

**Stephen Ailes Oral History Interview - JFK #4, 10/30/1968**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Mr. Ailes, under secretary of the Army under President John F. Kennedy, talks about the organization of the government's civil defense efforts, and also touches on issues of civil rights and discrimination in the military.

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STEPHEN AILES  
JFK #4

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
54	Bureau of the Budget
55	Civil defense structure
57	Office of Emergency Planning
58	Civil Rights
58	Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity
58	Gesell committee
62	Integration

Fourth Oral History Interview

with

STEPHEN AILES

October 30, 1968  
Washington, D.C.

By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: At the time you had just started to talk about civil defense, and you recalled that you had gone over to the Bureau of the Budget in the very early period when, I believe, civil defense was about to be transferred from an executive office to the department.

AILES: Right.

HACKMAN: Under Pittman, and then over time the responsibilities, well, at one point later were then transferred completely to the army.

AILES: Yes, I know the date of that because it's my birthday.

HACKMAN: I remember your saying that. Can you recall what position you were presenting in the early period and how this shift came about? Was this something you were involved in?

AILES: I went to the Bureau of the Budget; I remember the meeting, and I remember sort of where it was. I remember the man's name was Ken [Kenneth R. Hansen] who presided. That's just about all that I remember.

And this was just a matter of governmental organization, of whether, as I recall, the functions that are now performed by OEP [Office of Emergency Planning] and the functions performed by the Office of Civil Defense should be separated. And there was some serious thought given at that discussion to whether or not this should not be assigned to the army then, on the theory that the army tends to get the functions that have to do with the continental United States--functions of that character.

The decision was made--this was sort of in an era when some operating responsibilities were being brought up to the level of the office of the secretary of defense. The Defense Intelligence Agency came along in this

[-54-]

period; the Defense Supply Agency came along in this period. Art Sylvester was actively trying to consolidate the information, public affairs functions in his office. And perhaps in line with that move, the decision was made to create an assistant secretaryship at Defense. Perhaps it was thought that it would be easier to recruit the man you needed if you could get him a little higher up the line. In the hierarchy an assistant secretary of defense outranks assistant secretaries in the services, and besides that, the statute limits the number of assistant secretaries to three in each service anyway, or it did then. So, in any event, that was done, and Steuart Pittman was brought in. And I must say he did an immense job with that thing under terrible difficulty.

We had the responsibility for what was called military support of civil defense. And I remember the fellow's name. It was a fellow named Corbie Truman, who was a lieutenant colonel in the office of the deputy under secretary of the army for international affairs. Corbie was a younger brother of Lou Truman [Louis W. Truman], who's a lieutenant general that you've probably heard of, and they're both nephews of a fellow named Harry S. Truman. Corbie did a wonderful job of working with the other services and trying to figure out exactly what ought to be our normal organizational relationships with the civil defense structure and what ought to be our mobilization relationships with the civil defense structure.

And that was an interesting project, and some very useful work was done along the line of that, which was facilitated by the fact that in a good many states the adjutant general of the state was also the director of civil defense, and in a good many states the protected headquarters for civil defense purpose was also the headquarters of the National Guard.

But I was interested in that problem, and we worked out some effective devices, it seemed to me, for getting good cooperation there. And I was interested in it because it did really sort of increase the stature of National Guard permanent officials, the full time officials, in all the states and give them a very useful role to play. Then it was a very good exercise as far as disaster planning was concerned, and there were units in the National Guard and in the reserve who worked on that. So-called civil affairs units took those as projects.

We had an interesting device which I can't quite spell out of having people who were under different commands, so to speak, or in different lines of responsibility work together as a planning group under the organization chart they would use in the event of

mobilization. In other words, A was in command of this planning group although nobody worked for him at that point, but they would have worked for him in the event of mobilization. So some effective activity of this sort went on. And I thought the military, which at first, you see, was hesitant about having assets, as they say, committed to civil defense, nevertheless responded very well to the requirement that they plan for these things, so that, in effect, you would use the military that were available in the event of a disaster to meet it, without

[-55-]

tying them down so that they couldn't be used for their primary military purpose.

I guess the thing that I'm reaching for is that the interesting organizational thing we developed was that we would use the civil defense structure that emanated from Washington, all the way down through the governors of the states and their civil defense regional people and then the state people and so on, as the chain of command. And we worked out a scheme where army commanders would take orders all the way down that line from their appropriate counterparts, but that the orders would be mission type orders rather than specific orders, and that the chain of command of the army forces, that the chain of command of the military forces, would be through the army chain--the continental army command, the generals in command of each army area, the corps right down to the State AGs [adjutant generals]. And the State AG fit right into the federal chain of command, you see, in that sort of a situation.

HACKMAN: Is that something that came out of Pittman's office, or did Corbie Truman....

AILES: Oh, that came out of our office. That's Corbie Truman and the army staff, because the army was given the assignment of working out military support for civil defense. And we worked with Pittman's people, but it was the Army's responsibility to evolve the plan by which maximum military support for civil defense would be developed. And Pittman's people were delighted with the way this worked out.

HACKMAN: Was this anything that Secretary Starh or Vance were particularly interested in or had to push on to get out?

AILES: I would say that Howard Haugerud, who was the deputy under secretary for international affairs, and Corbie Truman were the guys that deserve the credit for a really effective job of thinking through those problems. And then the National Guard stepped right in all the way across the country; senior National Guard people were interested in doing a good job on this.

HACKMAN: Do you remember how the full switch of the responsibility to the army came about? Was that something that had been pushed by anyone under the Kennedy administration?

AILES: No sir. I think that my recollection is that what happened was when Steuart Pittman wound up his tour of about two years, or whatever it was, the problem of replacing him looked immense. And in fact he had not, in fact the Defense Department, the secretary of defense.... Let's say, in fact the reasons for placing that activity in

[-56-]

the office of secretary of defense proved over two years not to be all that important, and I think because of the terrific job that the army had done on military support for civil defense, it just looked like an easier way to house that thing would be to just place it in the army.

HACKMAN: Can you remember in the very early period when the move from the executive Office of Emergency Planning to DOD was being considered, any particular.... Well, I had heard that they were having problems with Cy Ellis [Frank B. Ellis]--I don't know if you remember this at all--he was from Louisiana, and who at that point....

AILES: It must be Frank Ellis? Was it?

HACKMAN: Frank Ellis.

AILES: Cy Ellis is the raw bar down here, isn't it?

HACKMAN: That's right. They were having some problems with him, and this is one of the main reasons they shifted it. Can you remember that being discussed at all?

AILES: I just remember some general talk about that. The OEP--these two things are really sort of separate, but they've never been worked out too well, and the first thing I did when the civil defense business was assigned to the army was to ask these guys to go through an army type exercise, which they willingly did. And I think it was a constructive effort, where you assume a scenario, you see, or assume a series of events, like you say, "At noon on November third there is a nuclear explosion over Chicago. Then just please sit down and write out for me on a minute by minute basis everything that happens thereafter for the next sixty days, telling me who makes what decisions pursuant to what authority. Then take that thing over to OEP, and see if you can get their agreement on who does all these things." And then I had another one that.... [Interruption] Well, I think that we had also assumed that there was just an accident, a major accident somewhere, or we assumed that there was a major military attack in Germany, and a series of different things of this character, in order to just play out the string. And these guys fell to that exercise with a great deal of enthusiasm, and it

produced a tremendous number of issues to be resolved. But I was astounded at the nature of the relationship between OEP and OCD even then.

HACKMAN: Was Ed McDermott [Edward A. McDermott] still over there at that point, do you remember?

AILES: Yes. I think Ed was there probably most of the time I was in

[-57-]

the army. And he was fine. In fact, Ed came over. When I had this idea, we asked him over, and he came over and participated in setting it up.

[Interruption]

HACKMAN: I'm finished with civil defense. The only thing I have, did you ever have any contact at all with Carl Kayesen at the White House on this?

AILES: Yes. Not on civil defense.

HACKMAN: On civil defense. You had talked about it on Okinawa and Panama.

AILES: I saw Carl on two weeks ago Saturday, up at Princeton, as a matter of fact.

HACKMAN: Okay. Why don't we talk about civil rights for a while?

AILES: All right.

HACKMAN: Can you remember at what point the Department of the Army got any push for movement in this area from McNamara, or Yarmolinsky was working, I believe, for McNamara on the civil rights side in '61 and '62? Or any contacts with Vice President Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson] Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity? Or did you get involved in this whole area to any great degree?

AILES: Well, Vice President Johnson's committee--we had a fellow named Roy Davenport who was a deputy undersecretary of the army for manpower. And Roy handled all the grievance matters with the president's committee. Incidentally, one of my partners here was over there working as the executive assistant to that committee, or executive director or something like that, Tom Powers. But Roy handled those. Roy was a negro himself, as you probably know, and an immensely able guy. And he would come and just talk to me generally about the state of affairs. The army, basically, is very good on this subject. And we had very few problems about what was going on on post or within the army itself. I never remember hearing from Yarmolinsky on this subject. I could have, but I simply don't remember talking to Adam about this at all--with one possible exception, and I don't know whether Adam had

anything to do with this or not. At some stage, there was something called a Gesell committee appointed.

HACKMAN: Yes. Gerhard Gesell, you say?

AILES: Gery Gesell was the head of it.

[-58-]

HACKMAN: And Ben Muse and that bunch.

AILES: Right. And their role was to check on the problem of off-post discrimination. And I was quite interested in that. I remember eating lunch with Gery on this subject, And then we set up a pilot project, at some stage, of trying to figure out really what should be done in this situation. And we picked Fort Bragg, and we picked Fort Folk down in Louisiana. And we sent teams to both places. I remember Owen Smith went down to Fort Polk.

I think before we sent the teams down, we had the commanders in because I remember sitting with General Westmoreland [William C. Westmoreland], who was at that time commanding the corps, the Eighteenth Corps, stationed at Bragg. And I don't remember the name of the general from Polk, but he was there. I remember we sat and talked with him about our plan and what we were trying to do and about our teams. I really can't remember now the make-up of the teams. I suppose Al Fitt might have gone down to Bragg; I'm not sure. Al was always very much interested in this whole subject. I went up on the Hill and talked to the relevant senators and congressman from each state simply to tell them that we were going to do this, explain to them about what our problem was. And I remember that Westmoreland did, as usual, a tremendously effective job along this line in just finding out what the situation was and initiating the proper steps for it.

We were anxious to see really what could be done by the army. Our basic approach to the problem was that we are not out to reform the world, this is somebody else's responsibility, but we, are determined to take care of our people. And servicemen are assigned to posts based on MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] branch classifications and not based on color because our records don't even show color. It has to be that way. And if a post exists in the situation where your service people can't get appropriate house or can't get schools or can't get access to the town's facilities, the climate there is simply not suitable for a military post in the modern world, in this day and age. And that's part of the climate. And certainly I should say that Gene Salet [Eugene A. Salet], who later was the commander at the army war college [The National War College] as a major general, was a commander at Fort Jackson in South Carolina....

HACKMAN: I've been there.

AILES: All right, this is.... Now wait a minute, correction. That's Fort Gordon in Georgia, in Augusta. And Gene had done a marvelous job of talking to the

city fathers about the problems of his post and what was required. And the Gesell committee came back with great praise, fulsome praise for the Salet operations there. But Al Fitt, as you know, was always interested in this problem and went up and did a tour as the civil rights man in OSD and then came back as our general counsel. So Al was

[-59-]

always worrying about various aspects of this problem.

Now we would have a problem from time to time of Negro versus white servicemen in the gasthouses of Germany. We had a problem at Kadena, or whatever that town was near Kadena Air Force Base over in Okinawa. That's not the name of the town. And when you went to those places, you always heard quite a bit about the situation and about what was being done about it.

Now I do remember the president coming over, as vice president, to talk with our equal opportunity officers from all the army bases. We had a meeting in Washington, and we had these guys that worked in this field all over the world back. Roy Davenport ran the meeting, and we had quite a program for them. I remember introducing the Vice president when he got up to speak to them. I had been called over by him and subjected to about a one hour diatribe, along with Fred Korth and Gene Zuckert [Eugene M. Zuckert], on this subject, and so I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to use this forum, in front of these people, to tell the vice president a little bit about what the army had already done in this field starting back in 1947, which I did.

HACKMAN: Do you remember how early it was that Vice President Johnson had the three of you over?

AILES: Well, you could date it quite easily from the fact that Korth was secretary of the navy at that time. He was in there a year or so. So that's got to be, that has to be--John Connally was there one year, and Korth was there just about one year, so this has got to be about 1962. I was over there representing whoever was secretary because I was under secretary then, and I have an idea it was Elvis that I was representing, but I could be wrong.

HACKMAN: Several people have commented that it was a problem to tell how serious Vice President Johnson and the administration were on this, how hard they really wanted to press this. And some people in the early period were surprised, I think, when he pushed it that vigorously.

AILES: I think that's right. I think that there wasn't anything in his record, public record that would have indicated that he would be as interested in this problem, but the day we talked to him, he was pretty damn interested in it. And he talked to us about an hour. And he had two or three stories that I heard later, and everybody else heard, that he always talked about when he talked about this subject.

HACKMAN: On your contacts with the Gesell committee, were you aware that the primary studies that they were doing were being done by the

[-60-]

Civil Rights Commission staff?

AILES: No. At least, I don't remember. I remember there was a young Negro on that committee that people thought was very able, and I suppose Al Fitt must have told me about him. I had known Gery Gesell before, as a lawyer in town, and my contact with the committee really consisted of a long luncheon with him when he was telling me about what they were doing and I was talking to him about matters in which we could help them, and so on. What I don't recall is what the genesis was of that two base inquiry that we made.

HACKMAN: That was after the committee was announced and before it made its report?

AILES: No. After the committee made its report because this was done while I was secretary.

HACKMAN: Oh, I see.

AILES: This was done, I suppose, sometime in '64.

HACKMAN: Can you remember the report of the committee having any immediate impact? One of things that happened, I believe in the month after the committee made the report, was this order came out of Secretary McNamara's office that they could put an off limits ruling on housing that was discriminatory, a commander could with the concurrence of the civilian secretary?

AILES: That could have come out then, but my recollection is that that came out later, even after I left.

HACKMAN: This is July of '63, I'm thinking.

AILES: It did?

HACKMAN: Yes.

AILES: I just don't remember that. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: Well, this came out that several people have said there was an understanding that it wouldn't really be used. Does that tie in with anything you remember?

AILES: No. I just don't really have a recollection with respect to that. I do remember after I got over here talking with Tom Morris [Thomas D.

[-61-]

Morris] from time to time about some of the housing problems around here.

Incidentally, I do remember another thing that had civil rights overtones to it that was a unique problem you get with the army, and that the problem of integrating concessions, amusement facilities that were on concessions which were controlled by the Corps of Engineers. And we put out an order at one point, a flat out order on that that was supposed to be going to create terrible problem, and it created none at all. And again that's something that Al Fitt was very wrath interested in.

HACKMAN: Can you remember getting in any particular community problems, problems in communities close to bases--at Fort Lee there was a problem on the school busing or something down there....

AILES: No.

HACKMAN: Impacted area, Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] got involved in making a ruling at one point on conditioning grants to impacted areas where there was discrimination?

AILES: No. As I say, Al was very good on these subjects and would probably just automatically take ahold of anything of that character.

HACKMAN: I have a note from the White House appointment books, and you may not recall this, that you attended a National Security Council meeting, May 19, 1961, very early, with McCloy [John J. McCloy], Fisher [Adrian S. Fisher], Ed Gullion [Edmund A. Gullion], Harold Brown, Lyle Garlock, Glenn Seaborg. Do you have any recollection of that at all?

AILES: Yes.

HACKMAN: What was that on?

AILES: I haven't any idea, except that Brown made a report. This was--in fact, it's the only one of those I ever attended, which is why I remember it. I remember being ushered in; I remember where we sat. [Interruption] ...substitute for Elvis and probably with Gene Zuckert. I was tremendously impressed by the way President Kennedy ran the meeting and the manner in which he was intellectually in control of the meeting, if you know what I mean. I was astounded by

Harold Brown and his ability to make the presentation he did. I have an idea that the meeting had to do with nuclear testing or something like that.

HACKMAN: That's what I surmised from the group. Speaking of Brown and McNamara's other civilian deputies, were there any that you had

[-62-]

particular problems in getting along with, Hitch [Charles J. Hitch] or Brown or you probably had a lot with Paul [Norman S. Paul] in the manpower spot. And let's see, who was the other fellow, who was in manpower? Carlisle Runge, yes.

AILES: Runge. You had a general problem at first: whenever there is a change in administration, you sort of have a feeling that the Indians at Defense, as they are called, go through a Little Big Horn operation as far as the services are concerned. They undertake to--I say you have the feeling, this might not be true at all, but you have the feeling that they make a hell of an effort to maximize the control which OSD exercises over the services, and that's bitterly resisted, just sort of automatically.

But there are very strong bunch of indians at Defense. For instance, we had something like six or eight grade eighteens in the whole U.S. Army, and there will be eight of them in the Office of the assistant secretary of defense, I and L [installations and logistics], and, say, six of them in the comptroller's shop, or something like this, and five or six of them in manpower. And there's just a lot of high price talent up there. And they want to be line rather than staff in the worse way, for understandable reasons, and they naturally are a little bit--resentful may be too tough of a term with respect to these civilians who come in from private life, knowing absolutely nothing about the particular areas of their responsibilities but receiving a beat deal of pomp and ceremony and fanfare from these services that they work for, with automobiles and titles and fancy offices and all that. And there is sort of a natural inclination on the part of the indians to put these guys in their place, early.

And there is an immediate resistance on the part of the people; there's a tremendous resistance on the part of the men in uniform toward that operation; and there's a quick resistance on the part of the people who come in from outside into the presidential appointment slots. But if you've got the right kind of appointees in the services, men like Paul Ignatius, who was our assistant for I and L in the army, Finn Larsen and later Willis Hawkins in the R and D [research and development] side, and men of real talent, you won't have any trouble holding your own. And strangely enough the presidential appointees in Defense are quick to straighten out that situation if you just ever go at them on it, with the exception of Art Sylvester and what we were talking about here earlier. I'm only kidding about Art. Art was just mildly a problem in that regard. But in answer to your specific question, I never ran into any kind of a personality conflict of any type with any of those persons. I found them tremendously helpful and cooperative. [Interruption]

[-63-]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Steven Ailes Oral History Transcript  
Name List

President Kennedy	Kennedy, John F.
Powell	Pierpoint, Powell
Johnson	Johnson, Louis
Elvis	Stahr, Elvis
Frank	Pace, Frank
Paul	Warnke, Paul
Harold	Leventhal, Harold
Bill	Schaub, William F.
Dick	Morse, Richard S.
Paul	Ignatius, Paul
Tom	Morris, Thomas D.
Finn	Larsen, Finn
John	Bailey, John
Dick	Donahue, Richard K.
Dorothy	Davies, Dorothy
Cy	Vance, Cyrus R.
Stan	Resor, Stanley R.
Adam	Yarmolinsky, Adam
Bob	McNamara, Robert S.
Roy	Davenport, Roy K.
Al	Fitt, Alfred B.
President Johnson	Johnson, Lyndon B.
Ros	Gilpatric, Roswell L.
Gene	Zuckert, Eugene M.
Ed	Pratt, Edmund T. Jr.
Charlie	Hitch, Charles J.
Bob	Anthony, Robert
Jack	Fitch, John H.
Tyler	Port, Tyler
John	Macy, John
James	Cook, James
Robert	Willey, Robert
General Johnson	Johnson, Harold K.
Joe	Farland, Joseph S.
Barney	Koren, Henry L. T.
Eisenhower	Eisenhower, Dwight D.
Bob	Fleming, Robert J. Jr.
Phil	Leber, Walter P.
Elihu	Root, Elihu
Chiari	Chiari, Roberto F.
Mac	Bundy, McGeorge
Rusk	Rusk, Dean
Dicky	Arias, Ricardo M.
Ed	Martin, Edwin M
Gardner	Ackley, Gardner
Potter	Potter, W. E.
Zincke	Zincke, Bernard J.
Dan	Flood, Daniel J.
Don	McGowen, Donald W.
Jim	Cantwell, James F.

Joe	Peck, Merton J.
General Decker	Decker, George H.
Sterling	Wright, W. H. S.
Tom	Kenan, Thomas A.
Freddie	Weyland, Fred C.
Congressman O'Konski	O'Konski, Alvin E.
Ros	Gilpatric, Roswell L.
General Hamlett	Hamlett, Barksdale
Congressman Hebert	Hebert, F. Edward
Mendel	Rivers, L. Mendel
Bill	Bray, William G.
General Van Fleet	Van Fleet, James A.
Bill	Sutton, William F.
Max	Rich, Maxwell E.
Bo	Hearn, George A.
General Wheeler	Wheeler, Earle G.
Ignatius	Ignatius, Paul R.
Jerry	Ford, Gerald R.
Johnnie	Heintjes, John A.
Max	Taylor, Max
General Boyle	Boyle, Leo M.
Dave	Traub, David W.
Jack	Norton, John W.
Larry	Hoelcher, Leonard W.
Sol	Horwitz, Solis
Larry	O'Brien, Lawrence F.
Pittman	Pittman, Steuart
Ken	Hansen, Kenneth R.
Corbie	Truman, Corbie
Lou	Truman, Louis W.
Ed	McDermott, Edward A.
V.P. Johnson	Johnson, Lyndon B.
Tom	Powers, Tom
Gen. Westmoreland	Westmoreland, William C.
Gene	Salet, Eugene A.
Gene	Zuckert, Eugene M.
Tom	Morris, Thomas D.
Ribiciff	Ribbicoff, Abraham A.
McCloy	McCloy, John J.
Fisher	Fisher, Adrian S.
Ed	Gullion, Edmund A.
Harold	Brown, Harold
Lyle	Garlock, Lyle
Glenn	Seaborg, Glenn
Paul	Paul, Norman S.
Willis	Hawkins, Willis