

Robert Amory, Jr. Oral History Interview – JFK #2, 2/17/1966
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Biographical Note

Amory, Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and Chief of the International Division at the Bureau of the Budget discusses his role in these organizations, foreign policy issues, counterinsurgency, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Laos and the Berlin task force, among other issues.

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John F. Kennedy Library
with Robert Amory Jr.

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21 May 73

ROBERT AMORY, JR.
JFK #2

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Second Oral History Interview

With

ROBERT AMORY, JR.

February 17, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

AMORY: It is true that on November 3, 1961, I have down "White House, 12 o'clock, running about an hour," and I think that's the one that was the dry run for the meeting with Adenauer that I mentioned before. But that's easy for you to check because it would show Adenauer meeting the next day or later that afternoon or something like that. And that was essentially the presentation of an argument to him from both the intelligence point of view and the American military capability point of view--on November 3, 1961--that the Russian armies on the ground in Germany and their potential reinforcements were not invincible in a conventional war, and that their divisions were much smaller than ours--the strength of many of their so-called divisions were really little more than cadres--and that Europe had the capacity to build itself up to where it didn't have to quiver and quake at the thought of the Russians running all the way to the English Channel. Adenauer was skeptical. His attitude was that, well, maybe they wouldn't run all the way to the English Channel, but what would happen if they just took Hamburg and then just sat down there and said, "Okay, now, we want to settle for that." This was his fear, and as you know, this has persisted in German-American relations ever since. But we have at least gotten away from the early Dulles-Eisenhower views or the President-de Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle] views that if anything happened at all and one platoon came across, we'd drop all the bombs in the arsenal. Now if that isn't the right date, this can be just applied to a different date because I do remember very clearly that thing. Now other dates not on here.... There was a meeting shortly after the Bay of Pigs in which Bobby Kennedy took a very prominent

part and which I attended, which essentially reviewed what we could do to harass and trouble Castro admitting that we couldn't and wouldn't go in and drive him out with the Marines and the Army. That led to the setting up of a special task force under Bobby and, I think, including the famous Ed Lansdale [General Edward G. Lansdale], who is now in Saigon. Then I made the point that there's something terribly wrong about this Ormsby-Gore luncheon. It could conceivably--but I think I would have heard about it--have been my younger brother, who knew Kennedy, but just purely socially. It has nothing to do with the government.

O'CONNOR: Well, if that's the case...

AMORY: Or the other possibility, there is an English Viscount Amory who was very prominent, who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and later the British High Commissioner to Canada--but he was no wife. So anyway, this is sort of a mystery. Okay now, shoot with your questions.

O'CONNOR: I was wondering if you could remember anything about those two disarmament meetings there. They were the two longest meetings on that list.

AMORY: Yes, those are always very long detailed things. I'm sure the disarmament people have a clear and adequate record there. They were questions of exactly what position we'd take on Russian propositions on some of the English and neutral things--highly complex and really not very interesting except to a student of the field. My memory would just be inadequate. If I put anything down in a record like this, the contradicting would just be a confusion to a competent historian. By the way, does somebody have Doctor Scoville on your list?

O'CONNOR: No, we don't.

AMORY: Well, you should have him because he was quite close to the president. He was Deputy Director, S and T--Science and Technology--of CIA, and moved over at some time about September 1963, to be chief scientist of Foster's Disarmament Agency. But in both capacities he should be on the list. At the moment he's lying in the hospital, but he's recovering up in Massachusetts in MGH [Massachusetts General Hospital].

O'CONNOR: Alright, this is the next field that. I'm going to go into, so his name will be fine. You, during your years in CIA, apparently were working on interpretations or estimations of Soviet military strength, among other things certainly. I wondered if you were involved in the estimates of Soviet missile strength--in other words, the missile gap?

AMORY: Yes, very much. I can tell you a little about that. We started at the very beginning, as I think I may have told you, estimating when they would

develop just the rawest capacity to get one missile to travel several thousand miles, and we predicted these things with some accuracy. We had to help us both communications intelligence and over-flights--U-2s after 1956, over their missile test--range in Tyura-Tam. And as we saw them coming along, we began to get--a few of us, Bill Bundy and myself, particularly--increasingly fed up with adjectives: have a "substantial capability" or something like that. Because we felt everybody was using the words with different numbers in their mind. So I suggested that we stop talking in adjectival terms and focus on the dates when they would have, first, a ten missile capability, second, a hundred missile capability, and third, five hundred--the idea being we're just substituting numbers for an initial capability. The first significant capability would be a hundred. And they could do a lot of damage even if 50 per cent of them didn't work and so on and so forth. And five hundred would be a major change in the balance of power. When they orbited their first... [Telephone call--tape recorder turned off--resumes.] So the estimates then, and they varied, were on dates when these things would come about. Naturally, once the Russians orbited their first missile, the computation was based on our industrial opinions of Russian missile industry.

We tended to give them fairly near dates for when they could, if they froze the design at the very first missile, have these various numbers. And that's what led to the rather alarming predictions that got into the hands of the Symington Defense Preparedness Subcommittee. Taking our earliest estimate of when they could have five hundred and then comparing that with the known projection of American strengths, which were none of our business, you came up with a potential missile gap--which everybody struck the word "potential" in getting excited about it. And Kennedy quite reasonably as a politician used the thing to belabor the Republicans, and when he got into office and saw the real estimates and the actual state of the thing, he realized that there was no gap. Now there could have been a gap. This wasn't bad intelligence, as I say, this was a potential. But, in fact, what the Russians did was concentrate not on intercontinental ballistic missiles, they concentrated on intermediate range... [buzzer] ...on a range missile that was a threat primarily to continental Europe. From this we had concluded--we rapidly were aware of this--that they were not satisfied with their first intercontinental ballistic missiles, and they went from the SS-6 through the 7, and 8, and I think now the 9.... And even so they have been rather slow to build up a capacity. I don't know what the exact estimate is right now, but it's a few hundred--nothing like ours. But this is very parallel to what they did with the airplane. In 1954, they flew by the Bison, the big four-engine jet like our B-52, and everybody jumped to the conclusion--LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] and others--that they would have hundreds and thousands of those and present a threat to the United States, when, in fact, they built sixteen hundred two engine ones that were a threat to Europe, and never built over a hundred--or about a hundred--of the big ones, thus showing that their basic strategy was founded on an accurate estimate that if they held Western Europe hostage, it was just as good in restraining us, as a deterrent to our deterrent, as if they'd had Chicago because no American President was going to lightly demolish Paris and Brussels and Rome, not to speak of London and Liverpool, just to save a situation in Iran or something like that. I think it was a very sophisticated analysis on the part of the Soviets, and we were very unsophisticated in not realizing it for so long.

O'CONNOR: Then you feel that there was a realistic appraisal in the reappraisals after

Kennedy came in?

AMORY: Absolutely, there's now question that.... The other thing that, of course, is very important to realize is that the groundwork that Gates [Thomas S. Gates, Jr.] and McElroy [Neil H. McElroy] laid in our missile business gave McNamara a hell of a head start. In other words, he really just accelerated a little, in relative terms, a program that already was on a very sound basis. After all, Polaris, Minute Man, Titan III, all of those things were finalized in the Eisenhower Administration, and the only things that were done were to deploy more of them in '61 and '62 than Gates might have done, which I think was the right decision. But the picture that sometimes is painted that Kennedy got into office and found the American military in a parlous state, and the unique genius of McNamara saved the country that's a little rich for anybody's blood. He did give us more divisions for a nine hundred thousand man army, and for that he deserves a lot of credit and so on. But he was turned over a damned good working organization by Gates. If McNamara wasn't so terrific, Gates should go down in history as a damn first class Minister of Defense, unlike Charlie Wilson [Charles H. Wilson] who was a rather inadequate one.

O'CONNOR: Another important re-estimation of the Soviet strength dealt with something you mentioned before, the re-estimation of Soviet strength, opposing NATO, opposing European armies, the conventional strength, in other words. There was considerable downgrading of Soviet strength--or estimations of Soviet strength.

AMORY: Yes. For years and years and years the army had had a very, well, conservative in the sense that it tended to maximize the enemy's order of battle system, whereby if they ever had any evidence of a division, they continued to carry it until they were positively assured that it had been deactivated. And this meant that they were carrying 175 divisions year after year after year, as sort of a sacred number, when sometimes they hadn't heard of a division since 1952 or 1950 or something like that. Also, they didn't pay enough attention to how many of them were really cadres. They were no more important than our National Guard outfits or our Reserve outfits that have a few regular officers attached to them and some people drilling weekends and so on and so forth. Finally, under Kennedy--and this was sort of late in his administration, as I recall, because this was done after the DIA was created, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Army lost its sort of stranglehold on this problem--a joint task force was set up from the DIA and the CIA to review every single Russian division and its evidence, and to appraise both its existence and, if it existed, how strong it was. They came out with, as I recall, 121 as the maximum number of which some 50 were in various stages of incompleteness. So you essentially cut the estimate by a solid half. Now what has never changed because there is good evidence on it--and has been continually good evidence, mostly through the German Gehlen Organization [Bundesnachrichten-Dienst] which we worked very closely with--is the group of Soviet forces in Germany, and the twenty divisions carried there are active. Spies spy on them, and pictures are taken of them. So that force, as an initial cutting edge, has always been a major threat. It's only ninety miles from the Thuringian gap to Frankfurt, and so, if they jump, there's no question they could take Hamburg and be on the Rhine. But there'd be nothing behind them. This would be like the

Battle of the Bulge and Runstedt [Field Marshal Karl R.G. von Runstedt]. It would look lousy for the first two or three weeks, but then the obvious atomic bombing behind them would keep the reinforcements in the Soviet Union from coming up. The Soviet Union has never had over two divisions in Poland. They don't use Poland as a major base for their things, and we've always downgraded the satellite armies in every circumstances except an American attack. They probably would fight well in defense of their soil if the Germans and the Americans had a Drang nach Osten, but, as offensive troops, you can't just add twenty Polish divisions to twenty Russian divisions and say there are forty divisions. This just isn't true. We've been very careful about that. And then McNamara, of course, was talking in terms of what we should have there. For example, if the French component in NATO were up to its commitments, and the Belgians and the Danes and the British and so on and so forth, then, and this was his argument, we would be in a position to say we can meet them on very even terms. But, of course, the French ever since the Algerian war have been a cipher on the NATO front.

O'CONNOR: Well, the implication of this re-estimation was to give more encouragement to the European armies, to tell them, in effect, you can possibly withstand...

AMORY: Exactly. There is some use in this. it isn't sort of putting up a Duke of Marlborough's Army with muskets against a hopelessly technologically superior force. Then this also ties in, of course. The other argument against it is the evidence of a maneuver that was held in '60, '61, or '62, in the Tennessee-Mississippi area in which they sort of "war gamed" on the ground the use of tactical nuclear weapons. And that did show one hell of a lot of destruction. If played on a highly populated area such as West Germany, there isn't much difference between whether you use tactical nukes than big nukes. So that's the most sophisticated anti-McNamara argument. Christ, if you'd fight a modern war as it would be fought with these things, remembering that these so-called nominal bombs are all about the size of the Hiroshima bomb, you'd have damn little left.

O'CONNOR: Well, then you feel that this was again, as with the reevaluation of Soviet missile strength, a realistic appraisal? It wasn't just propaganda that McNamara put out?

AMORY: Yes, I'd say they were 100 per cent conscientious, and I think they had enough factual basis so that they are objectively realistic.

O'CONNOR: Another thing we didn't talk about the last time was the CIA role in the reemphasis of counterinsurgency forces in the early part of Kennedy's Administration. I wondered if any CIA people were particularly prominent in pressing for emphasis on counterinsurgency forces. The name Bissell was mentioned frequently.

AMORY: Yes. Bissell should certainly be questioned on this. Another guy who should certainly be questioned on it is Fitzgerald.

O'CONNOR: Dr. Dennis Fitzgerald?

AMORY: Desmond Fitzgerald, who's now got Bissell's old job in the agency as Deputy Director of Planning and so forth. I'm not a particularly good witness on that. Actually, counterinsurgency became almost a ridiculous battle cry. It meant so many different things to so many different people. The extreme kind of reaction to Bobby Kennedy's insistence that everybody get gung-ho about it was that word went out from the Chief of Staff of the Army that every school in the army would devote a minimum of 20 per cent of its time to counterinsurgency. Well, this reached the Finance School and the Cooks and Bakers School, so they were talking about how to wire typewriters to explode in the face of things or how to make apple pies with hand grenades inside them. It just really was a ridiculous thing in that way. But, on the other hand, to the extent that it really meant that one should look at the real causes of discontent in a place and prepare a rounded program to meet them, not just helicopters and machine guns and so on, it was very sensible. Where CIA figures primarily on that is helping develop internal police forces, which is a dangerous ground because you can get to Gestapo-type tactics and so on and so forth, but essentially bringing to bear good police methods good filing systems, good fingerprinting systems, good systems of riot control such as using dye so when you get the ring leaders, they can't wash the dye off their clothes, without having a riot squad that picks up a lot of innocent people who just happen to be caught on a street corner. They worked very closely with AID on this. It's a program called 1290-D--which could be a very good subject of a, you know, PhD monograph sometime--which involved who was responsible in this police thing, and it fell back and forth between AID and CIA. Finally, under Bob Komer's [Robert W. Komer] leadership on the white House Staff, a task force was set up under Alexis Johnson. I happened to sit on it, and we solved the problem in a rather rude, but practical fashion of saying, "By God, AID will be responsible for it, but the brains are in CIA, so we'll move those brains over to AID." So we just took the CIA men--I can't think of his name now [Byron Engle]--and gave them the mission of training police forces using American police forces occasionally as sort of sponsors, using Michigan State University School of Police Work, which is the best in the country, and a lot of excellent work has been done there. We even had, I think.... In some respects the groundwork done there, in Indonesia, may have been responsible for the speed with which this coup of last September, or whenever it was, was wrapped up.

O'CONNOR: Do you know in what division in AID these men were put?

AMORY: It's in the special division called.... [Pause to look up name] This led to the creation of the office of Public Safety directed by Byron Engle who came from the CIA--the man I was talking about. It has an operational division, a technical services division, and a training division, and it reports, as I recall, directly to the Director and Deputy Director. That was one of the things, we didn't want it subordinated to various area bureaus who were always interested in building dams rather than building up police radio nets or something like that.

O'CONNOR: Let's get into the question of Laos again. I mentioned very briefly some of the

conflicts that our forces, whether they be State or Defense or CIA in Laos, had with each other and again the question of Winthrop Brown and the English, let's say, favoring Souvanna Phouma. And it is reported that CIA men were favoring Phoumi. Can you elaborate at all on that?

AMORY: I think I said in the last interview it was more a split between Washington and the field than it was a split between the agencies. The CIA man out there--a funny guy who had been out there a long time--was originally very strong for Phoumi and for the right wing. But he was recalled and a guy who Win Brown always told me was as loyal as he could possibly be to him and agreed with him went out there. Also the military guy, the general out there, agreed with Win that Kong Le and Souvanna Phouma were the new base, and these old corrupt families and wild-eyed men of the right just had no strength except in the southern parts of the country which, of course, are now, to jump ahead, the most communized, the most communist controlled part of the country--the Ho Chi Minh Trail part. And it was the wild men back here who saw Laos in the same terms that Rusk sees Vietnam now, as, you know, the challenge point between international communism and the free world. They were the ones that pressed all along, and it was the President's very good sense, once he sort of got a feel for the situation, and his good luck in picking Averell Harriman that saved the thing. I think I mentioned Chester Cooper, who's now on the White House Staff, who was very important as an intelligence adviser to Harriman in Geneva in doing the working up of the negotiations. And so, as I say, you can't institutionalize this thing and say the CIA and military were the thing; there were some of each and some of each on each side all the way up and down the line. Jeff Parsons, for example, was a tough guy, and they sent him to Sweden. Who was the first Assistant Secretary for the Far East under Kennedy?

O'CONNOR: I can't remember. Hilsman?

AMORY: They put Hilsman in later. [Pause]

O'CONNOR: Well, did you ever hear of any conflicts between particularly John Addis, who was the British Ambassador.... It is said that he hated the CIA. Do you know if there's anything to that?

AMORY: Well, I think he hated this first guy whose name escapes me. The chronology's all so difficult there for me. You know I don't remember my years and dates. But I think that's more back in the late Eisenhower days.

O'CONNOR: Alright. It is sometimes said that Kennedy pursued, in effect, a new policy in Laos as compared to the policies that were pursued in the late Eisenhower days. Do you think that really is so? Do you credit him with much in the...

AMORY: Oh yes. Oh, I think so. In the Eisenhower days we were trying to defeat and exclude the communists, maybe conceding that we never could drive them out

of Samneur and Phongsaly--the northern provinces. But the rest of the country was to be made secure, and by force of arms if necessary, but primarily, of course, working through a military assistance group. And Kennedy's policy was let's make this a neutral territory, and he pretty well sold it. To the extent Khrushchev could control it, I think Khrushchev made an honest deal with him in Vienna. But the trouble was he didn't really control Hanoi, and he didn't for sure control China as time moved on.

O'CONNOR: Alright. In some of the early meetings on Laos, General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer] comes out as advocating many military blunders in Laos, advocating stronger military force. I wonder if you were involved in all that or any of it.

AMORY: Well, that was the so-called Plan Five? Yes. Well, I was on the edge of the scene there, and all I would do would be to sort of point out that if we put American forces there and they decided to play chess with us, they could build up much more rapidly than we could. I thought it was a very bad basic strategy, that our line of communications was long and round about and insecure while theirs were difficult in terms of jungle trails and so on, but they'd shown us in the French days that they could move a large number of people over trails and supply them. And I was always very much against it. But the others in CIA.... Fitzgerald was very strong for it; Bissell and McCone were strong for it. I tried to point out to these people how empty the damn country is. I wrote part of a speech that Kennedy gave to the nation very early in his administration where he used three maps of Laos--I think it was in February 1961--and I put in it that everybody talked about little Laos. Laos is actually as big--and you can see it on that map there--it's as big as Italy. But whereas Italy has forty-five or fifty million people in it, Laos has two million. There are more tigers and water buffalo in Laos than there are people. So it's a great empty land; you've got to think in those terms. It isn't a nice little place. And Kennedy changed the analogy to three times as big as Austria. He wanted to pick a neutral country, he told me. And you know, his expertise of style, just what will be dramatic, and you pick up what is a fair simile or metaphor or figure of speech, and he had a better one.

O'CONNOR: You mentioned there were some activists in CIA eager also to put troops in Laos.

AMORY: Yes, Fitzgerald is the key guy I'm talking about.

O'CONNOR: Do you know of anybody in the State Department who was also of this opinion? Are you aware of any particular people?

AMORY: Oh, I think--what's his name?--Sullivan [William H. Sullivan] who's now the ambassador out there.

O'CONNOR: How about William Bundy?

AMORY: Bill Bundy wasn't there then. Bill Bundy was in Defense, and I wouldn't want

to characterize Bill's views. He was under Paul Nitze there, and I don't remember his taking a particularly prominent part in the argument. Mac was very cautious about it.

O'CONNOR: It is said that when McCone came in, he repaired relations with the State Department and the Congress, but not with the Defense Department. Do you know what is meant by this?

AMORY: Yes, a very long complex story. And this may be one thing you might make a note of, that what I say here might be better classified for a while. He, I think, did very well in the Congress. There were less demands on his time for congressional oversight committees, and he went out of his way to brief people over and above the actual select committees to keep them happy. With State I don't think it was so much McCone repairing relations as Kennedy making it perfectly clear in his general policies that State and the ambassadors had primacy and there was going to be no rivals to them. So McCone was just a good executor of Kennedy's policy there. With respect to Defense, everything was by and large in good shape except for one major rivalry--and that is the rivalry in satellite reconnaissance. This goes way, way back. When we first heard of the Russian missile center in 1952, or about then, at Kaputsin Yar on the Volga, we demanded that we get photographs of it. "We just can't ignore it. This is going to be a major new thing, this whole missile development, and we've got to get on top of it in the beginning and judge it." And Twining [Nathan F. Twining] --I guess it was Twining--said it couldn't be done. The British actually did it for us with the Canberra all the way from Germany to the Volga and down into Persia, a risky thing but they got some fair pictures. And then we said, "Well, this is fine." But the British said, "God, never again," so to speak; the whole of Russia had been alerted to the thing, and it damn near created a major international incident. But it never made the papers. Then we went to Twining and said, "You've just got to develop a plane that will do this, that will be high enough so it will go over their radar." And the damned Air Force insisted that every plane be an all-purpose plane. In other words, it had to have some fighter ability, it had to have some maneuverability and so on. At that point a guy who really deserves a great deal of credit from his countrymen, named Brigadier General Philip Strong, a retired Marine who worked for us, was a friend of Kelly Johnson's, went out on his own hook to Lockheed and said, "Kelly, what could you do if all you were trying to do was get as high as you could, get moderate speed but not too great speed, but just sit above their air defense?" Kelly said, "Jesus, I've got just the thing for you. I'd take the Lockheed such and such I'd give it wings life a tent." And so on. And that was the U-2. Bissell was put in charge of the project with Kelly Johnson. And, essentially, the Air Force's eye was wiped in you-know-what. And they resented that from the beginning.

Then when the U-2 started in 1956, everybody knew it had a limited life. The Russian radar would improve; their fighters and interceptors and other things like their surface to air missiles would improve. And a precisely accurate prediction was made of about a four year life. So immediately, the CIA started, secretly, work on a missile system. Meanwhile, the Air Force had a publicly classified, but not very covertly held, missile system called.... Oh God, I forget the code name [SAMOS]. It will come back to me. This was a system which would set up cameras in the sky and would take pictures and televise them down to the ground. And

hundreds of millions and billions of dollars were spent on it, but the bloody thing never was workable. Meanwhile, CIA working again independently and with the closest of tight security produced the Corona missile and camera--with Land working on the camera at Polaroid--and I think Lockheed's Agenda was the booster rocket. They put it on any major base. I think they used Atlases at first and now Thors. And this thing was ready to fly and did fly and got pictures in August 1960, less than four months after the U-2 was shot down over Sverdlovsk. Well, again the Air Force was just horrified. Here was the CIA getting big in its business. All through until today, still today, there is a bloody running war between the Agency and its contractors and the Air Force and its contractors on it. And Scoville quit on account of this business.

O'CONNOR: How do you spell his name, by the way?

AMORY: S-C-O-V-I-L-L-E, Herbert F.--I may have called him Pete, but Herbert F. is his Christian name. And McCone fought with Vance [Cyrus R. Vance], McNamara and particularly Brock McMillan [Brockway McMillan], who was the Under Secretary to the Air Force, on that thing, and Kennedy and Bundy tried to arbitrate from time to time. They'd think they'd get a settlement. They'd arrange kinds of partnership deals where the National Reconnaissance Authority was created in which the joint responsibility was held by McNamara and McCone, but the executive directorship was held by Brock McMillan of the Air Force with the CIA scientist as his deputy. Well, it just was patchwork, and it didn't work. They went along their various rival ways. Actually, CIA produced the best general search capability--in other words, the broad coverage to find out new things. The Air Force came up with a camera that produced very high precision photography. So if you knew what you wanted and turned the camera on in the right place, you could get the best pictures. So actually the country hasn't suffered too much by it. Where the thing stands now.... I'm six months out of touch with it and no longer hold clearances for it. But when I left, the problem was who would control the next phase of development which would be a camera system good enough to get.... Well, let me put it this way. The Air Force wanted to go ahead on two systems--again, a general search and a precision. CIA felt that the modern techniques would enable you to do the general search with such precision, down to a one foot resolution, that you didn't need any more. The Air Force time and again moved in to block off CIA and said, "The time has come now to make this entirely a 'bluesuited' operation." And that's where it was when McCone left. It never was settled in his day, and whether Raborn's [William F. Raborn] been able to settle it or not, I don't know.

O'CONNOR: Alright, that answers the question.

AMORY: Well, that's the big issue about Defense.

O'CONNOR: Okay, let's move into the question of the Bay of Pigs. Why weren't you told about it?

AMORY: It was traditional in CIA that operational matters were strictly the business of the DDP. That is, most operational matters had been relatively small

clandestine things in which security--the less number of people who knew the better. And the patterns were essentially a one man operation against Mossadegh [Mohammed Mossadegh] by Kim Roosevelt [Kermit Roosevelt], a larger but nonetheless small American involvement in Guatemala. And that pattern set the sort of style of the thing. Bissell, also, though he's a good personal friend of mine--we see a lot of each other socially as well as business-wise--was a very naturally spookish guy, and I think he just wanted all the reins in his own hands. He particularly didn't want me, as a coordinate officer, involved. He didn't want me as a coordinate officer, involved. He didn't mind using some of my people, but he'd personally select them and then brief them into his thing and sort of co-opt them. And my knowledge, as I think I said in the last interview, of the thing was not negligible because these guys were also loyal to me and though they'd sworn to Bissell they wouldn't, they would tell me in a way what was going on. But the extreme example came the Sunday before the Bay of Pigs was launched on a Monday morning. That Sunday I was the duty officer. You remember we'd already had the bombing and the trouble at the UN with Adlai [Adlai E. Stevenson] and stuff. And that was the famous night with JFK at Glen Ora when Bissell tried to get the air strike re-laid on and didn't. Saturday Allen Dulles left for Puerto Rico as part of the cover plan to sort of show that he was out of town to make a speech. As he was leaving, alone with him in the office, I said, "You know, I've got the duty tomorrow, and whether you know it or not, I know what's going on. Now what should I do if anything comes up?" And he just said rather abruptly, "You have nothing to do with that at all. General Cabell will take care of anything of that." So I came in and opened the cables from Uruguay and Nigeria and so on and so forth and went home and played five sets of tennis. I said, "Screw 'em."

O'CONNOR: Okay, the CIA comes out very badly in the reports and investigations after the Bay of Pigs. Do you have any comments on that?

AMORY: Yes. An investigation was made by several people, but probably the most damaging one was made by our own inspector general, General Lyman Kirkpatrick--he recently resigned and is now a professor at Brown--who should, incidentally, also be on this project. I'm sure he would be. His basic charge is that, despite Dulles' and other people's injunctions that the very best of everything CIA had available be brought to bear on this in the way of human resources, actually they were a bunch of guys who were otherwise not needed. They were a strange bunch of people with German experience, Arabic experience, and other things like that. And most of them had no knowledge of Spanish--they'd have to deal through interpreters or through juniors who had had some Spanish--and absolutely no sense or feel about the political sensitivities of these people, you know, who were all the way from moderate right to strong leftists. Of course they kept the straight-out Batistas out of it. But the guys like Miro Cardona and Manuel Ray and others never had any confidence in the CIA people. Now at the top level, Tracy [Tracy Barnes] and Dick did have some sense of this. But the people they sent to Miami were just pretty much roughnecks, and they were pretty goddamned good at blowing up barns and power stations. I think that that's really the worst fault of the thing, that if they had realized that this was the biggest thing that the Agency ever tried to do and sat down carefully with the director of personnel and Allen and Dick and myself and said, "Alright, where's the best?"

If we pull this guy out of Buenos Aires and this guy out of Mexico City and this guy out of Madrid for our political section, and Amory out of DDI because he knows something about amphibious warfare, and somebody else out of it because he knows something about paratroop jumps and so on and so forth....” I think we could have had an A team instead of being a C-minus team. I don’t think it was a D-team. The thing failed, but it would have failed even so. But I don’t think it would have been as abysmal a failure, and there’ve been so many chances to say it never would have worked because if this had been improved, the other mess would have happened. But, you know, I never investigated it myself. I know most of what I know from the standard talk that went on all over the place and from reading everything that’s been written on it, good, bad, and indifferent. So I don’t want to be used. I’m just really quoting Kirkpatrick here, and I’m not adding anything to say that I know that to be true, too. But you asked what the basis was, and I think that’s the most solid basis.

O’CONNOR: Yes, we’re interested in your opinions as well.

AMORY: Yes. But I think one of the things that ought to be in the files of the Kennedy Institute is the actual Kirkpatrick report. And one final thing that that did lead to was from then on out, once McCone got in, nothing went on in the way of operational things of any size--I don’t mean just splitting a mail box or something like that, but anything that involved a political overthrow or a major guerrilla type raid without my people, including myself, in the DDI being called upon in McCone’s office for our comments. We’d be able to ask, “All right, how many assets have you really got in that country?” And then we would give them an appreciation of whether if all those people rose at once, the country government could be overthrown.

O’CONNOR: Okay, now the charge was leveled at the CIA--and I’d like to have your opinion on this, if you don’t mind--that the CIA was deceptive in a sense because they didn’t let the president become aware of the real risks involved in the operation.

AMORY: Oh, I don’t think that’s fair at all. I think that is mixing up the fact that Rusk didn’t say anything, that Schlesinger kept his mouth shut until the very end, that Bowles was suppressed by Rusk, that the machinery of government over and above CIA did not do its part. A child would know that a failure in this would be a disaster. You can’t say that fifteen hundred Cubans got together in a sort of Michael Mullins Marching and Chowder Society and acquired aircraft and ships and ammunition and radios and so on and set forth all by their little selves. The American hand would clearly show in it. I’m sure had Kennedy been in office a year and a half and the team shaken down instead a very few months--that’s the gravamen of Schlesinger’s book--it never would have gone that way. But one of the things that may have led to this was the CIA estimate, which I was responsible for--actually, it was written by Sherman Kent and his people, and concurred in by the State Department and the Defense Department--that Castro’s hold on Cuba was getting increasingly strong, that time was running out. And this Bissell used time and again to the president. He said, “You can’t manage this thing.” You can cancel it in which case you’ve got a problem of disposal. What will we do with these fifteen hundred people?--they’ll all run

amok in Central Park or something like that. But anyway, it's now or never was the theme. And that put the President in this awful bind. Here was something the great General Eisenhower had begun. He may not have been the world's greatest president in Kennedy's mind, but prestige wise, as Kennedy admitted, he would have been licked if Eisenhower had run for a third term. The American people would have felt, "Well, God, he cancelled something that Eisenhower had set in train which would have liberated Cuba." And, therefore, the total political risk, undoubtedly balanced in his mind, was a very close one. And certainly there would have been leaks. The Senator Keating [Kenneth B. Keating] and the somebody else would have come out in due course and said, "Well, Kennedy got in and just settled with Castro rather than drive him out as Ike would have done."

O'CONNOR: Well, do you agree then that, as some people have said, Kennedy was a little bit trapped in this operation?

AMORY: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Were there any men in the CIA that you were aware of that opposed this operation before it came up? There wasn't much opposition to it anywhere else.

AMORY: I would say I know of none. But it doesn't mean there weren't some on the DDP side that I don't know about. And basically the DDI side, as I said, except for a few technical experts, wasn't aware of the thing.

O'CONNOR: Okay. It's often said also that this helped to destroy John F. Kennedy's confidence in the CIA. You had pointed out in the last interview that his confidence seemed to be pretty great in the CIA initially because of the quick response CIA was able to give him.

AMORY: Yes. It certainly hurt him. Of course, in that quick response stuff I was talking more about my side of the house, the analytical side. That didn't suffer too much. And his personal confidence in Bissell was extremely high, and that never went down. His feeling about Dulles was well put in the Schlesinger book, that it was an inability to understand the guy. He'd gotten used to dealing with guys like Sorensen, O'Donnell, and others over the years that he knew exactly what they meant by a shrug of their shoulders or the way they phrased a sentence. With Dulles it was something brand new to him, and he just felt he had to get somebody who was more on his wave length than Dulles had been. But obviously, you know, I think he'd made up his mind to work for a successor then, but he wasn't in such a state that he wanted to tear the place apart. And certainly he approved of McCone's essential keeping everybody who was there. After all, though Arthur's taken it out of his book, I would say that Rusk and the State Department were as much hurt by it, by their failure to have done their part of warning him in it, as the CIA was in his.

O'CONNOR: Alright. The 54-12 Committee is a committee that comes up periodically as a

kind of a control committee of the CIA. What was its role during the Bay of Pigs? Do you have anything to say on that?

AMORY: Ah....

O'CONNOR: I mean was it as effective a control agency as it was intended to be? Or was it intended to be that?

AMORY: It was in general, but I think the Bay of Pigs thing was raised to a higher level than it. And my limited knowledge would indicate to me that it was probably not even cleared for it, all the members of it.

O'CONNOR: It can't be considered an effective control commission at all with regard to CIA?

AMORY: With regard to that particular operation. Of course it was since strengthened in, this special group counter-subversion setup under Harriman afterwards. But on all other things the 54-12 group has been an effective thing. It may be that CIA sells its wares too easily in the 54-12 group, but the fact that a senior officer of Defense and a senior officer of State and a representative of the president have to be advised of and have to give their sanction to every operational thing is a fact of life which most of the public doesn't realize. Incidentally, 54-12 means it's the twelfth National Security Action of 1954, but before it, the thing was called the 10/2 Committee, and it really runs back into Truman's days.

O'CONNOR: Alright. Bobby Kennedy became sort of a watchdog of CIA after that I'm told. Do you have any opinions of this? What was your reaction?

AMORY: I think that he sat on the special committee for counter-subversion and was very active on that. I don't think he was a control mechanism so much as a gadfly to get them to do more and to build up more capabilities and to be more aggressive in places like Algeria and other places where things were going to hell in a hat. And again his personal affection for Dick Bissell was never shaken. I know that from several long talks with Bobby after his brother died.

O'CONNOR: Staying on with the question of Robert Kennedy, you said later on after you left the CIA, even after you left the Bureau, that you did not get one particular position, you thought possibly because of your too close relationship with him.

AMORY: Oh, that was just a comment made by Marvin Watson [W. Marvin Watson] to Jim Rowe [James H., Jr.] as a reason for not appointing me. It happened to coincide in time with Bobby Kennedy's famous disarmament speech in June 1965, which shook the hell out of the President because it stole the thunder he wanted to use in San Francisco. It's utterly ridiculous in a sense. I'm not close to him--a pleasant speaking

acquaintanceship, and I can get through to him on the phone in forty-eight hours notice, but I can't get through to him in ten minutes. You know what I mean.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I was wondering what your relationship was with him' precisely because this all involves the question of rivalry with Lyndon Johnson, and I wanted to ask you if you knew anything about the rivalry as it existed during the Kennedy administration.

AMORY: No. I know the gossip, and I know what I've read, but I couldn't contribute independently to it.

O'CONNOR: Okay. There was also reference to a circular letter by John Kennedy really putting CIA, in effect, under the local ambassadors.

AMORY: It put everybody under the local ambassador, and CIA wanted an exception to it, and Kennedy refused to put it in. That letter is in public print. It's been printed by Senator Jackson's [Henry M. Jackson] committee.

O'CONNOR: But I wondered if there was much irritation or opposition to this within the CIA.

AMORY: Among the pros, yes, only in the sense--and the legitimate sense--that many of the CIA operations are third country operations. In other words, let's say in Denmark the CIA guy contacts a Russian seaman who's on his way back into Leningrad and sees if he can recruit him as a spy. Is there any legitimate need for the Ambassador to Denmark to know that? And our answer is no. And I think the pros are right on this, that just gets too many people involved. Take a thing like the Penkovsky [Oleg Penkovsky] case--a marvelous operation. And yet, secure as it was, it finally broke not, we know, of any leak on our side, but nonetheless when you're got something going like that, you want the case officer and nobody to know the actual identity.

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

AMORY: You asked about the Berlin task force. As I recall, that was set up shortly after Khrushchev in--what was it?--late 1958 made his demands that by the end of the next year there be a definitive German peace treaty that would strike down the allied rights in Berlin, and there was good reason to be concerned. And since it was an allied business, it involved a high level group, meaning the Under Secretary of State, I think, and the ambassadors here of France, Great Britain and West Germany. To do the American planning back of that was a lower level task force with, by the time the Democrats got in, Paul Nitze and myself and the DDP guy from CIA. Christ, the whole damn table had seventeen or eighteen people around it and a continuing command post. Stewart Alsop wrote an article about it some time, and the State Department had a still picture of the thing just as

sort of a showpiece to show the Department was working on it. We met damn near daily in one form or another, sometimes for a great length of time. We got a briefing on the latest day and then would deal with all sorts of little things of what your response would be given small provocations because the danger was that something would get started. There was a little in place, for example, called Steinstuechen which was separated from the rest of Berlin. The people were allowed to go back and forth. Suppose the Russians cut off that--it only had something like twelve houses in it. Did we start a war or a major diplomatic initiative on that? So you had to learn your Berlin brick by brick, so to speak. It was a well-run operation, and it reported.... The president had a representative on it. Either Bundy or Walt Rostow or somebody like that would come to meetings. I'm sure that its reports, the volume of paper work available on that is just awful.

O'CONNOR: Let's turn briefly then to your work in the Bureau of the Budget. Do you have any opinions on the troubles AID had getting its appropriations through Congress? They had tremendous trouble in '62 and '63 at least.

AMORY: Well, a lot of it's personalities. Kennedy said in my hearing once that he made a terrible mistake in calling it--I think I said this last time--AID, that he should have wrapped the flag of defense around it. He was very disappointed in Fowler Hamilton as its director. The major question, of course, is that the damn thing's got no constituency. The Nigerians don't have a vote, and you're taking money from Iowa or Maine or Massachusetts and you're sending it to Nigeria isn't a very popular thing to do, particularly if you hike income taxes or something like that at the same time. But Passman [Otto E. Passman] and Cannon [Clarence Cannon] were well known opposition to it. And the way the House operates, always full committee rubberstamping what the subcommittee does, and the House essentially rubber-stamping what the committee does, it's just been almost impossible in recent history in decades--I don't mean just this last year, but in the last decades--to get anything back in an appropriations bill that hasn't gotten in there at the subcommittee level. Occasionally, for something like heart or cancer or something that's a great big business, you can do it. Then, I think, you see we had in the Marshall Plan great generosity, and the proportion of the GNP, of course, was much more than they've ever put in since. But everybody was talked to in terms of this is a sudden infusion. In four years we'll get this thing done, and Europe will be on its feet. And roughly speaking, it took a little longer than that for Europe to get on its feet, but the infusion of capital assistance was all over pretty fast, was wrapped up with the Korean war and the threat of Stalin to Western Europe. You come along to the latter day aid, and you see populations expanding. No matter how much you put in, the misery is still there. The political instability gets greater rather than less as some of their rising expectations are granted. Pakistan receives all this stuff, and of course, Kennedy was long since dead before it attacked India, but it gets soft on Red China. Everybody just says, "Oh, the hell with it!" Kennedy, of course, himself put in four billion nine hundred million, and then the Clay Committee next year persuaded him to cut that back by a billion or more. But still it was a full billion more than Johnson has asked for. And it's a very discouraging thing. I mean, I saw the way Johnson operated on the budget the last time I was there. You know we'd done the most refined job studying project by project everything that AID proposed. I had at the tip of my tongue every warehouse that was to be built in

Thailand or Lima, Peru, school buildings here, and so on and so forth. And Johnson just in less than twenty minutes at the ranch just said, "Cut, four hundred million dollars out of it. I don't care where you take it." Well, what's the use of doing a complicated staff job well if that's the way a politician reacts? Whereas Kennedy wouldn't do that. Kennedy, when it came to the cutting, sat and worked on it--if not project by project, country by country at least. He was very conscientious with it.

O'CONNOR: Well, do you think there was padding, though, in the '62 and '63 appropriations requests on the part of AID, unconsciously or consciously?

AMORY: Well, both. But in fairness, if you had had an appropriation like that, you could have spent it all effectively, and the world might be in a better place. In other words, it was the right thing to ask for, but you knew you weren't going to get it, and you knew that you were going to have to do a less than adequate job. And that's the real problem. Of course, it's getting compounded now by putting everything on a loan basis, which was Kennedy's idea. It was supposed to help Congress by feeling that, you know, they weren't giving the money away; they were making it available, but it would ultimately come back. Now you've got these countries with their World Bank loans and other things, their debt service is rapidly creeping up to as much as they're getting in new money. So you're just spinning your wheels. I'm moderately conservative in most of my views, but I do think that with a GNP of six hundred and seventy-six billion--this was announced last night--two billion in economic aid abroad is just absolutely inadequate and our children are going to pay for it. If we don't get some way to get these resources in to these people, all hell's going to break loose. No Guatemalan cavalry's going to conquer America, but they're goddamn well going to confiscate every bloody thing we've got in their territory in a vindictive way.

O'CONNOR: You're critical then of the Johnson approach toward AID of paring down the budget as low as it can possibly be cut.

AMORY: Yes. I think that a guy with the power that he's got on the Hill now with Cannon's death, he could call George Mahon [George H. Mahon] and just say, "Take that Otto Passman out of that position and give the chairmanship to somebody else."--Albert Thomas who died the other day. He wouldn't give it to a starry-eyed New York Jewish Liberal because that would make the poison too much. But he could find somebody who was moderately constructively inclined to the thing, and then could gradually ease it up. I also am on the side of much more multilateral stuff. I'm a believer with Fulbright among other things that we ought to vastly increase our contributions to the IADB [Inter-American Development Bank] (the Latin American Bank), and the World Bank, make the World Bank soften its terms. In other words, have the soft window the outer window. That would, I think, help sell it to America if we could say the West Germans and others who are doing more and then put terrific diplomatic pressure on them to do so. Particularly these countries that have a favorable balance of payments.

O'CONNOR: We can wrap this up in just a minute. Do you have any opinions or were there

any particular strong contacts that you had, for instance, with some of the men working under Fowler Hamilton. William Gaud is the man I had in mind.

AMORY: Bill Gaud is one of my closest friends and absolutely so able that when Fowler Hamilton was leaving, I urged on the President indirectly through Bundy, and I think through Ted Sorensen, that Gaud be made head of it, long before he was deputy. He was then only head of the Near Eastern and South Asian part. He and Bell make a marvelous team, I think. But I was so sad to see Bell leave the Bureau where I thought he was very good--not that Gordon and Shultz aren't also good, but Bell, I felt, was being thrown to the wolves there. Of course, he's done a great job and I think was excellent there. I think Macomber, who took Gaud's place, is very good. Below that I don't really have any strong views.

O'CONNOR: One thing that came up, Penkovsky. I wondered if you can say anything about Penkovsky.

AMORY: Well, all I can say is he provided us with uniquely valuable stuff that beautifully complemented the material we were getting from photographs. In other words, it gave us the detail and enabled us then to interpret our photographs better, and the photographs gave us the things to ask him as questions that he could put his technical friends. And a combination of a highly placed spy and this capacity to look down on the whole Soviet Union put us in the securest possible position and had an awful lot to do with the 1962 missile crisis. Never before in history have two great powers come together on a collision course like that and one power known exactly what the other had. In other words, this is so different from 1914, where everybody was wondering who was mobilizing, what was going on and so on. But Kennedy knew minute by minute what was going on and exactly what the Soviets could do and the fact that they weren't taking the covers off their missile silos and so on and so forth. And I think the assurance with which he played his hand, and the whole executive committee with him, would not have been there if you took away this solid intelligence. If we came back in what we were talking about earlier this morning, the missile gap stage, where you wondered whether the Soviets had ten missiles or five hundred or a hundred versus five hundred, everything would have been at sixes and sevens. But it wasn't.

O'CONNOR: I was once told that the decision or the critical point in the Cuban missile crisis--and this may be completely false was when we discovered that they were bringing in nuclear warheads. They had put them on ships and were sending a nuclear warhead to Cuba. Do you know whether that's true or false? Did you ever hear that?

AMORY: I don't think it's true. I think we reacted.... Well, I think that the have been there if you took away this solid intelligence. If we came back in what we were talking about earlier this morning, the missile gap stage, where you wondered whether the Soviets had ten missiles or five hundred or a hundred versus five hundred, everything would have been at sixes and sevens. But it wasn't.

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AMORY: I don't think it's true. I think we reacted.... Well, I think that the warhead is something that we couldn't tell; we couldn't see. They could be in the hold. After all, they're not very big. What we saw were these medium range missiles and even a couple of the two thousand mile missiles that could have reached all the way to the Chicago-Duluth area--car whatever the president said. And we just assumed they wouldn't send the missiles without the warheads. I wouldn't separate the two; I wouldn't make a particular hinging point on them.

O'CONNOR: Okay, unless there's any other question you'd like to discuss.

AMORY: I don't think so. When I get your transcript and go over it, I may think of some notes in which case I'll just dictate to my girl elaborations or corrections or something I may have slipped into saying.

O'CONNOR: We'd appreciate that.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

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