and supplies, in an area which is underdeveloped. We have now an army which has lost a lot of fine people, which on the other hand has in it remaining large numbers of men who have now had direct combat experience, and I am sure are more highly professional people as a result.

Personally, I think what you've got to worry about long range is that because the war has grown increasingly unpopular, things military have therefore grown increasingly unpopular. When you put that together with the fact that we have a continuing economic

boom which keeps civilian salaries running ahead of what the government is able to pay, we may in the next ten years have a pretty severe problem in recruiting the potential professionals, people who will stay with the army or the other services for more than just a very short period of time It's too early to tell what the dimensions of that problem are going to be, but I'm inclined to think they may be fairly serious.

McS: Along this line, I'm sure you participated in some manpower studies regarding an all volunteer army. Also along this line would be Selective Service versus random selection.

McG: I have some views about it I personally think that the Marshall Commission recommendations on random selection and the reform of the Selective Service system and drafting in an inverse order of age are good ones, and I hope that Congress will eventually see fit to adopt them. As far as the all volunteer army is concerned, there's another study going on in the Pentagon now I think on this subject. The earlier studies indicated you might be able to do it if you're willing to raise pay very, very substantially. I've forgotten what the price tag was, somewhere between six and twenty billion dollars a year annually.

When you're talking about an all volunteer army, I think you've got to remember that that's a misnomer to some degree. Because what you're talking about is an all volunteer military force including the reserve forces, because the reserve forces are in fact populated with people who are there because of draft pressure to some significant degree. Instinctively, my judgment is that if you are going to maintain the current national policy of the United States, which I see as a forward containment policy with the ability to fight two wars, or wars on two fronts contemporaneously, it implies rather large

standing forces, both regular and reserve, of a size which in my judgment simply cannot be filled with volunteers unless the pay is very substantial. So substantial that I don't think probably it makes economic sense.

Furthermore, I have some philosophical doubts about it. I'm not sure but what an all volunteer army wouldn't put us back where we were prior to World War II, when military forces really were in a cocoon from the point of view of society. They tended to circulate in their own orbit and had little influence on and be little influenced by society as a whole. I think the infusion of the average citizen which the draft brings about is probably valuable, particularly when we are going to have large military forces which unlike the small forces prior to World War II, simply by their size, have considerable leverage on U.S. policy. I don't like compulsion, any kind of compulsion in American society. But I must say in this case, on balance, I'd rather see us go to a national service concept where every young person, except the lame, the halt, the blind and the insane, do some sort of national service, be it military or civilian, for a year or some similar period.

McS: Mr. McGiffert, was there any effort during your period of service to reduce the ratio of officers to enlisted men? They say this is sort of a bureaucratic establishment in the military, the armed services.

McG: Actually the maximum ratio is governed by statute: you cannot have more than a certain number of majors, colonels, and so forth, all based on the size of the total army. You don't go at the problem that way, actually, by saying, "Well, people say there are too many; therefore, we have to get rid of some." The requirement is really based on a very careful calculation, involving taking the table or organization of every authorized unit,

which in turn hopefully, I think actually in most cases, has been developed by a team of experts who are professionals, know what's really needed. You take all these tables of organization, and one will say, "We need one colonel and two majors and three lieutenants," and add them all up. Then you add a certain number of people to cover those who are going to school and those who are in transient status, and you come out with a number. That's what you need. Now undoubtedly there are people who would differ and say, "In a tank company you don't really need that many officers." But it isn't an arbitrary judgment. So I think we're fairly close to the right number.

McS: Mr. McGiffert, I did want to continue on to one area, just sort of turn it back to you. There was tremendous managerial reorganization in the Defense Department under Mr. McNamara. Changes in what is called outlook on roles and missions theory--

McG: Yes.

McS: --which has tended, according to reports, to centralize authority, both in the Secretary and in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. I wonder if you could give me really what you think were the most significant changes, since you were there through the entire period, and what the impact has been on the army.

McG: Let me put what I conceive to have been the problem as seen by McNamara when he arrived. Very simply, he did not have an adequate basis on which to make informed decisions, partially because information was not aggregated in a meaningful way and partially because there was insufficient independent analytical capability to develop options for solving a particular problem. What he did, and he did an awful lot of things but I only want to concentrate on a couple of them, [was] first of all functionalize the

Defense Department program. Instead of looking at army, navy and air force, you look at general purpose forces, strategic forces, and airlift-sealift forces and so forth So that you can see what is actually happening and make intelligent choices in relation to function or mission, rather than dividing up the pie between these competing bureaucracies.

The second thing he did was build an analytical capability in his own office which could give him, independent of the natural bias which any institution has towards its own survival, which characterizes the agencies in the Department of Defense just as it does in other bureaucracies, views that were hopefully independent of those biases. Now, that was his so-called systems analysis office that raised a lot of fuss about whiz kids and so forth. But I thought when I was in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and I continued to think even when I was at the other end of the pipe, down in the army, that no secretary of defense can get along adequately without having this kind of capability in his own office. Now you can argue about how big it ought to be and exactly what questions it ought to be asking and so forth. There is room for, in my judgment, a reasonable difference of opinion on those subjects, but the need for something to me is quite clear.

Now I think all this had a very healthy result. I don't believe that Mr. McNamara ever wanted centralization of power in the office of the Secretary of Defense for its own sake. He was responding to a situation as he found it, and he had to have the means for deciding or making recommendations on both budget and military program issues. One would hope, and I think he hoped, that in time the subordinate elements of the Defense Department would acquire a greater capability to objectively appraise the possible options that are available, and the choice of weapons systems, or the size of forces and so

forth. Indeed, I think that's what's happening. Because the army and the navy and the air force, for example, cannot possibly hope to be very successful with the Office of the Secretary of Defense if that office has a good analytical capability and the army and the navy and the air force don't. They're just laughed out of court.

Now, what we did in the army was in effect to set up our own, we don't call them system analysts, but it has much the same function in the army staff. This is a step which I think should have been taken even had there been no pressure from above to take it, because the army staff consists of seven or eight deputy chiefs of staff, each with their own area, personnel, logistics, and so forth. There was no organization which really served to thoughtfully integrate the product, so that problems tended to be solved by the lowest common denominators solution reached through the process of coordination by action officers. There's been, in short, a major management revolution in the army.

McNamara's own reforms have been in part responsible for this, and in part it's been Secretary [Stanley] Resor who saw the problem and tried to do something about it. The result is that as time goes on, and it's happening now, far fewer small issues will have to go up to the Office of the Secretary of Defense They can be solved at the level they ought to be solved at. Far fewer issues will have to come to the secretary of the army. They can be solved at a lower level, and this is what you really want to do. You want to try to decentralize decision making commensurately with the importance of the decision. That's perfectly possible if the people at a particular level have the capability to generate the information and analyze it in order to make an intelligent decision.

The army has got terrible problems coming up. Because their weapon systems get

more and more expensive, people get more and more expensive as pay goes up, and there just isn't likely to be room in any budget in the foreseeable future to do everything the army, or indeed the air force, the navy, would like to do. This forces the problem of choice and selection on management and forces you to become much better than, quite frankly, has been the case in the past on cost estimating. Because it's characteristic of certain periods in the past that cost estimates have been understated. You spend a lot more money on item "X" than you intended, meaning you have to spend less on something else, and your forces get out of balance as a result. All I can say to sum up is that the army in 1968 compared with the army, say, in 1966, from a management point of view, was an enormously better institution. Because, really, through Stan Resor's efforts it had been able to create the management tools in both information and analysis where they simply hadn't existed before.

McS: How has it affected the office of the service secretary and his role?

McG: I think that, and I can't speak for the air force and the navy, in the case of the army the life of the army secretary in the first half of the sixties was fairly difficult in many cases. Because the Office of the Secretary of Defense had, as I indicated, developed analytical capability which outstripped the capability of the army secretary's staff; so he was at a disadvantage. I think the worm is beginning to turn now, that it's a pretty even thing at the moment. That's very healthy when you have thoughtful people both in OSU and the army who can really talk to each other as equals in terms of their knowledge and their analytical capability, give their bosses good, solid stuff with which to work.

McS: Between the military in the various services and the office of the Secretary of Defense,

does this still carry with it the need for a service secretary?

McG: Well, you've got to have some organization that will administer from a personnel and logistics point of view ground forces, let's say. We happen to have two; the army does some, and the Marine Corps does some You've got to have some organization like that personally think that whether you need a civilian or civilians heading such an organization really depends on the secretary of defense. To me, if the secretary of defense is wise he will not only want civilians to be there, but he will lean fairly heavily on them. Because if he doesn't, then the only civilians he's using are his own staff advisors who have no line authority. He is getting all his knowledge about what the opinion of the uniformed service or services is from the JCS unadulterated--perhaps that's the wrong word--but unaffected by whatever relevant considerations or analytical work the civilians might be able to bring to bear. So I think a service secretary's usefulness is directly proportionate to how the secretary of defense uses him If the secretary of defense uses him in what I would call a proper way, then he's a very significant individual. If he isn't, then he might just as well stay home.

McS: Did this occur? Was he used?

McG: T think, yes, for the most part I think that probably during the sixties there was at least one service secretary whom the Secretary of Defense did not have much confidence in, and who therefore was really quite ineffective. But for most cases I think the service secretaries were people in whom McNamara and Clifford after him had a lot of confidence, and therefore they had considerable influence. I think we'd better quit in about two or three minutes.

McS: Let me just ask you, how would you compare the two secretaries that you worked under, both of them in various capacities, Mr. McNamara and Mr. Clifford, in terms of decision making?

McG: Before you even start to make a comparison you've got to remember that they were operating in very different contexts. McNamara was there a long time; Clifford was there a short time. Clifford came in with a war on his hands, a very difficult problem posed by that war and without either tremendous management experience or any particular experience in the workings of the Department of Defense. He also found himself with Paul Nitze as deputy secretary, who had been at the Pentagon for eight years, who was superbly competent and knew his way around. As far as I could see, what Mr. Clifford did was to say, "I'm going to by and large let Paul run the department. And I am going to concentrate on what is the most important national issue that we've got that the Defense Department's involved in, and that is Vietnam." Furthermore of course, he was, I believe, advising the President on a lot of other things, too, which took up a lot of time. So their *modus operandi* were quite different, in part that difference imposed by the circumstances.

Now Mr. McNamara had and has an ability to absorb information and a thirst for detail and for the making of decisions which very few people in this world have. He's also a management expert. I would not characterize Mr. Clifford as either a management expert or as having the sort of thirst for facts that characterized McNamara. I don't mean to say that Clifford didn't want the facts, it's simply that the degree to which he went into things in detail was somewhat different I think that Clark Clifford--I don't know whether

I can express it clearly--is both a more remote person than McNamara; McNamara is a very warm, outgoing individual although his public image is not that; [and] at the same time Mr. Clifford has a way with people in a public context which McNamara doesn't have. Perhaps it's mostly due to the willingness of Mr. Clifford to invest time in the cultivation of people, more time than Mr. McNamara.

McS: Mr. McGiffert, just to conclude as a very broad and general question on how you think that the history will judge Mr. Johnson, Lyndon Johnson and his administration And of course I'm relating this to the Defense and the Vietnam War You can decline if--

McG: I think I will decline, because I used to major in history in college, and what you find out very quickly is that those who see events close up are not, until some time has passed, in a very good position to render any very meaningful judgment about them. I really don't know how to answer that question.

McS: Do you have any summary remarks relating to your service in the Defense Department during this administration?

McG: It's the best time of my life so far in the opportunity to serve the country and to serve two fine presidents. To serve with the enormously able and decent people, both military and civilian, I was associated with in the Pentagon was quite an opportunity, particularly for somebody who's as young as myself. I was relatively younger than most of my contemporaries, and yet they were willing to put some confidence in me. In any event, I'm awfully happy to be able to contribute what I can, and I hope the project will turn out to be a real success.

McS: Thank you.

McG: Just let me know if I can do anything else.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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