

INTERVIEWEE: GENERAL WILLIAM F. MC KEE (TAPE #1)

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE

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P: General McKee, to briefly identify your recent background: you became a four-star general in 1961 and served as Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force from 1962 to 1964, retiring in 1964. You were appointed that same year Assistant Administrator for Management Development of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and in 1965 appointed by President Johnson as the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Agency. Is this correct?

M: This is correct.

P: When did you resign, and what is your present position?

M: I resigned as Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration on July 31, 1968; rather that was the effective date of my resignation.

P: And what is your present position?

M: I am now President of a management consultant firm known of Schriever and McKee Associates, at 1400 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia.

P: Why did you resign?

M: In my letter of resignation to the President, I pointed out to him that I had spent more than three years in the Federal Aviation Agency, later the Federal Aviation Administration. I further told him that when he had asked me to take the job that he had specified that he would like for me to take it for a period of two to three years. I also pointed out in my letter that I had more than thirty-nine years of Federal

service, and it seemed to me that in the interest of my family it was time for me to resign the most demanding job I had ever had in my life, Administrator of the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. In short, I made it clear to the President that I was tired. And I might say that the President understood my position.

P: Do you recall--

M: At this point, I didn't tell him, but for history, a short time before you will remember the President also indicated that he would not seek reelection, and pointed out that he had spent over thirty-seven years in the service of his country and I wanted to tell him that I was two years up on him, so I was sure he couldn't object to my retiring at this time.

P: I agree with you. Do you recall your first meeting with Lyndon Johnson?

M: I recall my first meeting with Lyndon B. Johnson very vividly, and I will tell you the story. It was in 1950 or '51, at which time I was the Assistant Vice Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force. Among my many duties in this position was the handling of the political aspects of closing air force bases, which, as you know, is a very sensitive problem. On a Saturday morning during this period the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, Mr. Eugene M. Zuckert, called me in my office and said that he had just had a call from Mr. Stuart Symington who had formerly been secretary of the Air Force, and at this time was (Chairman, National Security Resources Board) Administrator of the War SS Administration. Mr. Symington said he would like very much for Mr. Zuckert and me to come over to his office, that we had a serious political problem on the Hill. We proceeded immediately to Mr. Symington's office. His first remark was, "Gene, you and Bozo are in serious trouble on the Hill (for the

information of the people who listen to this, my nickname is Bozo)" and I will not tell you where the name came from. As a matter of fact, I haven't told the President or my wife. I promised to let them know when I got to heaven.

Both Mr. Zuckert and I were nonplused that we were in serious trouble on the Hill. And we asked, "With whom?" Said Mr. Symington, "Only one of the most important people in the Senate, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson." And he said, "Bozo, you in particular are in deep trouble." I said, "Why? I have done nothing to Lyndon Johnson. I have had relations by phone many times with his office, but I know of no problem with Senator Johnson or with his office." Mr. Symington said he didn't know what the problem was, but he felt it important that I go talk to Senator Johnson, whereupon Mr. Symington picked up the phone and called Senator Johnson. He arranged for me to go visit Senator Johnson; Senator Johnson said that he would call me. I didn't get a call from him until about two weeks later. You can imagine the sweating I was doing in those two weeks trying to figure out what horrible thing I had done to the great Senator Johnson.

At the end of two weeks, I received a call and was asked to come over and see the Senator, which I did. As I walked into the Senator's office, he looked up from his desk at me, and his first remark was, and I quote, "General, have you ever been in this office before in your life?" My clear-cut answer was, "No, sir, I have never been in this office before." Whereupon Senator Johnson got up out of his chair, he put his arm around my shoulder, and he said, and I quote, "General, I have done you the greatest injustice that I have ever done anyone in my career. I have

tried for the past year, with the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force to get you fired. It is a compliment to you that you haven't even heard about it, and a compliment to you that you didn't get fired. I had you, General, mixed up with somebody else, and I want to apologize from the bottom of my heart, and I will tell you that I will do anything in the future I can to rectify this mistake."

The true story is that he did have me mixed up with another General who had a name somewhat similar to mine. This part of the story is a long one, and has nothing to do with this particular narrative, and I will not go into it.

P: Would you tell me who the other General was?

M: No. It's unfair.

P: Just for the interest created here, could you just briefly indicate what the problem was?

M: Yes, for the interest of historians, the problem was very simple. The Air Force had been in the act of closing a number of bases throughout the country. One of the bases on the list was San Marcos, Texas. This particular General officer had been sent over by the Air Force to brief Senator Johnson about the closing of this base and the reasons therefor. Senator Johnson apparently understood the necessity for closing the base, but he asked that he be given a week or so in order to mend his fences before the announcement came out. He further asked that his office be notified before any public announcement was made. As I remember it, this occurred on a Friday. On the following Sunday the announcement about the closing of San Marcos came out in the Austin papers. Senator Johnson felt very strongly that the Air Force had not kept their commitment to

him and it was for this reason that he felt so strongly. I gather that he thought the person involved was General McKee because of the responsibility that I had in the overall business of closing bases. Of course, when he saw me he immediately recognized his mistake.

P: What were your impressions, your first impressions of Lyndon Johnson?

M: Well, of course, I had had strong impressions of Senator Johnson before I met him in his office because I had had many conversations with his staff, and I knew before that he was a very strong-minded individual, certainly a strong Democrat and certainly a powerful politician and a man of great determination. This impression that I had had before was confirmed on my meeting him. On the other hand, a side of him I didn't know is that when he found that he had made a mistake, he couldn't have been more understanding and more gracious.

P: And did you have some other subsequent meetings since that time that have particularly stood out in your mind?

M: Of course, I have had many meetings since that time with President Lyndon Johnson.

P: Did you have any further connections with Lyndon Johnson while he was Senator?

M: I had no direct relationship with Senator Johnson although I had a great many indirect relationships when I was the Vice Commander of the Air Materiel Command at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.

P: What year was this?

M: This was during the period 1953 through 1960. See, what year did LBJ become Vice President?

P: 1961.

M: Yes, then 1953 through about 1959. Because during a part of this period Senator Johnson was the chairman of the Senate Preparedness Committee, and since the Air Materiel Command was charged with the worldwide logistic support of the United States Air Force, his committee was quite interested in our operation and particularly in the efficient management of the operation because of the tremendous sums of money which we were spending.

P: Does one of these instances or specific question come to your mind that you had to deal long and hard on?

M: Of course, as chairman of that committee, Senator Johnson and his colleagues were very much interested in finding any evidences of mismanagement or waste. I think we can all recognize that in a multi-billion dollar operation involving in the neighborhood of one hundred thousand people you are going to have examples of this kind. And I might say that Senator Johnson unearthed three or four of these and gave us a pretty hard time. Actually, from the point of view of the Executive Branch of the government, these things are oftentimes good because it puts people on their toes throughout the system to understand that they are responsible to the taxpayer, and it is incumbent upon them to manage the government's resources just as those they were managing their own. Notwithstanding the fact that the Senator gave us a hard time, none of us that I know of ever bore him any ill will for the hard time he gave us. In the end it was probably good.

P: Could you tell me about any one of these cases?

M: One of the famous cases was when his committee accused certain commands, the Strategic Air Command down in Fort Worth, for using coffee instead

of sawdust to sweep the mess hall floors. This caused quite a few headlines, and there was a great controversy that went on over this subject. I think that the Air Force was partly right, and the Preparedness Committee was partly right. In any event, I must say that this particular epic was a tempest in a teapot. But this is what you can expect from politics. That's not for publication.

P: I wanted to go into your selection now, and I have several questions on this. Can you tell me how you came to be considered for the selection as head of the Federal Aviation Agency?

M: I do not know how I came to be considered. I do know precisely what happened. It was Saturday morning about 8:30 on April 24, 1965. At that time I was the assistant administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for management development. At our home in Arlington, Virginia, we had just finished remodeling our kitchen. Mrs. McKee was sitting in our new breakfast nook. At her right hand was a brand new white telephone which had just been installed and had never rung. Suddenly the telephone rang, and I saw the look in her face. She looked up at me and said, "The White House is calling. The President wants to talk to you." She almost dropped the phone, and when I reached for it, of course, I almost dropped it because I didn't have the foggiest notion why the President would be calling me. I got on the telephone and his secretary said, "Just a minute, General." I waited for moment and she came back and said, "I'm sorry, General, but the President is on another call. Would it be that you are going to be around for a few minutes?" And of course I allowed as how I was going to be around for a few minutes.

In a few minutes the phone rang again, and President Johnson was on

the phone. His first remark was, "Bozo, have you got on your britches?" I said, "no, sir, I haven't. I'm still in my pajamas." He said, "How long would it take you to get dressed?" I said, "About ten minutes, I guess, sir." He said, "Do you have any way to get down to the White House?" I said, "Yes, sir, I do, but that place of yours down there, Mr. President, is pretty hard to get into on Saturday mornings." He said, "Okay, I'll send my car for you." Whereupon he jiggled the operator and told her to get the directions as to how to get to my house. He then came back on the phone and told me to proceed to the diplomatic entrance of the White House, that an usher would meet me and bring me up to his living quarters. You may imagine what happened in the McKee household in the next twenty or twenty-five minutes while we were waiting on the car to come from the White House. I didn't have the foggiest notion what he wanted to talk to me about.

P: Did you feel that you personally knew Lyndon Johnson at this point in your career?

M: Yes, because I had obviously seen President Johnson at the White House on a number of occasions when I was Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force. As a matter of fact, I should have pointed out that the President had me over to the White House when I retired from the Air Force as Vice Chief of Staff and presented me with the Distinguished Service Medal. This is very unusual for anyone below the level of Chief of Staff. Not only did he have the ceremony in the Rose Garden which was attended by the Cabinet, the Joints Chiefs of Staff, and other senior members of the government, but he made a very complimentary talk after presenting me with the Distinguished Service Medal which I greatly appreciated. And I had

seen him on a number of other occasions during the period I was Vice Chief of Staff. He was always very gracious. I think he had never forgotten our first encounter in his office back in 1950 or '51. As a matter of fact, he referred to it on occasion.

P: When you arrived at the White House, what happened then?

M: I was met, as he had directed, by an usher who whisked me up the elevator to his living quarters. As I walked into his living quarters, the door to his bedroom was open and he was in the act of putting on his britches and obviously talking to someone else in the bedroom which later turned out to be Mrs. Johnson. I gather from what happened later they were discussing whether or not they should go down to Norfolk for the Azalea Festival where their daughter was going to be the queen of the festival. An aide hurriedly closed the door, and I waited for about five minutes at the end of which President and Mrs. Johnson came out of the bedroom. President Johnson then took me over to a corner of the upstairs living room. He sat down in his favorite chair and put me down beside him on the divan. He said that Mr. [Najeeb E.] Halaby had tendered his resignation as Administrator of the Federal Aviation Agency and that he had been considering a number of people and had decided that I was the one to take the job. He said he had discussed it with no one except Mr. [Robert] McNamara, Secretary of Defense, and Mr. [James E.] Webb, the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and that both had recommended me to him after he had asked them, that I take the job. I think it's interesting to note here that he didn't ask me if I wanted the job, he didn't ask me if I wanted to go home and talk to my wife; he just said, "This is what I want you to do." Having spent

thirty-five years in the military service, my reaction was to salute sharply and say, "Yes, sir." I am still trying to explain to my wife why I said, "Yes, sir."

P: Do you know who else was considered?

M: I do not.

P: It was rumored at this time that Mr. Halaby tendered his resignation upon hearing of your appointment as his successor. Do you know any facts regarding this?

M: I don't think that's correct. I think Mr. Halaby's resignation had been at the White House for some time.

P: Do you know why he resigned?

M: Well, Mr. Halaby had spent four years as administrator of the Federal Aviation Agency and four years in that job is just about all any human being can take because it's a seven day a week, twenty-four hour a day job with the pressure never relenting. Quite the contrary, the pressure builds up slowly but steadily every day. It's a back-breaking job.

P: Do you know of General Elwood Quesada [first Administrator, Federal Aviation Agency] relationship with Lyndon Johnson?

M: I do not know of General Quesada's relationship with--

P: I mean-- I'm sorry, Mr. Halaby, your predecessor, your immediate predecessor.

M: I am not intimately acquainted with the relationship between General Quesada and Mr. Halaby. As you will remember, General Quesada was the first administrator of the Federal Aviation Agency which was created by the act of 1958. He served under General Eisenhower and obviously submitted his resignation when the Democrats came in in 1960, at which

time President Kennedy appointed Mr. Halaby as the Administrator of the FAA. I have seen Mr. Halaby and General Quesada together on a number of occasions. As far as I know, they are friendly, and discussed many times the problems of the FAA.

P: And do you know of Mr. Halaby's relations with Lyndon Johnson?

M: I am not too well aware of what the relationship was between the President and Mr. Halaby. I presume from what little I saw that they were cordial.

P: Before your nomination could be made, Mr. Johnson had to submit a bill amending the Federal Aviation Act to waive the requirement of the FAA Administrator be a civilian. Why was "civilian" written into that act originally?

M: I think the only reason that the term "civilian" was written into the act originally was the feeling on the part of certain segments of the Congress that this was a civilian agency and that it should not be run by a military person. Actually, many members of Congress, I think, felt this was a mistake, because after all the Federal Aviation Agency as it was then called was also charged with the entire air traffic control of all of the military aircraft in the United States to include the Air Force, the Army, and the Navy, and this constituted really about thirty percent of the workload of the FAA. In addition, many members of Congress felt that some of the people who had been involved intimately with flight operations, as had many people in the Air Force, were probably better qualified in the management of the system than perhaps a civilian.

P: What resistance was met by this first bill, and who led it?

M: The opposition to the first, to the bill which would permit me as a retired General to be Administrator of the FAA was localized but rather

severe. The fight against the legislation which President Johnson submitted, this legislation was similar to the legislation which had been passed many years before for General Marshall when he was proposed as Secretary of Defense. This opposition was led by Senator [Vance] Hartke, [Democrat] of Indiana, and when the bill came up on the floor of the Senate after being considered by the Senate Commerce Committee, Senator Hartke led the fight on the floor. When the bill was reported out by the Senate Commerce Committee, Senator Hartke filed a minority report of some length. His objection to this bill was not personal, and he made that clear. His objections, as he stated it, were matter of principle, and that is that a military person should not be the Administrator of a strictly civilian agency. This debate went on one entire afternoon in the Senate, and was almost recommitted to committee, but wasn't. And that got through by a very narrow vote. However, when the final vote came up, it was almost unanimous. I think it's interesting to note here that on my retirement from the Federal Aviation Administration last July, I received a very nice note from Senator Hartke which enclosed a speech he made on the Senate floor. In this speech he stated that he still felt as a matter of principle the way he did when the law came up before the Senate concerning my nomination, that there are exceptions to the rule and he was the first to admit that this exception was justified. This was interesting.

P: Yes. When you appeared before the committee, on what were you questioned specifically?

M: This is all a matter of record in the Senate, and I was questioned, of course, about my capabilities to manage civilians having been in the

business presumably of managing only military personnel and dealing with military personnel. I pointed out quite clearly to Senator Hartke and to the other members of the committee that I had spent nine years at Wright Patterson Air Force Base as Vice Commander of the Air Materiel Command and later as the Commander of the Air Force Logistics Command and that the complement of the Air Materiel Command and the Air Force Logistics Command was principally civilian and not military; that I had been managing and dealing with civilians by the thousands for many, many years. They raised a number of other questions including questions pertaining to my views on patent policy which had been raised by Senator [Russell B.] Long [Democrat of Louisiana]. I think the committee, when the hearing was over, was clearly convinced that I had no bias with respect to civilian personnel and no bias with respect to a sound patent policy for the United States.

P: This patent policy that you were questioned on had to do with the difference between NASA, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Federal Aviation Agency. What was this difference? Is it a difference in the approach to patent policy?

M: I think more than anything else it was a difference in interpretation. After all, there has been great controversy for many years in the Federal government over the patent policy and there has been some difference of opinion as between the various agencies of the government depending on the particular mission of that agency. At the request of the chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, Senator [Warren G.] Magnuson [Democrat of Washington], I went over and talked with Senator Long, who had raised this question on the floor. After talking with

Senator Long and assuring him that I was for a patent policy which protected the interests of the taxpayer, and explained to him my views in some detail he withdrew his objections.

P: And what was the NASA patent policy?

M: Well, as I pointed out to him when I was accused of bringing over the NASA patent policy to FAA to which Senator Long had objected, that I didn't even know what the NASA patent policy was because I had absolutely nothing to do with it. Notwithstanding the fact that Drew Pearson had written me up in one of his columns as being a tool of the tycoons, because I was carrying over the NASA patent policy to the FAA. I felt like writing Drew a letter and telling him that he was only just one hundred percent wrong because nobody at NASA and nobody in the industry had ever mentioned the patent policy to me.

P: How had Mr. Pearson arrived at this conclusion? Do you know?

M: I don't have the foggiest notion as to how Mr. Pearson arrived at this conclusion, except obviously somebody, which is the usual method of operation with Mr. Pearson, had fed him this erroneous information.

P: Why would you have been a tool of the tycoons?

M: Because the allegation that had been made on the NASA patent policy was that it had been designed to favor industry. I think I should make it clear at this point in my meeting with the President, when he asked me to take the job as Administrator of the FAA, I think he made two or three very important points. First he said, safety was my number one priority, and I was to never forget it. I never did. Two, he said there was to be no politics in this job, and that I was not to be subject to pressure from any groups, either Democrats or Republicans or industry or anyone

else. That I was do to the job to the best of my ability, without any politics whatsoever and to do what I saw was in the best interest of the people of the United States.

Now, in this regard, and I want to make this a matter of record because I think it is important, in the three years that I spent as Administration of the Federal Aviation Agency and later the Federal Aviation Administration, the President of the United States or anyone close to him in the White House never asked me to do a single favor for anyone. When I tell this story to my friends, both Democrats and Republicans, they almost don't believe it because the Federal Aviation Administration has wide responsibilities that affect every state and every major community in the country.

For example, the FAA handles the Federal grants in aid to airports. You can imagine the pressure with limited funds available to get grants for a particular community, particularly when elections are coming up. I had tremendous pressures from various segments of the Congress each year before the announcement came out on these grants. I know that many of these people had gone to the White House to ask the White House to bring pressure upon me as Administrator to make a particular grant. And I think it's a great tribute to Lyndon B. Johnson that he never once gave into this pressure and he made it clear to the people around him that they were not to call me up and exert any pressure, and they never did.

P: During the hearings on your nomination, you were also questioned quite closely regarding instances at Wright Patterson of replacing civilian jobs, civilians on jobs, with military.

M: Yes, this came up very strongly, and it was very easy for me to answer

because we had not done that except in rare cases where it was important in the event the United States went to war that you have a military man in a particular key spot. As a matter of fact, as I pointed out, there had been a great many more military people replaced by civilians than there were civilians replaced by the military. At this juncture, Senator [Mike] Monroney [Democrat of Oklahoma] came in and he said, "I happen to know the case in point because it happened at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma. I called General McKee at that time and asked him what was going on, and I will say before this committee that the action taken by General McKee was perfectly appropriate and proper. I am certainly the one most interested, and I certainly have no complaints about the way General McKee handled this problem."

P: Had the complaint gone through channels?

M: No, the complaint had not gone through channels, as I remember it. The complaint was one from a union newspaper, and we had been subjected to this sort of charges many times before.

P: General McKee, since the first administrator of the FAA, General Quesada, a military man, had resigned from his retired status, I believe, when he accepted the appointment, did the committee hearing you wish you to do this?

M: This was raised not only in the Senate, but also in the House. I haven't mentioned it, but I appeared at an informal hearing before the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee in a full session of the committee, and I was questioned for an hour and forty-five minutes in great detail, and this was brought up. Why didn't I resign my commission and in effect become a civilian as had General Quesada? My answer was very

simple--General Quesada was in a financial condition that he could afford to do this, and I was not in that situation, and besides, I thought it was wrong anyway. I pointed out the mere act of resigning my commission and technically becoming a civilian didn't change McKee one single bit. I had still spent thirty-five years in the service. I had retired as a four-star general, and the mere signing of a piece of paper saying I was a civilian wouldn't change McKee in the slightest iota. It was interesting to note that a number of the members of the committee took exactly the same view. I would have been a fool to have resigned my commission.

P: Did you doubt your confirmation during all of this hearing?

M: I followed all of this hearing with a great deal of interest, and I might add that so did my wife, and she was really sort of plugging for the opposition because she wasn't very anxious after all the years I had put in the service, for me to take this very difficult and harrowing job. Particularly since I was going to lose half of my retired pay for the privilege of doing it.

P: But did you doubt it yourself?

M: Not really, no. The reason I didn't was because President Johnson had decided he wanted me to take the job, and with his great influence in the Congress of the United States, I never doubted but what this thing would go through because he had made up his mind that it was going to go through.

P: And you think that this is what made it finally succeed?

M: Oh, yes, if it hadn't been for all the work of getting this law through that President Johnson did personally, it would not have gone through.

P: In your judgment, could this resistance have been interpreted as a first

indication of an anti-Johnson rebellion on the Hill?

M: No, I don't think so, at all.

P: Why do you say that?

M: Well, if you look at that particular time, Mr. Johnson had quite strong backing in most elements of the Congress. It was, I presume, the first public schism between the President and Senator Hartke.

P: They had been rather close friends earlier, hadn't they?

M: That was my understanding.

P: You have indicated to me several times the horrifying nature of the position as Administrator of the FAA. Could you briefly go into your responsibilities? You have indicated that you were charged primarily with safety by President Johnson, and I wonder if you would elaborate on the responsibilities as FAA Administrator and your feeling and approach to the position and the demands.

M: As a matter of fact, as Administrator of the FAA, I had two major responsibilities. One of the reasons that the President asked me to take this job was because of the supersonic transport program, and FAA was charged with the management of this program. So I held the complete responsibility to the President for the management of the supersonic transport program. Obviously, as outlined in the law, which is very specific, I was also charged with the operation of the air traffic control system of the United States with a mandate to give due consideration to general aviation, to military aviation, and to commercial aviation. And my primary responsibility was not only for the effective and efficient operation of this system, but also for the safety of the system.

Now, the Federal Aviation Administration has some forty-four

thousand people in it, and they man facilities throughout the United States and also in some areas overseas. If you look at the number of passenger or commercial aircraft flying each day around the clock, and the fact that we have about one hundred ten thousand general aviation aircraft that are plowing through the air space, and this goes around the clock, you can see the job of FAA in operating the system and in providing the communications, the navigation and all of the other elements that it takes to operate effectively a system of this kind. You can see the enormity of the job that needs to be done.

P: What were some of these demands immediately placed upon the Administrator?

M: The big demands placed on the Administrator, of course, are decisions that have to be made frequently. You have budgetary decisions that have to be made, you have to appear before the various committees of Congress to defend the budget, you recognize that with the limitation on the budget that you are not asking really for the resources that are really required to do the job, and this makes it very difficult. Any time there is a major accident and people are killed in these accidents, you are called up before the appropriate committee of Congress and investigated in great detail. While this is proper, and this is the way it should be, it nevertheless is very taxing on the individual who happens to be Administrator, particularly since the Administrator has a very strong personal feeling for the safety of the people who are flying in the air space. You carry this responsibility with you, as I pointed out before, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. It never leaves you.

P: This brings me to another question. What are the distinctions between the FAA and CAB [Civil Aeronautics Board]? Who does investigate air crashes?

M: At the time when I took over as Administrator of the FAA, then the Federal Aviation Agency which reported directly to the President and the CAB, on the other hand, also reported directly to the President. We had a different relationship than exists today. The FAA was charged with the operation of the air traffic control system, the grants-in-aid to airport programs, and the safety of the system. And so in effect the organization was an operational organization that operated seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. The CAB, in addition to its regulatory functions in the economic operation of the airlines, also had the safety division. This was done intentionally by the Congress to have the investigation of aircraft accidents separate and apart from the agency that was charged with the operation. In other words, had it been under the FAA, we would have been investigating ourselves, and the Congress felt, and I think rightfully so, that it is a little bit difficult to inspect yourself and charge yourself with negligence. This system worked out very well.

Under the present organization where the Federal Aviation Administration is under the Department of Transportation, the safety division now comes under the Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, which is administratively under the Secretary of Transportation, but as far as investigation of accidents is concerned, it is totally independent of the Secretary. In other words, they have tried to maintain the separation of powers as between the investigative field and the operational field. I might add that this is working out quite well.

P: Who served with you while you were administrator of the FAA--directly under you?

M: Oh, my deputy as administrator of FAA was Mr. David Thomas who is now

the Acting Administrator. I selected Mr. Thomas as the Deputy because of his outstanding performance over the years in the CAA [Civil Aviation Agency] and also under General Quesada, and Mr. Halaby. He is a skilled jet pilot; he came up through the air traffic control system and so he is intimately aware of the operation of that system, and intimately aware of the problems that need to be resolved. He's a man of the very highest capability and integrity.

P: And was that your suggestion that the President nominate him as your deputy?

M: Yes.

P: What were your relations with your staff and your deputies?

M: Well, in addition to a deputy, we had a number of associate administrators in the various functional fields, all very able people. I considered my relationship with these people to be outstanding. As a result of my many years in the military, I had some experience in handling staffs of various kinds, in particular high-level staff. I met with these people every morning at 8:30 for ten or fifteen minutes just as a means of communicating with them. They all knew that my door was open at any time they had a problem. I think we had a feeling of mutual trust and confidence which permitted us to operate effectively and I hope efficiently.

P: What are the problems between FAA and the Air Force regarding air traffic rules?

M: I think that is a good question, and the easiest one you have raised for me to answer. The problem between the Air Force and the FAA in my three years were nil. There was a great argument a number of years ago about putting all the air traffic control under the then CAA and later the FAA.

When this argument was resolved in favor of giving the entire operation to the FAA, the first ones to admit that it has worked beautifully is the United States Air Force. The truth is that we have had no problems. During this entire period, I never had a call once from the chief of staff of the Air Force or the vice chief of staff of the Air Force concerning any significant problem between the FAA and the Air Force. As a matter of fact, our system is held up throughout the world as a model system. It's not generally known, but most of the foreign countries still have a separate system for the military as opposed to the civilian system. When they come over here, they take a look at our system and they would all tell me they wished they had the same system in their own country.

P: I would imagine that this alleviates the problem of coordination between two different groups.

M: Well, it just makes it easier. It's very difficult to run two separate systems when a single system is much more efficient, is much cheaper to operate, and a much safer system. After all, an airplane is an airplane up in the air space, whether it's a military airplane or is a piper cub or a 707. It's still got to be handled by somebody, so why have two separate systems to get all confused when one system can do a better job.

P: And there was no conflict between the Air Force's desire for restricted air space?

M: No, we have special operating procedures to handle classified flights and particularly Strategic Air Command flights, and that has been worked out in detail with the Air Force and also with the Navy without any significant problem.

P: This goes back just a moment. In your nomination there was some discussion about the closing of flight service stations. Was this a problem at

the time, or was that more historical?

M: Oh, there was a great problem about flight service stations because Mr. Halaby had come up with the plan to close something over a hundred flight service stations. And you look at the number of congressional districts this affected over the country. There was a great furor in the Congress about this proposal, and it never did get off the ground. The Congress stipulated clearly that we would have to get permission from the appropriate committee of the Congress before we closed any flight service stations.

P: Do you think this would have been efficient or economical?

M: The plan as proposed at that time I don't think was the right plan, and I think everybody involved now would say so. There is another plan for the organization of all the flight service stations which is under consideration in the Department of Transportation which all of us concerned think makes a lot more sense.

P: What is this plan.

M: Basically, the flight service plan now under consideration in the Department of Transportation would reduce significantly the number of so-called class-one flight service stations, but provide better manning of the ones that remained, better equipment, and do a better job, but would greatly enlarge the number of stations that did only weather reporting. So over-all it's a more efficient system. It won't cost any more, and in my view will provide considerably better service to the flying public than we have today.

P: Just to define this, what other functions do they have besides weather, these flight service stations?

M: Flight service stations do a tremendous job in terms of weather, but

in addition they are the stations that largely handle general aviation flying throughout the country. When a man in his piper cub or his private airplane wants to go someplace he files his flight plans with the flight service stations, and he gets his weather from the flight service station.. He gets his information concerning the route, concerning the location to which he happens to be going, and anything else concerning his flight that he wants to know. They provide a very valuable service to the safety of the general aviation operation. But they are also important to the operation of a commercial airliner because a lot of their flight plans are filed through the flight service stations that the airlines file.

P: There was also a discussion during the hearing regarding the medical department of FAA. Is this of any great consequence?

M: It was of some consequence only that we were having a problem at that time in the medical department of the FAA which revolved around personalities, and all I could do at the hearing was to say that I would look into it and take whatever steps were necessary to correct any inadequacies in the medical department, which I did. You will find now that the medical department of the FAA is efficiently run, and we have had no problems of any significance in the last two years.

P: What had created the problem?

M: It was a question of personalities and misunderstanding between various elements of the medical service of the FAA.

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By William F. McKee

to the

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