

Earle G. Wheeler Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Earle G. Wheeler
Interviewer: Chester Clifton
Date of Interview: 1964
Place of Interview:
Length: 72 pp.

Biographical Note

Wheeler, Earle G.; General, U.S. Army; Director, Joint Chiefs of Staff (1960-1962); commanding general, European command (1962); Chief of Staff, U.S. Army (1962-1964). Wheeler discusses his various roles as the director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the United States Commander-in-Chief in Europe, and the Chief of Staff of the United States Army. He discusses communication with President John F. Kennedy [JFK] and the issues that arose with the Soviet Union, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation

Earle G. Wheeler, recorded interview by Chester Clifton, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Oral History Program.

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Earle G. Wheeler
Earle G. Wheeler

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Earle G. Wheeler

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Oral History Interview

with

EARLE G. WHEELER

1964

By Chester Clifton

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CLIFTON: ...General Earle G. Wheeler, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During the Kennedy Administration, General Wheeler was first the director of the Joint Staff, later on the commanding general of the European Command, and then back to be appointed as the chief of staff of the army in which position he was serving at the time of President Kennedy's death. General Wheeler, would you start out by describing two things: first, your first acquaintance with President Kennedy and then give us a little bit about the impact of the Kennedy Administration on the directorship of the Joint Staff and on the Joint Staff in the first few months of the Kennedy Administration, January, February, March 1961, as far as you can recall.

WHEELER: The first time I met President Kennedy was in September of 1960 prior to his election to the presidency. At that time, of course, he had been nominated by the Democratic party as their candidate. The occasion for this meeting arose in the following manner: President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] had decided that Senator Kennedy should be given intelligence briefings on all pertinent security matters. In fact, Vice President Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] was already given additional briefings other than those he had had as a result of his official position during the Eisenhower Administration. There was a great deal of discussion as to who would brief Senator Kennedy from the military side as opposed to the intelligence briefings given by Mr. Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], on the purely intelligence

aspects of the United States position in the world. It was first thought that perhaps the chairman of the Joint

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Chiefs of Staff, at that time General Nate Twining [Nathan F. Twining] of the Air Force, should give this briefing. Then it was proposed that a relatively junior office of the Joint Staff, perhaps of colonel/captain rank, might give the briefing. Finally, as a sort of a compromise between these two extremes, it was determined that I, the director of the Joint Staff, would head up the briefing team. So in September of 1960, I went to the temporary office of Senator Kennedy in the Capitol building, I believe the office of the -- what would it be Ted? -- the office of the...

CLIFTON: Well, he was running his campaign.... He had the senatorial office, but he also moved over to...

WHEELER: The Capitol.

CLIFTON: ...the Capitol and had just an office they allotted him there.

WHEELER: That's right. But it came out of, I think, perhaps the doorkeeper of the Senate or someone like that, master of arms of the Senate. At any rate, this was a temporary setup. I took with me a captain in the Navy from the Joint Staff, two enlisted men who ran the slide projector, to the Capitol on this particular, very hot morning in September 1960. Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln], Senator Kennedy's secretary, was in charge of the office. Senator Kennedy came in somewhat late. He had been quite busy the night before on political matters. I recall that during the course of a briefing which ran about forty minutes, he was interrupted continuously by phone calls coming in from all over the country and dealing, I gathered from what I inadvertently overheard, with various political matters connected with his campaign. Senator Kennedy was extremely friendly, obviously pressed for time, and obviously, I thought, tired physically as a result of his political activities in his campaign during the preceding months.

The one thing that really sticks in my mind about this particular interview is in connection with the so-called missile gap presumed to exist at that time. At the end of a briefing which had encompassed our military posture vis-a-vis that of the Soviet worldwide, he questioned the numbers of operations missiles of the Soviets as compared to the numbers that we had explained to him as being our arsenal and said to me, "General, don't you have any doubting Thomases in the Pentagon?" I said, "Senator Kenendy, we have lots of doubting Thomases." I said, "As a matter of fact, that is the role of the intelligence community and indeed the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to act as critics and to be doubting Thomases in the presentation of these facts to you." Senator Kennedy made no particular

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response to this. He made a particular point of thanking the two enlisted men, one Navy, one Air Force, that I had with me for their part in this presentation. Then after thanking all of us in a body, why this terminated the first meeting that I'd had with him.

After Senator Kennedy assumed office as President in January of 1961, he installed, of course, as Secretary of Defense, Mr. McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], and as Deputy Secretary, Mr. Roswell Gilpatric. It became apparent almost from the outset that there was going to be a vast change in the pattern of operations within the Department of Defense and in the areas of the government impinging on the operations of the Department of Defense. For one thing, the National Security Council machinery was abolished very early in the Kennedy Administration. The old planning board was done away with. As a result, I found that the Office of National Security Council Affairs, a part of the Joint Staff, was no longer needed because there was nothing going on which would demand the attention of a major general and a number of colonel/captain level assistants. As a matter of fact, to jump ahead a bit, I was quite surprised in February or early March of 1961 to have one of my assistants bring me national security action memorandum NSAM number 22 or 24 -- I've forgotten the exact number -- because I'd never see the predecessors of this NSAM, namely NSAM's one through twenty-one or one through twenty-three. I forget which is the number.

It also became apparent on the Defense Department side, that the New Frontier was being established very rapidly indeed. Secretary McNamara wished to explore very meticulously, very minutely the various planning actions, contingency plans, programs within the Department of Defense. It was at that time in the first couple of months of his administration of the DOD [Department of Defense] that he issued the famous or infamous, depending upon how you regarded him, hundred forty-four projects to be accomplished. This threw a tremendous load on the Joint Staff. In the first place, the Joint Staff really was not manned for this type of activity. In the second place, many of the projects were worded in such a way or demanded information in such detail that it wasn't available in the Joint Staff itself or indeed within the service staffs. I recall that we had to bring in a number of planning officers from Europe, front eh Pacific, and elsewhere in order to get the detailed information required for these very voluminous and very far-reaching studies. The hours required to prepare these studies required a very heavy workload be accomplished by each officer on the Joint Staff. My people were working sixteen, in some cases eighteen hours a day, seven days a week in order to turn out this information. I must say that many of the studies were not satisfactory to me or to anyone

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else for the reasons which I've cited, namely a lack of information, very short deadlines. I regarded many of them as being only rough cuts or approximations of the studies that really were required in order to get ahead with the job.

CLIFTON: Was this series of studies really a major review of the Defense Department when you added them up?

WHEELER: Not only a major review of the Defense Department per se but you might

say of our defense policies, among other things. For example, everyone in the Department of Defense was aware, I believe, that the Kennedy Administration rejected a reliance upon massive retaliation as a viable strategic...

CLIFTON: As a strategy, I think.

WHEELER: Strategy, as a viable strategy. Instead, they had been talking openly in the public forum about the necessity for moving toward a more flexible strategy, one which would provide the President and his advisors options as to courses of action that might be taken in the event of a military encounter with the Soviets or with anyone else for that matter. So these studies, at least in part, were directed toward ascertaining what we really could do in other than general war wherein a major strategic exchange of nuclear weapons was envisioned. In fact, it also encompassed our capabilities, our planning in the realm of strategic nuclear warfare as well because you will recall that there was a great deal of question as to whether we had too much on the strategic side and too little on the conventional or in the area of something less than a general war.

CLIFTON: Did the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] and you in our position feel that this was coming from a direction from the President and his advisors, or did you feel that this was Secretary McNamara putting up his own review? Did you have an impact of the presidency in this?

WHEELER: I think that this was an agreed administration policy prior to the time that the Administration came into office. In other words, that in the preliminary discussions between the President and his soon-to-be principal advisors in the military area -- Mr. McNamara, Mr. Gilpatric, the President, and others whose names I really couldn't detail -- had agreed that this type of a review and this type of a move towards a more flexible strategy was necessary. This feeling or conjecture on my part was certainly borne out in my later contacts with President

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Kennedy because he exhibited a knowledge in this area and an interest in it that he wouldn't have had had it not come from within himself. In other words, this isn't something that could be laid on with a butter knife.

CLIFTON: In other words, you feel he was a participator in the beginning.

WHEELER: Oh, I do. I do.

CLIFTON: To go back to a point you mentioned about his question when you briefed him -- the missile gap, was that one of their early studies or did you have to come up with an answer on whether we had a missile gap or not?

WHEELER: There were some cuts taken at this, yet. However, interestingly enough, the missile gap as a controversial subject soon disappeared. There were probably many reasons for this, among them the fact that the missile gap was very hard to prove and also the fact that everybody got so busy in going to other areas of exploration that this sort of disappeared.

CLIFTON: My own recall of this thing was that it was a major defense problem in the campaign between Nixon and Kennedy...

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: ... and the Democrats used it considerably as a device, and then after they took office, it disappeared as if by magic.

WHEELER: That's right. This is it.

CLIFTON: No one really has traced how this disappeared.

WHEELER: It just seemed to go down the drain.

CLIFTON: Go away.

WHEELER: It just went away.

CLIFTON: Another thing about your briefing -- and I mention this again because in the campaigns, this has been a traditional thing for some time now, briefing the opponents. On the political scene, some people say, "Well, this is

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really to corral them so they can't beat you. You give them enough knowledge so they can't knowingly beat you on the head for a policy you are pursuing." But as a result of your briefings, did you note any restraint on the speeches made by candidate Kennedy? Did you feel that there were areas because he had knowledge of them that you found him holding back on?

WHEELER: It seemed to me in retrospect that the subject of the missile gap was not pursued with the same vigor that it had been before. However, you will recall also that there were a good many issues in that particular campaign, one of them being the relative experience of the two men in the field of foreign affairs, governmental management and so on. As the date of the election came nearer, I think it was this aspect of controversy that became sharper rather than debate as to more finite things such as how many missiles, how many of this, that, and the other thing.

CLIFTON: In your own opinion, having met President Kennedy or candidate Kennedy in this one briefing -- and you met him as you described under some very tough circumstances of interruptions and so forth -- did you have a first reaction of whether this man, you felt, would (a) take an interest in national defense or would he be more interested in, say, labor management or did you have a reaction of not only his interest but his capabilities at all?

WHEELER: I came away from meeting candidate Kennedy with the impression that I was dealing with a very intelligent man; a man who probably didn't know too much as to the details of national defense; in fact, a man who probably didn't have many other areas in governmental affairs with which he was intimately familiar. But he certainly had a shrewd intelligence, he asked intelligent questions, and he tried to bore in and get at the bottom of things rather than being content to accept the surface explanation. Not only that, as a result of talking to my captain in the Navy and my two enlisted men as we were coming back to the Pentagon, I found that all three of them had been impressed by his personality. In other words, he made a most favorable first impression on people. This because of his friendly manner, little touches of humor and so on and the fact that even though he was pressed for time and obviously very tired physically, he was polite and pleasant in his manner. I must say I came away from this first meeting with Mr. Kennedy with a most favorable impression of him.

CLIFTON: Remember a little later when in February, March, we had our first go-around on what we were going to do in Laos, which President Kennedy always pronounced Lay-os...

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WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: ... and he was terribly surprised at least according to our records that things were in such a shape over there and we could do so little. Do you recall from your briefing in September whether our Southeast Asia capabilities came up, or was it mostly on intelligence?

WHEELER: Our capabilities worldwide were discussed; however, there was no particular pointing toward Southeast Asia. In this area we were talking merely of the overall capabilities of the CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief, Pacific] forces and then as a part of the overall posture of the United States around the world. I don't recall Senator Kennedy making any particular point about the Laotian situation.

CLIFTON: Then, later on, President Eisenhower had meetings with then President-elect Kennedy about the seventeenth, eighteenth, or nineteenth

of January. Again, according to President Kennedy's recollection, there was a very brief mention made of Laos. He was surprised at that early meeting that this was a problem going to be laid at his feet. Do you recall whether the Joint Staff or you as director had to prepare any material for General Eisenhower's, President Eisenhower's briefing of Kennedy?

WHEELER: To the best of my knowledge, we did not. We had been sending, however, the normal situation reports to the White House having to do with the Laotian situation. I assume that this was just pulled together by some of President Eisenhower's people and used as a medium for him to discuss this with President-elect Kennedy.

CLIFTON: As far as you knew then, he didn't have a special briefing for President Eisenhower before he briefed Kennedy?

WHEELER: Not that I knew of.

CLIFTON: Another point that's very interesting to the record -- you know, in November and December, I believe it was after the election, the Symington [Stuart Symington] report on defense was pulled together.

WHEELER: I remember it well.

CLIFTON: Then it quietly was accepted by the President-elect,

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Kennedy, as far as I could tell, we heard no more about it. It just sort of quietly faded away. Can you recall a little about that report and its impact?

WHEELER: Yes, I can. When the Symington committee report was released to the public, it caused, as you would imagine, a considerable discussion within the DOD, within the Joint Staff, within military circles, let's say it that way. Then it sort of disappeared. Since I happened to know that Mr. Roswell Gilpatric had been one of the leading members of this committee, I was quite interested many months later -- in fact just about the time that Mr. Gilpatric retired from the DOD -- to learn that he had changed his mind during the course of his tenure in the Pentagon and felt that he and Mr. McNamara who had followed a different course, and not advocated in large part by the Symington group, had pursued the right course of action rather than the wrong courses of action. In other words, he revised his thinking in the process of being one of the mainsprings within the DOD. That was the end of the Symington report so far as I know. It just sort of disappeared. It went away like the missile gap.

CLIFTON: Later on, of course, you went up on the Hill quite a bit during the first year

there of the Kennedy Administration and probably saw Senator Symington. Did you feel at any time that he was reaching back in his questioning to establish the validity of that report, or had he dropped it too pretty much?

WHEELER: I think that Senator Symington had dropped it pretty much. I believe that once the Kennedy Administration was in office, the trend of events in the DOD and elsewhere probably was to Senator Symington's liking. I've met him a number of times since both when testifying before the Congress and, you might say, on social occasions.... I think on one social occasion he mentioned the fact that there had been such a report and that was about it. I mean he made no particular point of it, he merely used it, I think, to illustrate his long-term interest in national security affairs. Of course, this is illustrative of his long-term interest. I might add that Senator Symington has considerable knowledge in the area of national security affairs.

CLIFTON: In the early part of this administration, now after President Kennedy's inauguration, we saw a lot of things develop which we'll talk about, but one of the points that he had been pressing on or seemed to me to have some interest in was the usefulness of the National Guard and the reserve.

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Did you feel an impact on that? Were some of your studies on the usefulness? Did you feel that he was antagonistic toward it or curious about it? Can you recall anything about that?

WHEELER: I think it's more a matter of curiosity on his part as to whether we were getting full return for the money spent on the reserved component forces. He had an inquiring mind as you know. He was interested in many things and this was one of them. Later in his administration, after the Cuban affair of the fall of 1962, to jump ahead, it seemed to me that President Kennedy took an ever-increasing interest in the military establishment. I believe that it was at that time -- and we can come to this again when we discuss the events of that fall of 1962 -- that he began to realize the value of ready military forces. He came to appreciate, I think, the reliance which he could put upon the American military in times of crisis. These things, of course, brought him into thinking about the readiness of the reserve components, where they fitted into the overall defense picture, and I believe it was one of the things that led eventually to the realignment of the army National Guard and the Army Reserve Forces which was done something over a year ago, during his administration. He was one of the people who had pushed this or supported it, let us say it that way. But I wouldn't think that he had any preconceived ideas on this.

CLIFTON: In other words, you felt from the developments that ensued that he had an open mind, but wanted to be sure that we were getting our money's worth?

WHEELER: That's right. This is correct. I think that also this feeling on his part was undoubtedly fostered by the inquiries conducted by Secretary McNamara

in this same area where he wanted to make sure -- in fact, he still wants to make sure -- that the reserve strength, the reserve armament, readiness, and so on is compatible with the requirements of national security in conjunction with the elements of the active forces.

CLIFTON: Still in relation to the reserves and the guard as you recall in July 1961 after President Kennedy had talked to Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] and we had the two aide-memoires that sort of hit him in the face, we then had the Berlin tension and we did call up a couple of divisions. Did the Joint Staff propose this as the only way out? Were we enthusiastic about this as a device to build up our strength? Do you think that this had a relationship to later changing the number of, as you said, ready divisions?

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WHEELER: I think that -- and you've got to recognize that I was director of the Joint Staff then so, in effect, I was sitting a little bit to one side of the army actions which were service actions related to their readiness, capabilities to deploy additional units and so on. But as I recall the trend of events and the discussions that took place in the tank during this period, Secretary McNamara -- and I presume he reflected the views of the President -- was most anxious to take positive steps to indicate to the Soviets that we were prepared to face up to this crisis and to follow through to the end anything that might face us.

Now at that time we were directed, the Joint Staff was directed to take a look at our readiness for the use of conventional forces in order to carry out something less than an all out nuclear war, or let us say this way, to give us, give the Administration the option of starting with something less than all out nuclear war. These studies revealed that we were not in good shape. This was not in the Army alone. This was across the board. For example, the Army at that time supposedly had fourteen active divisions. As a matter of fact, this was not true. Eleven of these divisions were in good shape, but three divisions in the United States were training divisions. By this I mean that they had a cadre of anywhere from four to six thousand men, approximately 40 percent of a division strength who were indeed trained soldiers but the remainder of the division was made up of draftees or volunteers who were being trained to take their place in the active forces both within the United States and overseas. This was a continuing operation. As one group of trainees graduated and went on to their permanent units, another influx came in. So these three divisions were not deployable...

[BEGIN TAPE II]

WHEELER: ... in any sense of the word. They were not combat capable, combat ready. We also found, speaking of the Army, that while moneywise they had ample combat consumables, ammunition for example, that the stocks were out of balance. We would have too little of one type of ammunition and far too much of another. Now this was the result of many things -- economies in buying over the years, the

fact that the military assistance program had required larger inputs of certain types of ammunition than others. I honestly believe what I've always thought to be merely poor planning, an examination of our logistic stocks on a money value basis rather than on the basis of individual items, critical items.... In the Air Force we found that their capability for conventional-type action was strictly limited due to small stocks of iron bombs and shortages, imbalances in such things as pylons for the aircraft which

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would support the weapons, the bombs. The same was true in the Navy. In other words, over the years we had programmed ourselves out of any sizable capability to fight a conventional-type war.

Now, since the United States, since the administration wished to make a gesture of readiness, since they wanted to signal to the Soviets that we were ready to undertake any action required to solve or to meet their actions in regard to Berlin, we started then on a sizable program of actions. You will recall, I'm sure, Ted, that among these were an increase in the manpower of the active Army which would permit the three training divisions to be brought up to strength. In addition to that, the reestablishment of two more active Army divisions which had not been in being. They had been inactivated some years before after the Korean War.

[BEGIN TAPE III]

CLIFTON: These were not replacement training divisions then?

WHEELER: No, no, these were active divisions, combat...

CLIFTON: So we're going to have five combat divisions.

WHEELER: That is correct. On top of that, we readied and shipped to Europe, as you will recall, in increments a sizable number of combat units, the largest of which, as I recall, was the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment from Fort Mead, to increase the combat as well as the reconnaissance capability and the delaying capability in the Seventh Army area; then a number of men, totaling some forty thousand as I remember it, who went in to fill up the units of the Seventh Army because they were below strength.

Now at the same time that we were doing all this, it was recognized that it was going to take some time to get the three training divisions of the active army in shape to fight, it was going to take a year to organize, train, and equip two more active army divisions to Europe, one armored division and one infantry division, we called up from the National Guard two divisions for active duty. They were put in a training status, one at Fort Polk and the other, I believe, at Fort Lewis, Washington. Now, this was so that if we had to deploy two of the active Army divisions, we would have two reserve component divisions -- in this case, National Guard divisions -- in training, coming along so that they could be used as part of the

strategic reserve pending the readiness of the active Army units that I mentioned a little bit earlier. Similar actions were taken in the logistics area.

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Accelerated buys were undertaken of combat consumables for the Army, the Navy, and Air Force. We started shipping equipment for one armored division and one infantry division to be restocked in Europe so that if we did have to reinforce there, we could send the men and their personal equipment over and marry them up with their heavy equipment on the ground. This was a sizable effort. It took a long time really to accomplish.

Now you will recall, getting back strictly to the reserve components and the interests of the Administration, the difficulties that the Army had in calling up these two National Guard divisions and, I might add, a number of combat and combat support units, getting them filled up with properly trained men, getting them equipped and trained and ready for deployment. You will recall that it was found that the plans were not as good as they should be, certain men were called up that should not have been called up. In other words there was a considerable pulling and hauling before they got this straightened out.

CLIFTON: And lots of personal hardships of people who had never thought they'd be called away from their home towns and their businesses.

WHEELER: This is correct. This is correct. As a result of all this -- although as I say I was outside of this because I was in the Joint Staff at the time -- the Army undertook a considerable restudy and revamping of this reserve structure in order to preclude this type of things happening in the future.

CLIFTON: This started in 1961. When you came back as chief of staff in October 1962, did you find that -- what?-- twelve months' program or sixteen months' program had had a good effect?

WHEELER: Yes, but you will recall also that about the time I came back in October '62 was at the time when really the actions to revamp or realign the National Guard and the reserve components was just being put into effect.

CLIFTON: It was just the start of it.

WHEELER: In other words, it had taken that length of time to make the necessary studies, to take the necessary preliminary actions so that you could reshape the reserve components, you might say, in a fashion which would make them more responsive to the needs of national security.

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CLIFTON: And yet in this period, at least I saw and perhaps you did, I didn't see

President Kennedy lose his interest in the guard and reserve program or his support for it.

WHEELER: Far from it. Far from it. On the contrary, he was very much interested in it for reasons I've enunciated. He wanted to make it more usable and more responsive. I might add that he recognized, I think everybody recognized it within the government, that it's not desirable to call up the reserve component units unless you can foresee rather clearly that you're going to have to use them. In other words, you don't want to call them up as every little cloud arises on the horizon. You want to make sure you are going to have a storm before you call these gentlemen up. It's a great hardship to them, it disturbs their businesses, their lives, and so on.

CLIFTON: Did you think when we did it, when the U.S. did it, that it was a convincing signal to the Soviets despite its problems?

WHEELER: Very interesting. I went, as you know, to Europe in February of 1962 and took over as deputy CINCEUR in the DB [Commander-in-Chief, Europe in the Office of the Commanding General] of the European Command at that time. In talking to various Europeans, military as well as civilian, they had the feeling that the actions of the United States had been a very perceptible signal to the Soviets and that they had understood loud and clear what the United States was getting ready to do, and that this is one reason that things flattened out and quieted.

CLIFTON: I think we've done pretty well on that subject, but I think they're a couple more things that only you know about. You mentioned earlier that they abolished the NSC [National Security Council] planning staff and you found that in the Joint Staff you had no further use for your office that supported that action or that operation. Do you recall any reaction of your own or of the Joint Chiefs when this was done and the NSC began to function in a different manner? Was there a small revolution in it, or was it...

WHEELER: Well, I'll tell you what the effect was, that we had a sense of loss because we did not feel that we were getting the political guidance quickly, directly that we needed to conduct our military business. There was at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration in my opinion, now

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I'm not reflecting the views of the then Joint Chiefs of Staff, but I considered that at the beginning of the Kennedy Administration, for several months, there was confusion within the government. The lines of control had been cut, but no other lines had been established. Now at that time, I recall, there used to be luncheon meetings a couple of times a week of a group consisting of George McGhee, who was then the head of the policy planning staff [Policy Planning Council] of the State Department; Bill Bundy [William P. Bundy], then assistant to

Mr. Nitze [Paul H. Nitze] in ISA [International Security Affairs]; Nitze himself; and perhaps one or two others whose names I don't recall at this time. This used to be referred to rather jokingly among some of the military and non-military in the DOD, for that matter, as the junior cabinet who were busily engaged in plotting out the policies of the United States. I must say that I think they may have found that this was no substitute for more considered and, you might say, more formalized action on various policy problems because after a while this went away. I mean, this sort of ceased. Everybody got too damned busy to go off and have lunch and over the salad and the coffee, deciding on what course of action to take.

Rather slowly, but I think eventually rather effectively, you came to have lines of control reestablished along different patterns than had been the case in the Eisenhower Administration. I think, from my observation of this period, that it was quite apparent that President Kennedy had no use for large groups or committees handling problems. He preferred to look either to one man or to a smaller group of men to solve problems. So that rather than getting his advice from the National Security Council and all of its membership gathered around the board, his tendency, it seemed to me, was to call in the principals who might be involved in any particular problem. For example, it might be State, Defense, CIA for some problem connected with national security affairs. He wouldn't have in the secretary of treasury, the secretary of commerce, and all of the other non- or very...

CLIFTON: Marginal.

WHEELER: ... marginally interested agencies for consideration of these problems. Also at that time there began to grow up the practice of establishing these task forces to handle problems. Again these would be drawn from the various interested or most greatly interested elements of the government rather than from across the board. Now this has advantages, it also has disadvantages. The planning board, the demise of the planning board did take away an office of record, an office which was supposed to follow up on governmental actions, but which, I must

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admit, very frequently did not, or at least they did not do so effectively. The creation of the task groups offered difficulties because frequently, it would seem to me that you didn't get that direct drive that you like to have in carrying out a function. There would be a State Department aspect, a military aspect, and the problem was to bring them together. Considering that the secretary of state, the secretary of defense are both two very busy men, some of this had to be done by their assistants. Sometimes this worked like a charm and sometimes it didn't work so well; it all depended on who was handling it, I would say.

CLIFTON: Well, your office in the Joint Staff then that was connected to the planning staff in the NSC was also a means of communication.

WHEELER: Correct.

CLIFTON: You got the impact of the leader in the White House thinking on a steady flow.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: When it was abolished, that was not...

WHEELER: It was gone.

CLIFTON: ... it was gone, and nothing was substituted initially.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: You had the secretary of defense and a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff but they weren't constantly in the flow, they were so busy shaping up their own business...

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: ... that the flow stopped.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: Do you recall whether you as the director of the Joint Staff had any liaison officer over there or any means of communicating except through General Twining? Was there a residual process? Did somebody come from Bundy's [McGeorge Bundy] staff, for example, to brief you or keep you in touch?

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WHEELER: No, from time to time, we would get a NSAM or else I would get a memorandum for the record for Nitze's shop or I would talk to Nitze or Bundy [William Bundy] personally on various problems that had military aspects where they wanted some assistance, some input from the joint staff.

CLIFTON: Well, there was a vacuum then for a...

WHEELER: But there was not a steady flow, there was not a continuous contact, there were breaks, and this was bothersome.

CLIFTON: Later on we can talk about when it, how it reestablished a different avenue. This leads us to the pattern problem, as you might say, when in January and February and March and after the President took office, President Kennedy, you were the director of the staff and you must have had a couple of

things going on. One is the Joint Chiefs of Staff are brought in for some meetings, but did you then see President Kennedy again in that period that you recall?

WHEELER: Not in the early months. The next time that I really saw him on a business basis, you might say, was during the Bay of Pigs episode.

CLIFTON: This was in March and April.

WHEELER: This was in April.

CLIFTON: After it was a failure or before it was on the dock?

WHEELER: On the day that it was failing was the next time that I actually saw him. As I recall it, General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer] who was then the chairman of the JCS was on the Hill testifying and a meeting was called very hurriedly in the cabinet room and Admiral Burke [Arleigh A. Burke] who was a second-ranking member of the JCS was getting prepared to go over and he took me with him so that he would have some backup on various military aspects that might be discussed.

CLIFTON: And because you were familiar with what the chairman had been doing pretty specifically.

WHEELER: That's right. Correct. So I went over to this meeting which was on the afternoon -- I can't remember the date...

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CLIFTON: Probably the nineteenth of April.

WHEELER: It could have been the nineteenth of April. It would be about that time.

CLIFTON: Certainly after the invasion had been launched that morning.

WHEELER: It was very definite that the operation was going down the drain unless something of a sizable and perhaps drastic nature was undertaken. Not too long after we, Admiral Burke and I, arrived in the cabinet room, General Lemnitzer did come in from the Hill. He had been alerted that this was going on and he was able to excuse himself and leave. There was a sizable body present on this occasion, not only the President but the Secretary of State...

CLIFTON: The Attorney General.

WHEELER: ... the Attorney General, Mr. Bowles [Chester Bowles], the then director of central intelligence, Mr. Allen Dulles came in with Dick Bissel

[Richard M. Bissell, Jr.] who had been rather in the directive position on this particular operation. Bissell was tremendously upset. In fact, he could hardly talk coherently at the outset. I was struck with the fact that he didn't even so much as have a map with him or anything else. He started telling President Kennedy what the situation was. Then there was considerable discussion as to what should be done to correct the situation. I got the impression from President Kennedy's reactions, facial remarks, and so on, that he was extremely desirous of doing something to correct the situation and hopefully enable this thing to go. It was made very clear to him that what was wrecking and had wrecked the whole operation was the action of a couple of T-28's, that this had wrecked the whole thing because there had not been sufficient and timely air support. With that he said, well, perhaps we ought to put in the Navy air off the carrier which was lying offshore, and from which, by the way, reconnaissance had been flown in order to ascertain what was going on on the beach. There was some discussion about this. And he was quite insistent, as I say, that something could be done and that he wanted to do something. I had the very distinct impression that he was going to go ahead and do something. However, after a fairly brief discussion along these lines he went back into his own office with two or three of his advisors and later came out and said, no, that he would not do this, about five or ten minutes later.

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Now, the results of all of this were very bad within the government, at least this was my personal impression. In the first place, I had the very distinct feeling which lasted for months thereafter that this failure so early in the Kennedy Administration had had a profound effect upon him and I know it had a profound effect on many of his advisors in a number of ways. In the first place, it shook their confidence in themselves considerably. In the second place, it started (as I think the newspapers of the day will reflect) backbiting, dissension within the upper levels of the government which caused a great deal of difficulty, I would think, for President Kennedy, although I can't document this. And thirdly there was a tendency in many part of the government -- and this undoubtedly had an impact on President Kennedy -- there was a tendency to blame all of this on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. You will recall that there were, I think, some very carefully leaked pieces that appeared in the press at that time. You will also recall that the Joint Chiefs of Staff never made any reply to any of that.

CLIFTON: In talking about leaks in the press, leaks that indicated that President Kennedy had lost confidence in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in his, you might say, military advisory machinery.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: Both. And rather pointedly sometimes about General Lemnitzer.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: And also, you're pointing out that in the ensuing months, May, June and July, the Joint Chiefs individually or collectively never made a defense of their actions in this operation.

WHEELER: Never.

CLIFTON: Of course, as we know, for the record, General Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] was called in to make an investigation of what went wrong. He has a rather extensive report on file over there in the President's papers, President Kennedy's papers. But aside from his report and calling in, when you went back into the tank with the Joint Chiefs of Staff were they somewhat demoralized?

WHEELER: I think that what hit them the hardest was the fact that they were being blamed for an action over which

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they had practically no control and in which the military was very little involved. They had no directive authority over this action at all. Now, furthermore, they felt very strongly, and I might add bitterly, that what military advice they had offered had been ignored; that in the decision-making meetings which preceded the Bay of Pigs affair, no military man was present on numerous occasions. They were particularly bitter in their own attitudes about the fact that the air support which had been planned as an integral part of this operation -- not U.S. air support, but Cuban dissent air support -- had been knocked off without any reference to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In other words, they felt that they were being very unfairly blamed publicly and in a sense pilloried for a series of events for which they were not responsible.

CLIFTON: This was planned by a civilian agency.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: And without much consultation with senior military.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: Some junior military were involved, right?

WHEELER: This is correct. And there was some military support in the way of hardware provided, but there was no planning staff. There had been a review as you know, of the plan by selected members of the Joint Staff. This review pointed out very clearly, I think, the pros and cons of this particular operation. The basis for success in this operation as laid down was that there would be a sizable and early popular uprising by the Cuban people. On this assumption, in other words if it proved

to be true, the Joint Staff review group said that with other corrective measures in the area of training, air strikes, and other things -- oh, and logistics -- that the thing had a reasonable chance of success. However, you may or may not know that the lodgment area was changed, the air support was progressively whittled down and finally eliminated at the last moment, and various things, various important ingredients were pulled out to the point where a couple of training planes were able to wreck the entire operation.

CLIFTON: There were two points that I know President Kennedy thought this had been subjected to the top-level scrutiny. One was in November before he took office when it was planned. In this operation, as it went along he was assured that the JCS had seen it in its early days when it was

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Eisenhower plan. Do you recall whether that's accurate or not?

WHEELER: They had seen it in a very, very sketchy way. What happened was that we were told to have the Joint Staff take a look at this particular plan which was extremely closely held. Up until that time, I think perhaps I was the only member of the Joint Staff, the director, who even knew that any such planning operation was in progress under the aegis of the agency. When we did take a look at it, we found that we had a tremendous difficulty in getting information out of the agency, in getting the supporting plans, the logistics, et cetera. It was only after the Chiefs had had a chance to look at this that really the logistics were put on, were laid on, I should say, in a realistic manner.

CLIFTON: In a realistic manner.

WHEELER: That's right. The shipping, everything else, was beefed up considerably because the original plan was definitely a shoestring that couldn't have possibly succeeded against any sort of organized resistance at all. Now, I repeat through that the key assumption upon which the success or failure of this operation rested was the sizable popular uprising at an early stage. This particular assumption was validated as being correct by agencies over which the Chiefs had no control and, in fact, had no way of making a proper judgment.

CLIFTON: You didn't have a counterproposal from your intelligence community. The Army, Navy, Air Force had not surveyed this situation.

WHEELER: No. No. We were getting the usual reports from your military attachés, but all of this stuff was long out-of-date as you might expect. There had been most of which have since been eradicated by Castro [Fidel Castro] and his people. Everyone.... Well, let's say it this way, assurances were given that there was the means, the apparatus for this sizable uprising which would have made the whole thing go. Of course this uprising did not take place. One reason perhaps being the very early defeat of the

invasion effort. In other words, there was no time for the people to react. By the time they really knew about this, the thing had been cut to pieces largely by these two aircraft which...

CLIFTON: Which is almost unbelievable.

WHEELER: Almost unbelievable that these two aircraft made all of this difference.

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CLIFTON: Now, in the March and April period, just to put a perspective on this, I noticed that it tightened up considerably over at the White House, too. The groups got smaller. The meetings were more secret. It went from the NSC level, where it was never discussed that I know of openly, down to a small group, and then I found -- because I was doing some public relations work and had too many contacts with the press -- I was eliminated from the meeting and I had no opportunity to see whether anybody came from the Joint Staff or not although you had to be aware that something big was brewing.

CLIFTON: Do you recall whether General Lemnitzer or yourself at that time ever had this as a JCS, you might say, item, the Cuban invasion?

WHEELER: I can recall this: I personally never attended one of these meetings at the White House. The first meeting that I went to at the White House on the subject of the Cuban operation...

CLIFTON: Was the day it was failing.

WHEELER: ... was the day that it failed. General Lemnitzer, of course, went over from time to time, but he did not attend all of the meetings. I know this for a fact. As I say, certain decisions were taken from time to time wherein he really had no input.

CLIFTON: It never became a formal JCS item in the March-April period that you know of as director?

WHEELER: Oh, yes. It was discussed I would say not only formally but extensively with the Secretary of Defense and the JCS in meetings dealing largely, I might add, with logistics. This was the key issue, to try to get the necessary logistic backup that would provide the means for these people to get ashore and then support themselves once they got ashore and then to provide means whereby this popular uprising could be armed and given an opportunity for success. In other words, I would say this, Ted, that...

[BEGIN TAPE IV]

WHEELER: ... this was a very unusual military input particularly from the Joint Chiefs of Staff level to an operation. But you've got to remember this was not a military operation. Now I would say this, that the Joint Chiefs of

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Staff were not involved and could not be held culpable to the degree that these leaks in the press would imply. On the other hand, any time that you were involved in any sort of advice to the President on any subject, you in effect have assumed a part of the responsibility for the success or failure of the operation. So in this regard the Joint Chiefs of Staff were involved.

CLIFTON: In the months afterwards as once in a while President Kennedy would in a soul-searching, almost self-analysis conversation, not in a critical way, the one question that came up several times and puzzled him was if the Joint Chiefs had doubts about the success of this operation. Even though it was a "civilian" operation, he said to himself, "Why didn't one of them step forward, any one of them, and say, 'This is a bad, this is an inadequately based thing.'" just as you might say as a friend if not officially.

WHEELER: Well, this is the interesting thing about that, Ted, and, I might add, this is a good question. You've got to remember, though, that the plan as initially conceived to include the lodgement area, the air support furnished, both as to quantity and as to continuity, were entirely different than what was eventually adopted. I recall having the Joint Staff supported by the Army Engineers make a survey of every landing beach in Cuba to get alternate landing beaches because for political reasons, they didn't want to land.... Let me say this, the original beach area was validated as to adequacy of ingress and egress, as to its location with regard to the guerilla activities still going on in Cuba and other necessary things, by a very exhaustive analysis conducted by the Joint Staff assisted by the Army Engineers because we were not sure when we first saw this plan that this was even the proper place to land. We finally came up with the conclusion that this was the best place; that in this regard, the agency had made the proper selection. There was no question about it. However, in all of the political hassling that went on in the ensuing months, the early days of the Kennedy Administration, it was found politically undesirable to do this. This was where the air fields were. That was the reason for going ashore, among other things, at that particular point.

CLIFTON: To get the airfields as soon as possible.

WHEELER: That's right. Secondly, it was because routes into this area for Castro's forces were (1) easily defensible by the invaders. Secondly, the lodgment area was far enough away from Castro forces so that it would take a sizable and pretty long-term movement to get these people in there.

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Thirdly, up in the Escambray [Mountains] -- which was just the high hills right up from the lodgment area -- was where an immediate source of reinforcement could be had. This was not true in the final area that was selected, the Bay of Pigs, which we looked at and said, "Well, it can be done, but it ain't going to be good."

Now, you ask why some of the military didn't step forward and say, "This ain't going to go." I think that there were several reasons in my opinion. One, this was not per se a military operation. This was one of them. Two, a member of the Joint Chiefs wasn't always present when these things were going on and decisions were being made. In other words, there was no argument or colloquy as to what's wrong with doing this, why can't we cut back on the air support, et cetera, et cetera. These decisions were taken without any reference to the military. Now, I may be oversimplifying a lot of this, and I'm sure I am, but as I said earlier, I believe that, let's say it this way, there was too much of a tendency within the government to go right around the military in dealing with this particular problem which was regarded as being far more a political problem than it was a military problem.

On the other hand I must admit that I don't think that the JCS could be completely absolved of any responsibility and blame in the area. I don't think this would be right either. I think there was a lot of fault on both sides, believe you me. I might add that I was very interested that as a result of General Taylor's examination of what went on that President Kennedy signed this memorandum having to do with the functions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the fact that he wanted them not only to lend their advice on military matters but as men of judgment and experience on any other matters that had an impact on the governmental position, or words to that effect, plus the fact that he wanted their advice to come to him undiluted and unscreened, you see, untouched by human hands.

[BEGIN TAPE V]

WHEELER: This is still hard to accomplish, damn hard to accomplish. But on the other hand the record after that was better, you see; not good enough but better. Because the Chiefs, as I told you earlier, were bitter indeed about the fact that, let's say this, quasi, at least, military decisions were being taken without the advice of one of the senior military men of the armed forces.

CLIFTON: I think that was quite evident over at the White House, too, certainly by the next steps in regard to CIA and the steps in regard to the State Department's....

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WHEELER: I'll tell you you one other thing too, Ted, which I referred to earlier, and this was the fact that when this rather unseemly thing happened, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were really scornful of the way certainly highly placed individuals ran for the hills saying, "We had nothing to do with all this. We advised the

President against doing. It's all the fault of the Joint Chiefs of staff." I mentioned to you that not one member of the JCS nor did they as a cooperative body ever attempt to make any rebuttal. But don't think that this didn't burn their souls to a crisp. As a result, their opinion of certain people went down to a pretty, pretty low ebb.

CLIFTON: As I recall, and you do too, President Kennedy stepped forward initially and took the full responsibility for this, which had some mitigating effect on this poison that was being put around. Do you recall later -- after this incident, in May, June, July -- any time that a civilian chief stepped forward and defended the Chiefs or in any way.... I'm trying to recall if.... Did the Secretary of Defense make any speeches in their behalf?

WHEELER: No. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. McNamara never said a word in this regard.

CLIFTON: Now the next thing that I saw happen -- and I'm sort of pinning it on this and it may be false, so please correct it, but I saw from where I sat President Kennedy start hunting for some new bodies, for a different, you might say different men. Without condemning any individuals, he began to hunt for an aliver approach to our military advisory business. I know he signed the memorandum that you indicated. Secondly, he did make an effort and directed me to make an effort to see that the Chiefs got over there more often and that we reiterated that any Chief who wanted to talk to him individually could come if he felt that he couldn't come as part of the corporation. But, did you feel an impact over here in the Joint Staff now in your succeeding months -- because you were here another eight months practically -- of shuffling of bodies and finding new people, or change in personnel policies, or enlarging the staff?

WHEELER: I would say this, Ted. I think that it was a pretty prevalent feeling among members of the Joint Staff -- let's say the echelons below the Joint Chiefs themselves -- that there were going to be changes made as a result of all of this. I mean, the Joint Staff.... I might add 95 percent of them didn't even know anything about this operation; they had never

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even heard of it...

CLIFTON: Until they read it in the papers.

WHEELER: ... until they read it in the papers. But as a result of all this and then the usual stuff that began to come out in the papers, the fact that General Taylor was over here making an investigation and so on, this all became known.... And I believe there was a general feeling that there were going to be changes made in a matter of the not too distant future. I think that quite generally the Joint Staff, the more

junior elements, accepted that President Kennedy would probably slowly but surely get rid of one or more of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and change the composition of the body.

CLIFTON: The next thing that came out of this was first General Taylor being called back to investigate it, and then the appointment of General Taylor as a sort of a special military advisor over there. This happened on the fourth or fifth of July, and the Bay of Pigs certainly hadn't subsided yet because *Fortune* magazine and others came out after that. What was the impact on your activity over here and on the JCS about his being taken on as an advisor? Did we feel we have a better voice in the military over there or did they feel he might substitute for the JCS?

WHEELER: The original feeling, and I think this ran through the military as a whole, was that probably General Taylor was being substituted for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I happen to know, however, that it was a result of the personal efforts of General Taylor and General Lemnitzer that this did not become the case. They were in frequent personal consultation. A couple of times a week, I know, General Taylor would come over here and actually sit down in this office with General Lemnitzer and they'd discuss problems. And not only that, but on many occasions I was in General Lemnitzer's office when he either called General Taylor or General Taylor called him to discuss various problems. And I might add, General Taylor called me frequently too, getting information about one thing and another, perhaps asking me to provide a study already in being or undertake a study on something in which he and the President were interested. So although General Taylor did not per se substitute for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, not only did people suspect or expect but later it became quite clear that you did have a military man in the White House who in effect was looking over the shoulder of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There is no question about that. In other words, instead of General Lemnitzer being the principal military advisor to the President, you had another individual,

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a senior military individual, namely General Taylor who occupied that position. He wasn't getting advice then from one military source, he was getting it from two.

Now what was the effect of this? Partly good and partly bad. I think the bad part was probably more psychological than real. The planning activity and so on, the various actions that went along, proceeded just as they always had. But the psychology of the thing -- the fact that there was indeed a military representative of the President other than the chairman of the JCS -- made it quite clear that the Joint Chiefs in effect were not as close to the President as the law and as custom and as what you might say the logic of the chain of command would indicate.

CLIFTON: And the good part would be per se that you had a voice over there...

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: ... then the interests of the military or at least the idea that there was a military input was protected.

WHEELER: This is correct. And the fact that General Taylor was sitting close to the President, saw him frequently, was dealing with McGeorge Bundy and other in the White House ensured, you might say, that there was a military voice raised on various important occasions.

CLIFTON: Now was this two-way communication then? Did General Taylor also bring you lots more information?

WHEELER: Yes.

CLIFTON: Did this sort of ease the loss of that NSC [National Security Council] tie in?

WHEELER: I think it did. This is where we started to get -- as we referred to earlier -- again an output from the White House counsels which came over into the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to the Joint Staff, because General Taylor had a small group over there with him that he carefully had moving around through the White House to the State Department and elsewhere, where they kept their fingers on the pulse of what was going on. As a matter of fact, General Taylor told me once -- shortly before I went to Europe -- that he found that the hardest part of his job was keeping in touch with what was going on within the executive branch of

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the government; that there were so many people, so many planning agencies tucked away in back rooms somewhere that you had a great deal of difficulty in finding out what all of these fellows were up to. And that's when he got people like Colonel Larry Legere [Laurence Legere], Colonel Smith [W.Y. Smith]...

CLIFTON: Several others.

WHEELER: ... several others.

CLIFTON: He had a small joint staff there.

WHEELER: He had a small group there, all of them very active, very intelligent young officers who were able to not only fan out and get information to him, but then in turn pull it together for him and then transmit it to the proper people so that we would be aware of what was going on and take a consonant action.

CLIFTON: He also added a CIA man Tom Parrott [Thomas A. Parrott], to his staff as I recall...

WHEELER: That's right. I remember that. I remember I met him.

CLIFTON: ... so he could get the intelligence input a little more carefully adjusted. I think we've covered almost the Cuban catastrophe as you saw it, the advent of General Taylor as a result. I think we need to know a little in this record about the Laos thing that hit us in January and February so that it's either reported accurately or the ations are corrected. President Kennedy's records show that he had some meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff early because that was probably the first military problem that arose in front of him. He was, according to his records over there, somewhat shocked and surprised -- going back to your lack of readiness -- that he had no flexibility. I believe in a JCS meeting they told him that the Chinese, for example, and the Vietnamese could put a lot more people into Laos, right next door, than we could -- that was the first thing -- in a time period. And secondly, that we lacked the proper lift, if we had the people trained and ready, to get them there which was a significant step there. And the third point that they made was that if we committed our reserves and had the mobility to get them there, that he would have no reserves for any other problem. Now would you like to comment on the Laos situation as you saw it in those early months?

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WHEELER: Yet. It's quite true what you say that what came out of these meetings with the President was his, I might say, dissatisfaction with the situation in which we found ourselves. As a matter of fact, in the ensuing months this kept coming up again and again. You may or may not recall that one of the problems to which General Taylor devoted himself soon after he became the President's military representative -- in fact, I would say the first problem -- was the problem of Southeast Asia and Laos in particular. He heard about a logistics study which I had had done in the Joint Staff. Now this had to do with roots of communication, tonnages, capacity of various routes, capabilities intelligence-wise of the Chi-Comms [Chinese Communists] and the North Vietnamese to introduce troops and support them in the area. And we refined this over a period of a number of weeks. This was a very elaborate and well-done study. General Taylor not only had a briefing on this, but he progressively came back asking for a review of certain aspects. In other words, as various possibilities occurred to him or perhaps to the President --

I have no way of knowing -- he would come back and say, well now let's take a look at this aspect of it rather than what we already have. Are you sure that the factors that are being used for the dry season versus the wet season are correct? That sort of thing.

And interestingly enough, Ted, very soon after General Taylor came over here in, what was it, late April or early May to conduct this investigation of the Bay of Pigs affair, he came into my office one day and told me as I recall it, or at least indicated that the President had a deep interest in what was going on in Laos and that this was going to be a problem for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was the way he expressed it. And he asked me what studies we had had on this, and I told him then of this particular logistics capability study. So then later on, he really delved into it himself after he got shucked of his investigating duty.

Now, I believe that as a result of all this and as a result of various proposals that came out of the State Department and out of the basement of the White House, that you began to get this "pork chop" concept, you know, of a line across Laos, giving up the northern half of it. You had about eleven different solutions. I'm exaggerating when I say this, but there were certainly several and in this sense I mean far more than two.

CLIFTON: Everybody had his own idea...

WHEELER: That's right.

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CLIFTON: ... and he was a proponent of it.

WHEELER: That's correct. And no two of them agreed. There was much debate as to the number of forces we might have to put in to protect the line of the Mekong, and then what line should we protect across the line of the Mekong, and then what line should we protect across Laos in order to keep the Commies from sweeping on down into the panhandle, and so on, and putting the pressure directly on South Vietnam. I think that probably, although I can't document this at all, it was a result of all of this examination and papers flowing back and forth, re-examinations and so on, that President Kennedy decided to take the political initiative. That's when he geared up Governor Harriman [W. Averell Harriman] to go and undertake a series of talks which culminated in the so-called Geneva Accords of 1962, wherein you remember everybody agreed to withdraw all foreign troops. We went ahead and pulled out our MAAG [Military Advisory Assistance Group] people, leaving only the attaché group as normally. Of course the Vietminh didn't pull out a goddamned thing, they started reinforcing as fast as we pulled out. I think you're quite correct in saying that President Kennedy felt he had no flexibility.

Now probably flowing out of that too, and trying in however with the Berlin crisis which followed not too long after that, was the press for more airlift (which the President undertook) and increased forces. In other words all of these things came together in his mind, *I think*. He never said as much to me.

CLIFTON: But from the problems you got over here and the trend that took, you'd

deduce that somebody decided we didn't have enough?

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: I was going to ask you specifically about a new airlift aircraft. Did the Joint Chiefs of Staff have to give an opinion pro or con that C-141?

WHEELER: Oh yes, oh yes and we supported it.

CLIFTON: And it was a unanimous feeling on that.

WHEELER: To the best of my recollection, Ted, this was an unanimous thing. As a matter of fact, I had an officer come to see me from MATS [Military Air Transport Service]; happened to be an Air Force officer that had served with me over in Naples many years before. I wouldn't say that we were

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close friends, we weren't, but he had worked for me and he just came to pay his respects. In the course of talking over military problems he raised the matter of the jet transport. And I told him that it made sense to me and that as far as I was concerned I was forcing the Joint Staff in the direction of the jet transport although there were many people that had doubts as to the utility of this. So I asked his professional opinion about it. And he said that he felt that this would be the greatest step forward that could be made in the field of military transportation and then proceeded to tell me why, in terms of turnaround, tonnages that could be carried faster. In other words it just gave you a tremendously greater capability with fewer aircraft and gave you far more flexibility than we had with the propeller driven fleet. So finally when the Chiefs got through, they all agreed, as I recall, that this was a good program and should be pursued.

CLIFTON: Because they were put in, I believe, by President Kennedy into actually more than ever before assessing the budget as well as assessing the equipment.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: Now we'd always had, as I recall, a strategic priority or a priorities of weapons that the various services should buy with their money.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: But, is it true then that Kennedy had the Joint Chiefs of Staff apply itself more than ever to this?

WHEELER: It became apparent to me, Ted, that as the months went on, more and more the Chiefs were being called upon to get into what I would call the logistics aspects of military planning as well as the strategic or operational plans aspects. And this trend is continued to the present day. The Chiefs spend far more time now, and I might say on an order of magnitude of perhaps twenty times as much time now on the logistics aspects, the budgetary aspects of the military than they ever did before.

CLIFTON: And the weapons.

WHEELER: That's right. That's right.

CLIFTON: And the equipment.

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WHEELER: That's right. We are required to take a look at every major item, you might say, and give our military judgment on it not only as to where its place is within the entire arsenal of the United States, but also you might say the priority that should be accorded it in terms of money, time of production, and so on.

CLIFTON: Now in this same time period that you were director, the Joint Staff underwent quite a reorganization and an increase. Was that started before the Kennedy Administration?

WHEELER: That was started before. Actually the Reorganization Act of 1958 was the act which increased the size of the Joint Staff to its present statutory limit of four hundred, established the unified commands, and the chain of command from the President through the SecDef [Secretary of Defense], the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the unified command. However, under my tenure as director, we made a lot of changes in the internal structure of the Joint Staff as to functions, as to the creation of additional posts. For example, I got the Joint Chiefs of Staff to give me two assistants at the director level. My office was increased from being merely myself and the deputy director of the Joint Staff to include also a vice director of the Joint Staff who is the number two as well as the deputy because my office was completely undermanned.

Also, we had started and implemented a series of administrative improvements having to do with how you prepare and handle papers. All of this was for the purpose of speeding up the handling of problems; in other words, making the Joint Staff more responsive to the needs of the chief, the Secretary of the Chiefs, the Secretary of Defense, and in the long term the President. This process is still going on. We never got the pattern of operation or organization which I thought was desirable, or you might say the optimum, at that particular time. We don't have it today. We're moving toward it and we'll continue to move toward it. But this was a process that was accelerated, perhaps inadvertently, by all...

CLIFTON: All the events.

WHEELER: ... the advent of the Kennedy Administration. I spoke earlier about the tremendous workload that was imposed. It was obvious that the Joint Staff and the JCS machinery was simply not fast enough to cope with problems of this kind. Therefore we had to do something to shorten response time and to provide a better product. Now among other things I had been trying to do prior

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to the advent of the Kennedy Administration was to have a better rapport and a better communication with DOD, the Secretary upstairs, and with the State Department and with CIA. I might add that I had been only successful to a degree in this area. I had supported and managed to get in an exchange program with the State Department whereby we had certain State people on the Joint Staff and military people over there -- State people on the service staffs and military people there. This occurred under the administration of Secretary Gates [Thomas S. Gates, Jr.] because he supported it too. However, with the advent of the Kennedy Administration and Mr. McNamara, these things accelerated a great deal because it was clearly mandatory that we had to have these channels if we were going to operate successfully. We couldn't have a Chinese wall around the Joint Staff and around the JCS organization. They had to be responsive to the needs of the rest of the executive branches of the government. To be responsive, they had to have means of communication to the other branches so they could both provide information and get information upon which to base military judgments on the problems that we were tackling. Now this, of course, was more of a frame of mind than it is an organization chart because the wiring diagram can't show these things.

CLIFTON: But also it's a frame of mind and a change in attitude too.

WHEELER: That's correct.

CLIFTON: It's a psychological change of the staff officers approach to the other agencies.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: One other thing that I recall in that area -- I don't know whether it was happenstance, natural curiosity, but President Kennedy became very interested in the communications. I don't know how he got his attention on that thing, but I recall that there were two or three things: first, your communications responses to him had to be reviewed and worked on; and secondly, the "war room organization" or "emergency operations center" at least we felt it over there at the White House -- how did it come about, what was the impact here? You were the director of this?

WHEELER: Well, we had already started to improve the facilities and increase the

manning in the war room -- the present NMCC, National Military Command Center. As

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a result of, you might say, delays in transmitting messages to the White House in which the President was interested, as a result of delays in getting reports from commanders and also intelligence reports on actions worldwide, little crises that flared up.... All I know is that there came an increased demand on us for responsiveness both in the fields of information and, you might say, sit-reps [situation reports]; but collateral to that a demand for better communications worldwide. Because when we took a look at what we had going down into South America and into Southeast Asia, it was quite obvious we simply didn't have the physical means of transmitting this information and these spot reports, these situation reports, any faster than they were being had -- with of course the occasional due to somebody just not being alert to sending a message with the proper precedence so as to get it to the next place as fast as you could. As you know, we had a diversity of communications going out, but at the same time a very sparse communications net to the south and into the Asia area.

CLIFTON: And in that year, let's say, there were steps forward for speed, for improved communication.

WHEELER: Oh yes, absolutely.

CLIFTON: And that has probably continued, at least as far as I can see.

WHEELER: It has to this day. As a matter of fact the interesting thing is that even with the establishment of the Defense Communications Agency which was supposed to, you might say, cut down on what was thought to be superfluous long-line communications or long-haul communications, we found the contrary to be true. The system is going to expand, it's got to expand if it's going to be responsive to the needs of the President and the Secretary of Defense in the security areas. This is particularly true. We are still putting sizable means into bettering the communications into Latin America. And this is going to continue over the next several years. CinC-South [Commander-in-Chief- South], General O'Meara [Andrew P. O'Meara] was in here not too long ago with a request to the Chiefs for certain action in order to give him better control over the communications in South America. This is going to cost money and it's going to cost people in order to do it. But at the same time, if we are going to have the responsiveness that I personally think we should have and which I also know that the President is going to want -- President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] just as would President Kennedy -- we're going to have to do it. But of course, as you know, President Kennedy was a great telephone man anyway.

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CLIFTON: He was always calling people up and wanting instant responses.

WHEELER: That's right. This was his sort of natural way of doing business and he wanted to be able to do this worldwide.

CLIFTON: Still sticking to the Director of the Joint Staff area, you had over a year with Secretary McNamara, almost a flat year. Do you see any way -- we've talked about the JCS with the President -- what about the JCS with the Secretary of Defense at that time and your own staff and your own relationship with Secretary McNamara. Were there changes there that were significant?

WHEELER: I think so. However, you've got to be very careful to give proper credit where credit is due for the initiation of a pattern. Secretary Gates who was Mr. McNamara's predecessor under Mr. Eisenhower was a very able man, in my opinion. He had had long experience in the military, having been Assistant Secretary of the Navy and later Secretary of the Navy, and so on. And he made an effective Secretary of Defense under President Eisenhower. I think had his tenure been longer, in other words had he been Secretary of Defense long before he was, that progressively a number of things established by Mr. McNamara would have been established by Mr. Gates.

[BEGIN TAPE VI]

WHEELER: For example, Mr. Gates established the pattern of meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff personally at least once a week -- something that had never been done by his predecessors. I understand that history hath it that Mr. Wilson [Charles E. Wilson] met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff exactly once and for about fifteen minutes and only because Admiral Radford [Arthur W. Radford] practically brought him in with an armlock. And I don't recall that Mr. McElroy [Neil H. McElroy] ever met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He may have once. Mr. Gates did, once a week. And at that time there was the usual practice of discussing important problems, I mean the present practice of discussing important problems, discussion of divergent views among the Chiefs on various things of moment and so on.

Mr. McNamara has followed this practice religiously. Now it may be that he has been encouraged in this by the fact that we had these early difficulties which call for frequent consultation, and

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next because this is one of the ways that he does business anyway. In other words, he's used to having a sort of a council of way...

CLIFTON: Staff meeting.

WHEELER: ... usually a very short staff meeting -- an hour, half hour, an hour -- in

which certain problems are laid out. Then you go off and go to work on it.

And also I think he's found this to be a very useful way of staying in touch with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on a personal basis, dealing with them person to person rather than by means of memoranda.

Now, but more than this is the fact that the channels of communication, the daily contact between the Joint Staff and the agencies in DOD and the State Department and CIA which I had tried to start a little earlier, this came about rather and in a hurry because there was no other way to get the job done. In other words there was no time for somebody to sit down and write a memorandum and then pass it down to the Chiefs to the chairman, eventually to me, and then through a carefully laid out channel go up and make contact with some individual in DOD and talk over the problem briefly and then write a paper. This wasn't the way he wanted it done. He didn't feel that this was fast enough, and I must say I agree with him. Therefore, we had to, you might say, on a very broad front make direct contacts with the agencies in DOD. This started at that time, has expanded since that time to the point where I consider today that there's a very open and free exchange of information back and forth between the Joint Staff and all elements of DOD.

Now, this is the normal staff business. It doesn't, you might say, pin down the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The staff has no authority to do that. The JCS speak for themselves. And here's the opposite side of the coin, whereas in the early days of the McNamara administration the new people in DOD were trying to get the Joint Staff to take positions for the JCS, they now understand that the Joint Staff can't, that all the Joint Staff can do is say, well this is the information which you request, my personal opinion is so and so, but remember that when the Joint Chiefs of Staff sit around in a corporate body and brood over this, they may not support my position at all. You may get one that's 180 degrees in the opposite direction.

[BEGIN TAPE VII]

CLIFTON: And that understanding has been achieved then.

WHEELER: Oh yes.

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CLIFTON: The secretary himself continued then a policy that was established and he's accelerated the exchange and the personal contact between, you might say, the military and the civilian defense staff.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: And I suppose his own method of operation has had some impact on the Joint Staff too.

WHEELER: Very definitely.

CLIFTON: One other question I'd like to...

WHEELER: One thing I ought to add right here, Ted, is that Mr. McNamara from the very outset of his administration has supported increasing the functions and you might say the prestige and authority of the Joint Staff. This is one of the tenets of his pattern of operations.

CLIFTON: Rather than downgrade it he has raised it up.

WHEELER: Oh yes, very definitely. And although it's quite true that he had nothing to do with the Reorganization Act of 1958 because he wasn't here -- he was with the Ford Motor Company at that time -- the pattern or the law that was adopted at that time fitted right into his own pattern of operations because it expanded the size of the Joint Staff, it set a pattern of operations in communication with the unified commands and so on which was much better than ever before. You remember the old executive agency system which was done away with. So that you might say somebody prepared an area of operations for Mr. McNamara which he has exploited.

CLIFTON: A blueprint which he was able to build on.

WHEELER: Which I might add he would like to build on even more.

CLIFTON: One of the early comments was that there was a lot of leeway and authority for the Secretary of Defense in that law which because of the situation of the time Secretary Gates couldn't reach out and grab and exploit...

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: ...that Mr. McNamara just assumed. In other words, everything the law allows he took onto himself.

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WHEELER: Right. You refreshed my memory on something too that Mr. Gilpatric said having to do with the Symington report. Namely, that once they were in office and began to take a look at how to accomplish various things they found that the law gave the Secretary of Defense ample authority to do things which permitted what they thought to be an improvement in the operations of the Department of Defense. I think that up until that time there had been really no close reading of the law and no recognition of the really great powers that reside in the Secretary of Defense. The Congress has given him a tremendous leeway. What has happened was that Mr. McNamara and Mr. Gilpatric exploited this.

CLIFTON: I think one last question on this Director of the Joint Staff position, did you feel that President Kennedy or how would you assess his impact on the morale of the uniformed people in that first year?

WHEELER: I think that President Kennedy's greatest contribution to the morale of the uniformed people came as a result of the Cuban crisis in '62. And I'll elaborate that in our next session because there was a very definite impact at that time and it ties back to what I said earlier Ted about my belief that President Kennedy really began to recognize what he had, what an asset he had in the military as a result of the Cuban crisis in '62.

[INTERRUPTION]

CLIFTON: General Wheeler, when we left off we had pretty much brought us up to date to around June of the first year of President Kennedy's Administration. About that time, as you recall, he did two things, he went up to Canada and planted a tree and there was a short Ottawa conference and he also then went to Europe to meet President Charles A. deGaulle and to meet Khrushchev in Vienna. I wonder if you can reminisce for a minute about the Joint Staff activities, perhaps in preparation for the deGaulle and Khrushchev meeting.

WHEELER: Actually we prepared for the Chiefs I suppose you would call them discussion items for talks that they had with the President prior to his departure for Europe. I don't recall anything particularly outstanding at that particular time. The normal problems were addressed -- the question of tensions in Europe, the Berlin problem and so on. The next time of real activity came with the Berlin crisis which was in the late summer, early fall of that same year when you recall as a result of certain actions by the Soviets the Administration took a hard look

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at our capabilities for something less than all out nuclear war and decided that those capabilities were not adequate.

CLIFTON: The aide-memoire that Khrushchev handed President Kennedy at Vienna were an awful jolt to him. They were real tough, there's nothing conciliatory in the aide-memoires. I presume that they were sent over to the Joint Staff to read and study too, is that correct?

WHEELER: As I recall it, the way it was actually handled was that the chairman got copies of these aide-memoires. They were studied in the Joint Staff, however there was no formal actions taken. They were more in the nature of the information for officers who were engaged in this type of work. For example, then

Brigadier General David Gray who was on the Joint Strategic Survey Council was very active in the tripartite planning having to do with Berlin. He read them, I believe in order to, you might say, educate himself. But they were tough. I do recall that in the course of discussions among the JCS that I believe it was General Lemnitzer who told the other Chiefs that the President was really startled by the toughness of Chairman Khrushchev and the very rigid positions that he took in response to certain suggestions or in the discussion of various subjects which might ease tensions and so on in Europe.

CLIFTON: From the aide-memoires I recall that in July they began to study ways of meeting our requirements and the next thing that I was aware of as a significant event was the decision to call up National Guard and reserve divisions, or at least to get two divisions to add to our strategic capabilities. As far as you can recall, were there any other efforts made earlier than that to change over those training divisions you mentioned before into line combat divisions?

WHEELER: No, as I recall the actions Ted took to increase our overall capability for limited war, non-nuclear war, they stemmed directly from the Berlin crisis. However, I must say that I think that the President's thinking and that of Secretary McNamara had been conditioned by the aide-memoires which reflected Mr. Khrushchev's attitudes, his very firm attitudes as a matter of fact, regarding Soviet-United States agreement on certain areas of controversy. In other words what I'm really saying is that as I recall it definitive action started as a result of the Berlin crisis but no doubt in my mind that our thinking had started to change, or at least the Administration's thinking had started to change as a result of the aide-memoires.

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CLIFTON: So in June and July our thinking was beginning to toughen up a little and say what can we do if he confronts us?

WHEELER: That's correct.

CLIFTON: And about August, I recall, we were confronted.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: And about August, I recall, we were confronted.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: And they stopped one of our convoys on the autobahn.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: Then I presume that the councils, you might say committees of the National Security Council must have met with the President and then it was reflected back into activities of the Joint Chiefs.

WHEELER: That's right. I remember that.

CLIFTON: What about August?

WHEELER: Well, as I recall it, the first action to you might say review our capabilities really to ascertain what we could and could not do took place in August. It started like this: Secretary McNamara met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- I believe in a special session, not one of the regular Monday afternoon meetings but a special meeting -- and in the discussion of the events in the Berlin area, began to ask what we could do to give a signal to the Soviets that we were not prepared to sit still for this kind of thing. As a result of this, he asked for the services and the Joint Staff to survey our capabilities worldwide throughout the military services. And I might add we came up with some deplorable findings. For example, in the Army really a very small capability to carry out our reinforcing role for NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. At that time, although the Army had fourteen divisions on the books, three of those were training divisions and they were not combat ready. They had, oh, probably anywhere between four thousand five hundred and six thousand trained men within their tables of organization, within their structure. The remainder of the troops going up to as high as fifteen thousand. I mean by that the difference between the four to six thousand and the regular TO [Table of Organization] of a division of around fifteen thousand was made up of trainees in various states of training. Not only that, it was very apparent there was an imbalance in stockages. For

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example, the ammunition dollar-wise was ample, however in certain categories of ammunition there were shortages which of course could not be made up because of the different calibers involved. The Air Force and the Navy were both short conventional ordnance, particularly general purpose bombs and things to that kind. The Air Force was even short, and I think this did apply to the Navy as I recall it, but the Air Force was short of the pylons that you use to hang conventional ordinances on fighter bombers. In other words we were not ready for anything sizable of a non-nuclear nature.

As a result of this all services began working to come up to a satisfactory level of combat readiness and capability for limited war. The Army, for example, got the increase in troop strength to fill out the three training divisions. In addition, they got authority to reactivate two additional divisions bringing them up to sixteen and also in order to give us a satisfactory strategic reserve within the United States, the President authorized the call-up of two National Guard divisions, put them in training with the idea that they would be released from active duty, unless they needed to be employed overseas, at the time that the two additional active Army divisions became combat ready which would take somewhere between nine months and a year. In addition to that we shipped to Europe, as you know,

about forty thousand fillers to fill up the Seventh Army TO, table of organization. We also shipped certain additional units such as the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment in order to give General Norstad [Lauris Norstad] an increased surveillance capability and combat capability. This, by the way, was at the direct request of General Norstad. We also shipped over equipment and put it in storage for two divisions, one armored and one infantry division.

CLIFTON: Now this all started in August and September and October.

WHEELER: That's right. Of course it took several months to complete all of these actions. As I recall it, the last of the personnel and units arrived in Europe just prior to Christmas in 1961.

CLIFTON: And so if we started in August it took us five months to finally close up the forty thousand and the extra units.

WHEELER: And to get essentially not all, but an essential part of the pre-stocked equipment, increases in combat consumables and so on.

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CLIFTON: Now the Air Force sent some units too I recall.

WHEELER: This is correct. They sent over a number of National Guard units, fighter bomber units mostly, which stayed in Europe for about a year, as did most of the Army units. They stayed there a year, year and a half before they were finally released. Of course there were many procurement actions that went along at the same time in step with this build-up in strength.

CLIFTON: Well ammunition lines were opened up.

WHEELER: Ammunition lines were opened up, and if I remember correctly there was an increase production of tanks authorized, certainly there was an opening up of lines on bombs, pylons, things of that kind.

CLIFTON: Communications equipment that we'd been buying one or two of, we now were going to buy in quantity.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: What was the reaction, as I recall President Kennedy was alarmed, you might say, to find that if he wanted to send something to Europe he had the Hundred and First Airborne Division and the Eighty-second and that was about all that would be available. And he had a choice that if he sent those he'd have no strategic reserve. Is this right?

WHEELER: He would have had one additional division as I remember it. The three training divisions, as I recall it, were the Second Armored Division at Fort Hood, the First Infantry Division at Fort Riley and the...

CLIFTON: Was it the Second at Benning?

WHEELER: I think the Second Division which was at Fort Benning. But in addition to that you did have one other division. You had the Fourth Division out at Fort Lewis, Washington, which was reasonably ready to go, it was not in bad shape and it was carried as a combat ready unit at that time.

CLIFTON: And it was at that time classified as, generally speaking, the reserve for Alaska or the Far East, if we had to send a division out there.

WHEELER: This is correct. Earmarked really for Alaska or the Pacific.

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CLIFTON: Now one other thing that was revealed at the moment, as I recall, was the shortage of transportation to get these people there if we had had them. Do you recall whether the decision to beef up our air mobility capability was made then, or later or earlier?

WHEELER: I think this was part and parcel of the whole thing because, you recall I said a moment ago about the pre-stockage of the equipment -- to division set, and in fact it ended up two divisions sets plus the equipment for ten smaller combat and combat support units, artillery, signals, engineers and what not -- the joint staff in conjunction with the services then began to take a look at the airlift that would be available to move the troops of the two divisions and these other units quickly to Europe. I believe that it became apparent to the Administration that our airlift capability simply was not sufficient. So this was not necessarily the genesis of the increase in airlift, but certainly it added a lot of steam behind the effort and from that time on out, as a matter of fact, Mr. Kennedy habitually kept increasing the airlift by, even above the recommendations made by Secretary McNamara.

I recall that in the conference at Palm Beach on the budget in Christmas of 1962 -- this is when President met with the chiefs and with the SecDef and with the deputy SecDef, Mr. McNamara and Mr. Gilpatric -- I think you were present -- after we got through talking about the various aspects of the budget, the President got into what we were buying in the way of airlift and he told Mr. McNamara that he wanted more bought than the Secretary had provided for in the budget.

CLIFTON: I recall he was still not satisfied a year, well this would be a year and a half after. As I recall that first Berlin episode that shook us up a bit was on

a Sunday, I think August the 13th as I recall -- it sticks in mind that way -- because it had happened the night before I guess or early that morning and one of the questions raised at the time was did we have any warning of this, were we taken by surprise, why were we not able to do anything about it? Do you recall any exercise we went through around here on, you might say looking back to see if we had known this could happen to us.

WHEELER: I don't recall anything particular. I think everybody was sort of shook up. I think I recall coming in -- in fact I do recall coming into the Pentagon that day in order to confer with the staff as to what we might do and get the lowdown on what had occurred. Of course everybody's always dissatisfied with the intelligence that you get as to actions by the enemy. You

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never feel that you get prior warning. The fact of the matter is and I think it became clear to everybody that we were really out on a limb insofar as Berlin is concerned. The city sits, I think, at ninety miles inside the East German border. The city sits, I think, at ninety miles inside the East German border. You have one railroad, one road that leads into Berlin and they are at the mercy of the Soviets, those communications. You have a number of bridges that you have to cross on the autobahn and any one of those can be broken or blocked at any time. I think that it became clear to all of us, if it hadn't been clear before, and I'm sure it had been clear to many before, that we had to be prepared to react to Soviet pressures, although not necessarily in the corridors themselves.

Now as a concomitant to all of this, a tremendous amount of planning activity started. I mentioned General Gray a while ago. He was put full time on working with the tripartite group which was established here in Washington. There were a group of ambassadors -- UK [United Kingdom], France, with United States representation. Underneath them was a working group composed of people from DOD, ISA in particular, General Gray from the Joint Staff was our personal representative, I should say -- people from State, people from CIA.

CLIFTON: As I recall the Soviets would from time to time try to get the focus of this discussion or this confrontation away from Berlin. They didn't want to acknowledge that their Berlin commander had any -- the Soviet Berlin commander had any further authority. And they would attempt to get it down to Heidelberg vis-à-vis the commander in USAREUR [U.S. Army Europe] and ignore the Berlin commander. And as I recall also they would try to focus it some place else and the Bonn group was so that we could have a three-nation -- actually a four-nation when you think of the West Germans -- response to things that they did in Germany. Is that about....

WHEELER: That's about the way it was, yes. This was an effort to make sure that activities were coordinated on the ground and also that proposed actions

here could be checked in advance in country to see how they would float in the European scene rather than...

CLIFTON: Doing it back here.

WHEELER: ... doing it back here.

CLIFTON: Well this seemed to work pretty well on at least the diplomatic confrontation, but there were two things

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that I recall that he wanted that were considered. One was actually a battle group or division probe down the autobahn and the other was the possibility of reviving the airlift of 1947 and '8. I recall that President Kennedy was always surprised and always annoyed that we took so long to do something. He liked to pick up the telephone and he thought that two hours later they ought to be up there.

WHEELER: That's right. That's right.

CLIFTON: He finally got the idea of what the time and space factors were. We actually backed up one of our confrontations by moving a battle group up there didn't we, one morning?

WHEELER: This is correct. The Seventh Army actually moved a battle group up into position opposite the Helmstead corridor. I recall that General Clarke [Bruce C. Clarke] who was CGUSEUR [Commanding General U.S. Forces Europe] at the time went there himself, and early in the morning we started this battle group by increment down the autobahn. Nothing happened. In other words, the Soviets just let them go on through. I think there was some argument about head counts and vehicle counts and things like that, but essentially they backed off and just let the battle group move in. And then, of course, this pattern was continued thereafter. And this was really the start of the so-called Long Thrust exercises whereby we reinforced from the United States Europe with an additional battle group so that they would still have their forces in position for their emergency defense plan and would have still an additional unit that they could use to reinforce Berlin, move back and forth down the autobahn.

CLIFTON: And we put an extra battle group in Berlin did we not...

WHEELER: That's correct.

CLIFTON: ... that we rotated from time to time...

WHEELER: Rotated from time to time.

CLIFTON: ... around the European theatre.

WHEELER: Every couple of months it would move out and another one would move in.

CLIFTON: And why did we not, or did we not, think that an airlift was feasible?

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WHEELER: Oh. Well when we took a look at the requirements for aircraft and the ease with which an airlift could be disrupted, it just didn't seem to be a very profitable exercise. The Joint Chiefs of Staff felt that we were really putting too much into it and not only that, in effect, if we instituted an airlift we were sort of acceding to the blockage of ground access. In other words, it didn't seem to fit in with our objective to say, okay, if you block the roads we'll go to the air, a very expensive proposition.

CLIFTON: By which they would still be controlling the ground and as I recall they were letting the East Germans control the ground and this is another thing that we...

WHEELER: That's right. This was the unacceptable thing, was the fact that the East Germans would be blocking the access and we would be acceding to this.

CLIFTON: Also, there's one other thing I think that came into the consideration. The first airlift there were not supplies in Berlin and the people would have starved and they would have froze that year...

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: ... so we hauled food and coal by air. In this case the people of Berlin -- at least West Berlin -- there were at least six months stockage of food and coal.

WHEELER: We checked that out, Ted, and while the stockages were unbalanced as you would expect, we figure they could get along for at least six months with what was stored there. This would be coal, fuel oil and food. So that there was no danger of them being starved out, you might say, within a very short period of time. No, I recall the first airlift. I happened to be in Europe at the time. I was the G-3 of the constabulary there. And the fact of the matter is that Berlin, this was 1948, was in very dire straits. They were living on a shoestring. They had enough coal for a few days. They had enough food for a few days and food was not very plentiful in those days on the German economy, as you probably recall. So that it was a matter of dire necessity to institute that airlift. But you'll also recall that in order to support that airlift the United States Air Force

and Navy had to call in aircraft from all over the world and even more importantly they had to call in maintenance people from all over the world so that our world-wide airlift capability went down to a dangerously low level in order to

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support the Berlin airlift -- a very expensive operation and a very well-run operation.

[BEGIN TAPE VII]

CLIFTON: Well I think out of this Berlin crisis there is a reinforcement of President Kennedy's determination to have more airlift. Even though it was voted against and found not necessary, he found a lot of reasons for more airlift when we were a leading aviation country.

WHEELER: This is true. Not only was he looking at it I think in connection with Berlin, I think he was looking at increased airlift as a necessity in the air age for movement of troops elsewhere, I'm speaking now of the Far East in particular.

CLIFTON: And the Middle East too .

WHEELER: And the Middle East.

CLIFTON: From the Joint Chiefs of Staff point of view then, did they get in on, did they concur with this action that he took or did they recommend it or was this sort of drawn out of the Chiefs or were the Chiefs seizing an opportunity to put forth ideas they had held for some time.

WHEELER: Relative to the increase of forces and so on?

CLIFTON: Increase of forces.

WHEELER: No question but what the Army in particular -- now of course I was director of the Joint Staff so I was not in a position to have anything to do with the policy of the Army -- the Army in particular seized this opportunity to carry out some long-cherished plans of filling up the units they then had and increasing their forces by two divisions. I recall General Decker [George H. Decker] being very pleased at this opportunity and he certainly took advantage of it to the degree that he could.

I think that the Navy also was quite enthusiastic about this because it gave them an opportunity to increase their capabilities. The Air Force somewhat less enthusiastic, as I recall it, although by no means negative. I think that when they started to take a look at their

capability for conventional action they were somewhat appalled at the situation they found. The fact that their stockage of conventional

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munitions, for example, for example, not only was low but completely out of balance. They were worse off than the Army and the Navy. They were the worst off of the services.

The marines, of course, did have the opportunity to increase their strength a little bit and I think they were pleased at this opportunity and took advantage of it. And they too, of course, were able to increase their combat consumables at the same time.

CLIFTON: The Air Force of course with having to give up a long cherished idea that if things got tough we make one gesture and then go to nuclear war.

WHEELER: That's right. This was really contrary to....

CLIFTON: A fight they'd won for the last seven or eight years and so it would be hard for them to fact a change of emphasis.

WHEELER: That's right, although once they got the swing of it, they went after it hammer and tongs. I might add that I believe that even at that time there was beginning to be within the Air Force circles a recognition that a new era had arrived and they were beginning to think more in terms of TAC [Tactical Air Command] air and conventional TAC air than SAC [Strategic Air Command] nuclear capability.

CLIFTON: The reason this is of significance...

WHEELER: They started to raise the capabilities. What I'm really saying Ted is this many people in the Air Force were perfectly willing to accept the logic of increasing the capabilities of TAC and the capabilities of a conventional use of air power, rather than the emphasis that had been given solely, you might say, to SAC nuclear capabilities.

CLIFTON: In other words, they welcomed the chance to have a flexible choice.

WHEELER: Many people. Now there were some, of course, that adhered to the old concepts.

CLIFTON: The reason I emphasize this is this took place in September, October, November of 1961 and so October 1962 when we again faced the Cuban crisis, we did have a conventional capability.

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WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: And we had a balance of iron bombs and we had a balance of munitions throughout the forces.

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: So Berlin, you might say, made the confrontation over Cuba possible in October 1962.

WHEELER: It certainly improved our capabilities and, of course, as you know, I was Chief of Staff of the Army in October '62. I found it possible from the strategic reserve within the United States to prepare five and one-half divisions for the invasion of Cuba. The Air Force and the Navy were prepared to conduct, I would say, a very sizable air campaign against Cuba using conventional weapons. And they would have still had plenty of stockages left. The one thing that came out of the Cuban affair was again a shortage of airlift. You recall it was necessary to call up nineteen squadrons of Air Force National Guard units, reserve units, in order to provide the airlift capability for the air assault echelon going into Cuba.

Now, this is not intrinsically bad, however the aircraft which these gentlemen were equipped was the old C-118 flying boxcars -- a two-motored aircraft which no one really likes to use for overwater transportation. The Air Force and the Navy, I think quite properly, want to have a four engine job for over-water flights. Now of course, Cuba being only ninety miles away it wasn't as bad as it might seem. However, another limitation were the short legs of many of the older aircraft in the airlift inventory -- the C-118's, the C-123's and so on. And this meant that these aircraft had to be moved into staging fields and then refueled and gotten ready for the actual assault on Cuba. It denied a certain flexibility which we would have liked to have.

CLIFTON: They actually couldn't fly troops from Fort Lewis all the way to Cuba. They had to fly in two jumps off somewhere closer and this means you're closer to where the enemy can watch you.

WHEELER: Not only that, it made a very complicated outloading problem because you had to move troops, let them sit, let the aircraft sit, and it made a very complicated movement plan. It took literally days to work out the air loading

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and the air movement plans for that particular operation. I recall that we made some minor changes -- when I say minor, they were sizable, but even so they were still along the same policy, the same planning avenue we'd been following. General Howze [Hamilton H.

Howze], then commanding the Eighteenth Airborne Corps and his staff and the air people from TAC and MATS [Military Air Transport Service], as I recalled it, worked around the clock for something like seven days in order to correct the loading tables. Terrific job, really terrific.

CLIFTON: Well those were two different things, two different Octobers, weren't they?

WHEELER: That's right. However I still think that this meeting that I mentioned before in December of '62 at Palm Beach when we were discussing the budget, I think that this airlift shortage was still sticking in the President Kennedy's mind and this was the reason he told Mr. McNamara to increase the buy of C-130 aircraft.

CLIFTON: He never was really quite satisfied...

WHEELER: He added a number of millions of dollars to the budget right then and there just at the snap of a finger, you might say, in order to get this increase.

CLIFTON: I think we ought to put two footnotes in here. One is that as his own participation after he had gone through July, August and September of 1961, he wanted to then see some of these things and as you recall he directed us to start a series of demonstrations. One Army, and then he said he'd go see the Navy and then he'd go and see the Air Force. And we did our little bit -- the Army part -- down at Fort Bragg.

WHEELER: I was present. That was in October of 1961.

CLIFTON: And each day he'd added something to the list of things he wanted to see. He wanted to see a full division, that was one thing, because he'd been dealing in full division probes and he wanted to see what it looked like and it's material. The second thing he wanted to see a battle group like the one... [Interruption]

WHEELER: As a sort of summary of the effect of the military build-up and the actions taken in July, August, September, October and November of 1961, I feel that the increases in personnel in the armed forces, the accelerated procurement of material and combat consumables and the deployment of

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certain air and ground force units to Europe had a salutary effect both in the United States and in Europe. To speak first of the impact here in the United States, I believe that these actions gave our military a justified feeling of confidence that they could better perform their part in case of a shooting emergency. The call up of reserves indicated very clearly, in the United States, the intent of the Administration to face up to Soviet aggression in Europe. And

generally speaking -- I'm speaking now more of the procurement of material and combat consumables -- we had a greater conventional capability and everyone, military at least, understood this. In Europe there was a definite feeling among the American military, and I believe the military of the entire alliance, that the increases in people and in units which they saw coming into the NATO area, signaled the intent of the Administration to stand firm against Soviet aggression in the Berlin area, and moreover, the increases in American military strength gave our American military people a greater confidence in their ability to carry out their missions in the face of Soviet aggression.

Early in the following year when I went to Europe myself as the deputy United States Commander-In-Chief, I had the opportunity to see the units and the people that we had sent to Europe on the ground performing their missions. It was very obvious that they had added a needed increment of strength, both in the combat area and in the combat support area. Moreover, in talking to various allied military and civilian officials, I found that they regarded the American actions of the preceding months as being a most salutary action in signaling to the Soviets the determination of the United States to stand fast in the face of any Soviet aggressions. In other words, what I'm saying is that this military action on our part had a quieting influence within the alliance that alleviated certain fears of what might be the outcome of further Soviet aggression in the Berlin area. I think maybe that about covers that aspect of what we've already talked about.

CLIFTON: In this conversation we have emphasized the increase in our conventional or limited war capability. What was done about our strategic nuclear capability during this same year?

WHEELER: As I recall it there was no increase per se in our strategic nuclear capability because none was needed. We have been for years, as you know, giving emphasis to an adequate strategic nuclear capability. It's quite true, however, that at this time we began to increase the number of B-52 bombers on ground alert and, as I recall it, there was an increase in the airborne

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alert which goes on as you know all the time anyway. I would say that this too was a signal to the Soviets of our determination because they always know when we increase our readiness in any area. They can get this by electronic means as well as by visual observation on the ground.

CLIFTON: In the nuclear field this was about the time that missiles began to phase in along with the aircraft we had ready.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: I believe this was recommended to the President by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and through the Secretary of Defense. Did this cause any problems in

the Joint Chiefs?

WHEELER: Not that I recall. There was a matter of money involved in the increased airborne alert because this wears out spare parts, it requires more operating or flying hours, but the Chiefs were quite unanimous as I recall it in their recommendations in the area.

CLIFTON: We emphasized in the discussion the European aspects of this mainly because of the Berlin situation, what was going on on the military side of the picture, as far as our efforts in Southeast Asia and the Pacific?

WHEELER: Things were quite quiet in Southeast Asia at that time with the exception of the Laotian situation wherein the government was already beginning to think in terms of some negotiated settlement in Laos. The situation in South Vietnam was not hot at that time. There was some activity of the Vietcong but not of a high level. This came somewhat later.

CLIFTON: When you left then for the command in Europe, the Southeast Asia thing, we are just pretty much settled a Laotian agreement of some kind -- we were working toward it -- and Vietnam hadn't heated up.

WHEELER: This is correct. Vietnam started heating up in '62.

CLIFTON: When you came back on October 1, 1962 as chief of staff of the Army, you found Southeast Asia pretty warm.

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WHEELER: It was getting warmer all the time and you will recall that we had sent General Harkins [Paul D. Harkins] out there and it was at that time that we began to increase the numbers of people, the amount of material and the degree of support that we were giving to South Vietnam in a rather massive way in order to overcome the actions of the Vietcong.

CLIFTON: In November and December 1961, before the JCS met with the President in Palm Beach in December, the budget considerations were right high up on the priority list here in the joint staff, in the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Was there any difference in that cycle that you recall in that period than there had been in previous years, in budget work?

WHEELER: Do you mean '61 or '62 now?

CLIFTON: Sixty-one when you were Director of the Joint Staff.

WHEELER: As I recall it General Lemnitzer had traveled up to Hyannis Port on a couple of occasions during the fall months to confer with the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Budget and others on the financial aspects of the military programs. It seemed to me that there was a greater involvement of the military in talking to the President directly about the budget than there'd ever been before in my experience. As I recall it, prior to Mr. Kennedy becoming President, there had of course been discussions with the President, I don't mean to infer that there had not been, but not to the same degree that there was in the Kennedy Administration.

CLIFTON: Well I know President Kennedy felt that when he closed that budget, which was presented to the Congress in January of '62, that the military had been carefully heard both by the Secretary of Defense and by himself and your statement bears that out.

Before we switch over to your job as Chief of Staff of the Army, would you like to discuss anything about the.... Did you have a meeting with President Kennedy or discuss this appointment to EUCOM [European Command]?

WHEELER: Yes, what actually happened was that General Norstad was back here in the late fall of 1961 on other matters and I recall that it was necessary for Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, General Norstad, Major General Fred Dean,

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the J-3 [Director for Operations] of the Joint Staff at that time, and myself to meet with President Kennedy in the upstairs living room in order to go over certain strategic nuclear planning factors in which SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe]/CINCEUR had a very direct interest. When we left this meeting, which as I recall was in early November of '61, Mr. Gilpatric stayed behind. I should add that General Lemnitzer, then the chairman of the JCS was present on this occasion. As I recall it, McGeorge Bundy and Carl Kaysen of the White House staff sat in on this. But anyway, when the meeting broke up, Mr. Gilpatric stayed behind. When Mr. Gilpatric returned to the Pentagon later that afternoon he called me on the telephone and told me that President Kennedy had approved my appointment as the Deputy Commander-in-Chief Europe, in other words to be General Norstad's American deputy.

Then, of course, prior to my departure for Europe, which occurred in late February of 1962, I went over and called on the President. I called on General Taylor. As regards President Kennedy, this was purely to pay my respects. He was very friendly, as he always was, and really said nothing of any great import at that time. I think he wished me a pleasant tour and, in effect, sort of congratulated me on having received a very fine appointment.

CLIFTON: Well I know that he thought very highly of you and, as you recall, was already thinking of the time when he would be having a new chief of staff

for the Army and was looking toward you coming back here to that. But I don't think you knew that your tour was going to be as short as it was.

WHEELER: No, as a matter of fact, Mr. Kennedy didn't even mention this to me as a possibility when I called on him on this occasion. He, as I say, merely wished me a happy tour on the other end and gave no indications as to what his thoughts were for the future.

CLIFTON: In the six months or seven months that you were deputy-CINCEUR/SACEUR over there, the American commander really in Europe, could you give me a summary of your reaction to the U.S. military policies in that period?

WHEELER: The place where our policies, you might say, had the most impact were in the area of the political control exerted within military areas. And the best illustration of this, I think, came in two ways. One, as you will recall, we were having trouble in the air corridors during the spring and summer

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months of 1962. Very shortly after I took over my post as deputy US CINCEUR I recall General Norstad calling me one Sunday morning. This was probably in late March or early April of 1962 and asking me to come to his quarters -- Villa St. Pierre -- to talk over some problems. When I arrived I found two or three other individuals assembled and we then talked about the latest Russian activities in the corridors, the best way to respond to these. In other words this was a sort of a skull session, you might say, with General Norstad who was extremely sensitive to the political aspects of these problems.

You will recall that here in the United States -- we discussed this earlier -- we had an ambassadorial group comprised of the ambassadors of the same countries and working under this ambassadorial group in the United States, a working group comprised of individuals drawn from State, Defense, the Joint Staff, and I think CIA, with German observers again, who considered the problems of how to respond to Soviet aggression in the Berlin area: whether on the ground or in the air or other ways, economic and political as well as military.

Also, in Bonn you had another ambassadorial group. These were the ambassadors to West Germany. And our ambassador, the British ambassador and the French ambassador in Bonn, being in close contact with the German government were able to express to the German government that we proposed to do in any particular area, draw up rules of engagement, and so on. Well anyway, this very complicated political-military machinery as far as action went.... Now this resulted in me being called into consultation with General Norstad, I would say five or six times a week to deal with the problems of the air corridors leading to Berlin. Every time the Soviets, for example, dropped chaff in the corridors why this was an occasion for us to get together and decide what we would do. If they buzzed an aircraft, we had to decide how many aircraft we were going to send in, what altitude, what

the tactics would be, all the rest of it. It was a very interesting exercise, particularly when you realize that all of this then was reported to Washington, checked in Washington and with the other governments, and then the political influence or the political guidance came right back out again. This was one way in which we found a difference.

Another way in which we had an impact in Europe, and one I might add which General Norstad took great exception to, we started to have a number -- in fact when I saw started I'm using the wrong verb; it had been going on before I got there. But a number of individuals, some of whom had no governmental status, began coming over to Europe and these gentlemen would go around the various capitals of Europe and we would suddenly find that one of them had been up in Bonn talking to the then chancellor or to the Minister of Defense and enunciating various governmental policies. General Norstad had a term for

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the whole group that was rather interesting and I recognize has been picked up here in the United States during the political campaign. He called them the carpet-baggers. One of the problems posed for General Norstad by this was that most of these gentleman were engaged in talking about matters connected with nuclear weapons: their storage and use in Europe, the problems of command and control. And the confusion arose because since these men were either of no governmental status at all or of very low governmental status as the Europeans looked at it -- they were not men at the policy making level -- they wondered whether they really spoke for the United State government. I know Norstad told me on several occasions that he would get telephone calls or the military representatives at SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe] of various governments would call upon him and say. Now the following conversation took place between so and so and my minister of defense and my Minister of Defense wants to know if this is really the policy of the United States because he doesn't recognize this guy as having a policy-making job, and Norstad, as the said, would then have to put the fire out again.

These things indicated to me, and there were other actions too, the very deep interest of the Administration in dealing with military problems as regards the alliance, the fact that the Administration intended and did keep military operations under close review and close control. And as I saw it conditioned me, at least, for the very close control that was maintained during the Cuban affair.

CLIFTON: This was a relatively new development as far as your experience had been in military matters is that correct?

WHEELER: Very much so. I served in Europe during both the Administrations of President Truman [Harry S. Truman] and President Eisenhower. I would say that both of them followed the practice of...

[BEGIN TAPE IX]

establishing a policy relationship with the senior commander and then within that policy the commander was left absolutely alone or relatively alone. This was not the case under the Kennedy Administration. There was a far more direct influence exerted or attempted than I had ever seen before.

CLIFTON: In this political management or supervision of the so-called military, did you feel a stronger hand or a stronger relationship, you might say, with the State Department in your affairs?

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WHEELER: Yes. It seemed to me that State was exerting a stronger influence and in fact to the point where speaking very frankly, sometimes they were getting out of their sphere of activity and into the purely military realm. I'm not saying that this is good or bad. I don't really know. In some instances I think it was good, in a number of instances I think it was bad, particularly when State or State representatives or people who were not their representatives but under their aegis in traveling to Europe, were enunciating what should have been a strategic or military policy. I believe that this is probably one of the things that led to General Norstad's retirement. He understandably took a dim view of this. He's a very outspoken individual, as you know, and I think that over the long term this caused a sort of an abrasive interface between himself and others which was not very comfortable for either.

CLIFTON: In your tour in Europe, did you have any contact or any visits from General Taylor who at that time had been brought in or earlier had been brought in as the special military representative of the President?

WHEELER: I personally did not see General Taylor during my tenure in Europe. I don't recall whether he traveled there at that time or not. I don't think he did. His position being what it was, he stayed pretty close to home here in Washington. We did, of course, have a visit from President Kennedy during that time. As I recall it, he came over I believe in June, was it not, of 1962.

CLIFTON: No, I think that was 1963 we all went with him. YOU were there on a trip weren't you?

WHEELER: That's right. That's right.

CLIFTON: You were a participant in that trip...

WHEELER: Well I was over on a separate mission but I had gone on and I happened to be in Germany at the time that he planned to come there and I came and joined his party. You're quite right.

CLIFTON: In June of '63, as I recall, he made a point of asking you to come to Bonn and participate all the way through Germany and also he asked General Lemmitzer, who was then SACEUR, to come up. Wasn't that correct?

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WHEELER: That's correct. I don't know why....

CLIFTON: The Junes get mixed up.

WHEELER: The Junes got mixed upon that particular one.

[BEGIN TAPE X]

CLIFTON: On October 1, 1962, then General Wheeler, you were sworn in as Chief of Staff of the Army and you were back here in Washington as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And, of course, that was the beginning of the second Cuban crisis which was already well under way. I believe you had been back here before swearing in for a week or two.

WHEELER: I came back in August, and as I recall it I was in Washington about four days to attend a hearing by the Senate Armed Services Committee of my qualifications to be Chief of Staff of the Army -- and incidentally, General Taylor appeared the saem day that I did. Also at that time, I not only paid my respects on General Taylor, but he and I together called on the President. This, however, was a fifteen or twenty minute interview, purely, I think, to let me have the opportunity to thank the President for the appointment and there was no business transacted.

Really, the affair in which I became rather closely involved with President Kennedy started not with the Cuban Crisis but with the integration of a Negro student into the University of Mississippi. And this affair started on the night of September 30, morning of October 1, before I had been sworn in as Chief of Staff of the Army. The circumstances of this were rather interesting. During the week preceding my taking over as Chief of Staff of the Army, I had been endeavoring, of course, to get caught up on various Army programs, Army problems, et cetera. And my predecessor General Decker [George H. Decker] called me in one day and said that this problem of putting this Negro student, Meredith [James H. Meredith], into "Ole Miss" was upon us, that the Attorney General had asked us to be prepared to support the operation militarily. When I say militarily, I mean both logistically and with troops if needed. The logistic support was to provide the marshals who were actually going to be present when Mr. Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] took Meredith in for registration and then, as I say, to back up the marshals if they got into trouble. General Decker said to me that since he would be going out of office on October 1st that he felt that I should become well acquainted

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with the operation and in effect monitor it or act for him in planning discussions with Justice or within the Defense Department.

Well, on Sunday afternoon, the thirtieth of September, things began to heat up in Mississippi. We had had no advance warning, as I recall it, that Justice really intended to put Meredith in on Monday the first of October, or perhaps I should say prior to Monday the first of October, but they did. At first when they moved him on to the campus on Sunday the thirtieth of September, everything was quiet. I was kept apprised by the Army war room that things were going well, there were no problems, and so on. I was out to dinner at a friend's house, received a final call about ten, ten-thirty that all was well, and I went back to the BOQ [Bachelor Officers' Quarters] at Fort Myer and went to bed. About twelve o'clock the phone rang; it was the war room again. They said that things were a little troublesome. They said that there was a mob forming, that the decision had been made to get ready to move some troops in, in accordance with plan, and so on. But still no reason for me to come in. However, about two o'clock, I received a phone call from Secretary Vance [Cyrus R. Vance] and he said that all hell had broken loose and asked me to join him in the war room and this I did.

And I found that things were in a pretty mess; we were really having a hell of a time. The President and the Attorney General were on the phone practically constantly because the marshals were being attacked by the mob. They were running low on tear gas. They were wondering where the troops were. The troops, as a matter of fact, had been at the Memphis Naval Air Station, and there was a problem of just getting them there. There was time and space. No one knew the routes. Attempting to move these people by helicopter after dark just plain took time. There had been instructions issued to change the armament of the troops. Initially they had been directed to use only MP [military police] equipment -- billy clubs, tear gas -- and this was with good reason and I think justifiably changed at the last moment and the troops took their usual weapons: rifles, bayonets, et cetera.

At any rate, this was a very tumultuous night and I recall leaving the war room on the morning of October 1st about nine o'clock, going back to the BOQ at Fort Myer, bathing, shaving and putting on a uniform, and coming back to be sworn in as Chief of Staff of the Army at 10:00 a.m. on October 1st. I may not be the best Chief of Staff that was ever sworn in, but I was the sleepest. There's no question of that.

Anyway, this resulted in a series of meetings with President Kennedy because he was dissatisfied with the way the plans had operated,

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and there was some question as to the responsiveness of our forces in handling this situation. I recall seeing him several times as to various aspects of this; these were usually short meetings, half an hour at the most. Usually Secretary Vance and I would go over and talk to him about this, that, and the other thing to satisfy his mind that things were going well. Then you will recall there was a rather extended period of keeping Army troops on campus in order to prevent any further disorders. This went on for months, literally for months.

Then, of course, in the latter part of October, in the latter weeks of October, the Cuban crisis erupted. Again, there were several meetings with President Kennedy in which I

participated with the other members of the JCS, having to do with our plans for taking care of Cuba militarily if we had to; matters discussing policy toward Cuba -- what would we do, how would we do it, and so on. During the early days of the crisis, the chairman, General Taylor, attending daily -- in fact, twice daily -- meetings at which he was the rep of the Chiefs. These meetings were attended by the Secretary of Defense, Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk], the Attorney General, and a couple of advisors at somewhat lower level. It was through this medium that we were kept aware of the various exchanges of notes with Chairman Khrushchev, the governmental reaction, and so on.

I've forgotten the date, but when the President finally made up his mind as to the course of action he was going to pursue having to do with the quarantine and so on, the Chiefs went over as a body and met with him. And we expressed our views as to the proper courses of action. The President gave us his reasoning, his motivations for the actions which he proposed to take; and thereafter, we just went to work to take them. We instituted a sizable military buildup of air, naval and ground forces; we got ourselves prepared ourselves to intervene militarily if we had to; we moved the troops into position; we marshaled a part of the shipping; we marshaled the aircraft which would have dropped two divisions in Cuba.

And then, after all of the plans were developed, I recall President Kennedy asking me to come over one day to talk to him about the Army participation in a possible invasion of Cuba. It so happened that General Howze was available; he was going to be the overall commander under CINCLANT [Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic] for this operation. And I took Howze with me so that he would be able to answer any detailed questions, so that the President could meet him, see who the man was that was going to command the force and so on. At that time, President Kennedy -- after I went over the troop list explaining from maps exactly the concept of how we were going to do it, the troop units involved -- said that he was concerned that we might be

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trying to do this with too few people. He placed this on the basis, one, we had to have a quick decision because of political pressures that would inevitably arise and, secondly, he was afraid that if we went in with too little that this would increase American casualties because the Cubans would be able to fight that much longer. In other words, he talked of putting enough in to overwhelm the Cubans. As a result of this, I came back and revised the Army plan and the increased the strength by about one additional division. So that in the final plan, we had ready to go on the Army side about five and a half divisions from the strategic reserve in the United States. This included one armored division that was actually sitting at Fort Stewart, Georgia, ready to load. And they stayed there as you know for a couple of months. We only sent them home to Fort Hood, Texas, just before Christmas of that year.

As I say, there were a series of meetings that went on. For example, I happen to have here a talking paper which was prepared for General Taylor for a meeting with the President on the sixteenth of November 1962. It makes rather interesting historical reading as a matter of fact because General Taylor ended up, and this was said in the presence of all the Chiefs: "In summary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended at this juncture (a) that the IL-28s be removed from Cuba, preferably by negotiation -- otherwise, by blockade followed, if need

be, by military action, (b) that the removal of Soviet personnel from Cuba be made an immediate objective of negotiations with the USSR, (c) that any assurance to Castro [Fidel Castro] be hedged by conditions protecting our obligations under the Rio Pact and linking the duration of the assurance to good behavior by Castro and the acceptance of air surveillance, (d) that in seeking a means of long-term verification and inspection which we consider to be essential, we oppose the proposals for a reciprocal UN inspection of the Caribbean and for a nuclear-free zone in Latin America." The reason I say that this is interesting historically is that reading it brings back some of the proposals that were being made around Washington as to what we would and would not accept -- in fact being made outside of Washington -- about nuclear-free zones, inspection, whether it was needed, how it would be done, and so on. I note that Brazil had suggested the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in Latin America.

This period of the Cuban affair, as I mentioned at the very end of our last session, I think marked a turning point in President Kennedy's attitude toward the military. You will recall that in early December, the President decided that he wanted to see what had been done as regards military preparations to handle the Cuban matter. And the Chiefs accompanied him on a very quick trip which took him to Fort Stewart, Georgia, where he saw the First Armored Division and I

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think for the first time realized what a division was. Because, as you will recall Ted, the equipment stretched from miles. I don't believe he'd ever seen really what an armored division looked like, the tremendous fire power, the tremendous mass of the armored division. And you will recall it was there that for the first time that he quoted that couplet about the soldier in time of peace being neglected, et cetera, et cetera, which made a very fine impact I might add on the troops not only there but worldwide.

Later, as you will recall, we went down to Homestead Air Force Base where he saw something of the air preparations and the command and communications preparations that had been made to support the overall action. You'll also remember that we saw something of the logistic preparations, the thousands, literally thousands of tons of ammunition that had been moved in, the medical facilities that had been provided and so on. And then, of course, we went on down to Key West and saw what the Navy had been doing, the air defenses that had been set up and so forth.

I felt that after his experience in the Cuban crisis, after seeing the troops, the celerity with which they moved into position, the first-class shape that the troops were in, the obvious sharpness of the commanders, everything ready to the last detail -- planning and otherwise -- that President Kennedy, perhaps for the first time, realized the tremendous asset, the very powerful tool that he had at his command in dealing with matters of foreign policy where military force was necessary. I also thought that I detected in later meetings with him perhaps a friendlier, a more appreciative attitude toward the military than ever before -- not that I mean to say that he had ever been disagreeable or curt or ungracious, but I believe that the Bay of Pigs business had, I don't like to use the term poisoned his mind against the military, but I think that he had some very grave doubts as to the role of the military and their

capability to carry out the things that he wanted done. I think that after the Cuban crisis, all of these doubts were dispelled or at least he recognized more clearly than ever before that the military were perhaps the one element that he could depend upon under any circumstance that might face this country.

CLIFTON: There were two things that became very clear to me, and I'm sure you sensed them too, subsequent to this inspection and seeing what the military had done. One was that he asked a lot of men down there if they were personally ready to go, and their response was very business-like. There was no hip hip hooray about their attitude, but he had a reassurance from corporals, sergeants, colonels, and on up that they knew that this was a very dangerous and business-like matter, but they were perfectly

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ready to go and do it if he as the Commander-in-Chief ordered it. Another thing -- and he did get this from that trip, there's no doubt in my mind -- there's another thing, I think his confidence had been shaken by the Bay of Pigs and he didn't know who was responsible for the you might say inappropriate measures of the Bay of Pigs. But having given the military rather short notice on this October '62 Cuban thing, it wasn't three or four months warning, you had probably two weeks, and the response...

WHEELER: Less than that, really.

CLIFTON: Less than that, really. You were thinking about it in ten days, but the actual end result was accomplished in a very short order. And he was impressed that given warning, given a hand to do what you wanted to do, and also feeling that we had provided the military with the things they needed in that past year, he certainly was a different Commander-in-Chief, I would say, from then on.

WHEELER: I think so. I feel that having come back from his meeting with Khrushchev in '61 rather a shaken man wondering where to turn and how to accomplish what he felt should be done, that the Cuban affair bolstered his confidence that he could deal with these very serious foreign policy matters from strength, and that he was not dealing from weakness, that he too had a lot of cards to play, that Khrushchev didn't have all the aces, that he had his fair share and perhaps more than Khrushchev. As a matter of fact he did have more than Khrushchev and I think he probably recognized this.

CLIFTON: The next meeting, I think, that we had as a formal meeting was again in December on the budget, the last wrap-up, after this visit down south, and I believe you attended that meeting.

WHEELER: Yes, this was in Palm Beach on, what was it? Twenty-seventh of

December I believe, 1962.

CLIFTON: Was this the meeting we took General Harkins to? I believe it was.

WHEELER: No, no. This was the year before that General Harkins had gone.

CLIFTON: Oh, General Harkins had gone out to Vietnam during '62.

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WHEELER: That's right. As I recall it, he arrived there in about February of '62.

CLIFTON: And so this meeting was just the budget discussion for the next year.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: And I believe he asked each member of the Joint Chiefs what their shortages were, what their feelings were, and you spoke for the Army at that time.

WHEELER: That's right. I recall telling President Kennedy that (a) I needed more men, (b) that I felt it imperative that we provide an anti-ballistic missile defense for this country. And you will recall that Mr. McNamara was there and Mr. Gilpatric as well as the Chiefs and that in effect I told him that I believed that the failure to provide the funds to start to deploy an anti-ballistic missile defense was a grave mistake. Because while we had divisions, we had nuclear bombers, we had missiles coming along, we had something in every other field of defense activity, the one thing that we had nothing of was anti-ballistic missile defense. This was the most serious gap or the most serious lack in our defense posture. I might add I was overruled by him as I had been overruled by Secretary McNamara earlier.

Now, I also told him that PEMA [Procurement of Equipment and Missiles, Army] funds, that is, the funds for the procurement of equipment and missiles for Army was most satisfactory. And then reverting to the manpower aspect of what I had said, and on which subject I had been overruled by Mr. McNamara, I told him that in all honesty I would have to admit to him that if I were given the choice between the very sizable sum for PEMA and more men, that I would take the PEMA funds and not the men. In other words, I place the equipment ahead of the men.

There was one additional interesting aspect of that meeting which I recall very well, and that is that in discussing the overall budget, President Kennedy asked Secretary McNamara about the airlift program. This was an area which General LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] had brought up as being what he considered an area which was not being adequately funded. And after some discussion, why President Kennedy directed the Secretary of Defense to add a sizable chunk of dollars to increase the airlift capability.

Now you will recall that he was always interested in, I would say, two things having to do with the military matters. First it was the

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airlift capability, and when I saw this I'm talking about strategic airlift -- the C-130, the C-141 area -- and the other was helicopters. He was continually sort of needling people: why don't we get more helicopters, why don't we have more airlift. And the other area in which he took a deep interest was the area of the special forces, the counterinsurgency aspect of special forces I suppose would be a more proper and more correct way to state it. He apparently had been very much impressed by Chairman Khrushchev's speech of January '61, in which Khrushchev, in effect, renounced nuclear war, considered that limited war could still be fought although with sizable danger of escalation into a general nuclear war, and then however said that wars of liberation -- what we call wars of subversion -- were a proper way in which to carry on the communist expansion, and the type of war which the Soviet Union could and would support. I believe that the helicopter special forces or counterinsurgency forces really were President Kennedy's partial reaction to his evaluation of this speech, and the increase in airlift capability, strategic airlift capability was another response from him or reaction of his to the Khrushchev speech.

[BEGIN TAPE XI]

CLIFTON: I think these were certainly his contributions as Commander-in-Chief to our readiness, or at least he spurred these on all the time...

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: ... and I think has a great bearing on our capabilities right today.

WHEELER: It does.

CLIFTON: In that year, 1963, you, of course, had a lot of problems and Vietnam warmed up considerably. The Army was in the forefront of this Vietnam business. As you'd pointed out later, he still kept his great interest in the Armed Forces on a personal basis including his visits to Germany in June and his other visits to the fleet units, to the Marine Corps recruit depot. Would you say then that -- how would you summarize, let's put it this way, that year, you as Chief of Staff of the Army, he as Commander-in-Chief in operations, in, you might say, funding, in interest, in research and development? Did he maintain this constant interest in affairs military as far as you could see?

WHEELER: Very much so. His interest was expressed in a number of ways. One, he was very much interested in our

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posture in NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. He was very much interested in our nuclear capabilities, both tactical and strategic, but more in the tactical area, I would say, than in the strategic area. Apparently in his own mind -- at least this is my evaluation -- he set this to one side as being a capability which we had and which would increase as time went on as it in fact has. In the tactical area, he was more concerned about command and control than perhaps any other one thing. I recall that when he went to Germany in June of '62 [1963], at Hanau we met with him after luncheon. When I say we, I'm talking about General Lemnitzer, General Freeman [Paul L. Freeman, Jr.] ...

CLIFTON: The corps commander, Michaelis [John H. Michaelis], was there.

WHEELER: General Michaelis who commanded the...

CLIFTON: Fifth Corps.

WHEELER: ... Fifth Corps and myself. He had a briefing on the subject -- and Ted Landon [Truman H. Landon] was there -- of the plans for the area. The subject that he pursued the strongest were the tactical nuclear locations, their use, the strategy which General Lemnitzer and General Freeman envisaged and so on. In the more general.... Now, wait a minute. I ought to say a word about Vietnam. In January of '63, I think pretty much at the direction of the President who wanted one of the Chiefs to go out and take a look at what went on, I was launched by my colleagues to go out and spend ten days or so, evaluate the situation, and come back and make a personal report to the President. This I did. I spent some ten or twelve days in country. I had a team with me, drawn from the services and from the Joint Staff. We made a pretty detailed evaluation of various programs there and so on. When I returned, I reported first to the Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense and then that same evening -- when I say evening because this was a late meeting of the NSC -- I reported to President Kennedy.

I was able to report that from the military side things were going generally quite well -- and this is true, they were going quite well -- but that however, Ho Chi Minh was fighting the war for peanuts and that if we ever expected to win that affair out there, we had to make him bleed a little bit. However, as you know, things moved very slowly and while we did start to plan on some maritime operations against the north, other things of that kind, it was really only this past year that we got these things launched as real programs. Now, I don't know what might have happened had President Kennedy not been murdered. Actually the military programs, as I say, were going quite

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well up until June of 1963. We were winning. But then starting with the Buddhist riots and troubles in May, increasingly the Diem government ran into trouble. Then, of course, when [Ngo Dinh Diem] Diem was overthrown and killed, along with Brother Nhu [Ngo Dinh

Nhu], in the first of November '63, things went to hell in a hand basket. We have never been able to recover the same degree of military success that we were having a year earlier. The political situation insofar as the South Vietnamese government is concerned has steadily gotten worse; the government has gotten weaker.

I believe that President Kennedy's interest in the military aspects of his job are revealed quite clearly by the proposal for the MLF [multilateral force], the agreement with the British to assist them in a Polaris submarine program for themselves, things of that kind. As a matter of fact, one evidence of his interest in the military is a very clearly high-lighted by the fact that in the early part of the week in which he was killed, as you know, I came over and spent forty-five minutes with him going over the records and the capabilities of the senior officers of the Army. He had asked for some such briefing because he was concerned about the future of the high command of the Army, who were the people that were coming along, who were the men to keep your eye on, who did I think might be my successor, and so on. As you recall, I left with you the photographs and the biographical sketches that I used on that particular occasion. I might add that was the last time I saw him.

CLIFTON: This was this personal interest in the kind of men we were developing.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: I think, as you recall, it was reflected in his interest in what they were reading, in the languages they were learning...

WHEELER: This is correct.

CLIFTON: ... the schooling that we were doing, and actually in the people themselves as to what kind of command we were building. Of course, I believe this: he had a great deal of confidence in you, as you know, because he asked you many times on subjects that you might say were not even in the Army's domain for your advice and counsel...

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: ... including Air Force matters and others.

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WHEELER: That's right. I remember that too.

CLIFTON: But he always had a great respect for a military opinion on military subjects, and he thought he had a good reading of men that he could rely on. Well, it was evident that he called on military men for lots of jobs.

WHEELER: This is correct. You will recall that among other things, he nominated

General Herb Powell [Herbert B. Powell] to be our ambassador to New Zealand. He had become impressed with him during the Cuban crisis of '62, the first time he'd ever seen the man. But he thought that he was most competent, which he is. He regretted the fact that he had reached the age when he had to retire and felt that Herb Powell was not a man that should be released from government service. You will recall that when Admiral Anderson's [George W. Anderson, Jr.] term ran out, he nominated him as our ambassador to Portugal. I know he did this on the basis of his personal acquaintance with Admiral Anderson and his own evaluation of his capabilities. I think that it's evidenced also by the reliance he placed upon General Taylor, first as his military representative and later on as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I might add that General Taylor had an influence with President Kennedy that extended far beyond military matters, rightly he regarded him as a man of broad knowledge, quick intelligence, and sound judgment.

I think this would be a fair summary, Ted, that when President Kennedy took office, he really didn't know too much about the military although he had served as a naval officer in World War II. He didn't know too much about the military as it then existed. He did have certain ideas regarding overall military policy and strategy which he had derived from reading, from consultation with military men -- General Taylor's an example, General Gavin [James M. Gavin], others -- that when he was faced with certain international problems, the Berlin crisis for example, he acted along the lines that he believed proper, namely to increase our conventional strength, our readiness so that we could deal from a position of flexibility, of multiple options, and not with a single strategy, which he felt to be inadequate and in which I think he was quite correct.

He read I think very correctly the import of Khrushchev's January '61 speech and took action to create the military capabilities as to meet these. Now, whether they were adequate military measures or not still remains to be proven, but the fact is at least he recognized it and did something about it. I think he was on the right track. Whether the exact mix and so on came out correctly, I don't know. I believe that increasingly throughout his administration, he came to understand and appreciate the very powerful tool he had in

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his hands in dealing with foreign policy matters in the armed forces of the United States.

In effect, what I'm saying is that as you would expect any man of quick intelligence and energy to do, as he served in office, his understanding of his job, his ability to deal with the job increased. This is certainly true in the military field.

CLIFTON: As Commander-in-Chief then he gave us enough material and money to change the emphasis from what it was in 1960 to what it is in 1964.

WHEELER: This is true. He started this. I've heard Mr. McNamara say that when he took office or when he agreed to take office as Secretary of Defense that President Kennedy gave him only one directive which he never changed, and that is for him to determine the forces that were needed for the defense of the United States and the American security interests, to create those forces, and to manage them

without regard to what it might cost. Now, he added that President Kennedy had said to him, "Now, as regard to the operating of the forces, I want you to do it as economically as you can." Which I think is a very fair directive to give to a senior executive of a government.

CLIFTON: I think we've summarized the impact he had on the military very clearly and your own experience in at least three jobs working for him as a wide spectrum of the various interests he did have. We might conclude this with a small footnote that you could throw some light on. Remember he was even interested in the Army-Navy football game...

WHEELER: Yes, indeed.

CLIFTON: ... and the size of the academies. Do you recall talking to him about this?

WHEELER: Yes, as a matter of fact, at the Army-Navy game in November '62, the Navy were the hosts that year so he sat on the Navy side the first half and then came over and sat on the Army side the second half. As you will recall, why we were getting the hell kicked out of us by a very fine Navy team. When he got over on our side, he was sitting in the front row -- General Westmoreland [William C. Westmoreland], then the superintendent of the military academy, on one side of him; Secretary Gilpatric, as I recall, immediately on his right; and then I was on the right of Secretary Gilpatric. One, I think he was a little shocked by the fact that

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Army was getting beat so badly, and secondly, he had been impressed by the fact that when the corps of cadets and the regiment of midshipmen marched on at the beginning of the game and went through their usual gyrations that the corps of cadets was only about half the size of the brigade of midshipmen, I guess is the term they use now.

He told us that he had been under the impression that the military academy and the naval academy were the same size. We told him no, that this was not true, that we had a total enrollment under optimum circumstances of about twenty-six hundred and the naval academy had better than forty-six hundred, that there were different laws having to do with his. He said, "Well, you better do something about this." As a matter of fact, when I saw him not too long after that in his office one day, he asked me what I was going to do about getting some football players. He said, "You know, you've got to go out and recruit them. You've got to go out and get these people. They just don't come to you." He said also that he felt that the disproportion in the size of the two academies was just incomprehensible to him. He said, "After all, the Army is at least a half again as large as the Navy and yet you have a smaller military academy than the Navy. I don't understand this."

Well, the outcome of the whole thing was that he said that he would support legislation which would expand the military academy and the Air Force Academy to the size of the naval academy. You will recall that we then and there went to work as to how we could

do this. There had been a bill which the Congress wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole, that is the Senate wouldn't, which had a lot of fancy language in, which changed the system of...

CLIFTON: Appointments.

WHEELER: ... appointments and so on which although the House bought, the Senate wouldn't. This was just sitting on dead center. The upshot of the matter was that LeMay and myself went to work, devised a bill which essentially was the naval academy bill which over the dead bodies of the Bureau of the Budget was presented to President Kennedy by LeMay and myself, and we got his approval in principle that this would be done. You will recall also that in the process of doing this, I went to see Chairman Carl Vinson and others; Senator Russell [Richard B. Russell] was contacted, indicated that he would be favorable to it; and we got the legislation that we so badly needed. As I say, over the dead bodies of the entire Bureau of the Budget because they didn't want to implement any of this. So I give President Kennedy full credit

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for the fact that we now have a program under way to enlarge the military academy, not only personnel-wise but facilities-wise because we've got to redo the military academy in order to accommodate this increase in strength. This is going to cost money. It's going to be about a ten-year program.

CLIFTON: Well, he knew that it would be a big bill and it would take construction and everything else.

WHEELER: That's right.

CLIFTON: But I remember there are two small incidents compared to this. He never gave up interest. He said, "They're really for this, aren't they?" And I said, "Oh, yes." He said, "Well, we've got to keep lobbying. These things wither away." He was constantly checking with me on this. When we went out to the Air Force Academy for graduation he took Senator Russell along. In a joking way, as Senator Russell and he were sitting on the plane, we're headed out there, he said, "Now, I'm assigning my aide to you today, Senator Russell. He's just going to take care of you." And he said, "Of course, he has a purpose. He's supposed to lobby for an improvement in the size of the Air Force Academy and the Military Academy all day long; he's never to let up on this. When you get tired of it, come back and tell me and I'll call him off." Then he also said in the last Army-Navy game he went to, "If we do this job well, luck could have it I might be still President another four years. I want to sit here when the two academies are the same size." This was just another example that I mention as we close of what I think was his intense interest from the beginnings of our military to the most senior officers.

WHEELER: This became very apparent as time went on, at least it did to me. Matter of

fact, it's always interesting to look back on your impressions of somebody.

You'll recall that I first met President Kennedy, then Senator Kennedy, in September of '60 when he had received the Democratic nomination and was starting his campaign for election. He certainly was an impressive man, obviously very intelligent, very quick, very energetic, and very personable in his manner and in his appearance. Over the three years that I knew him with increasingly frequent contacts, I felt that he was growing with the job. I believe that when he first took office -- probably under the influence of his colleagues, his associates -- that he was really not aware of the great difficulties, the great problems that the President is faced with and the difficulties in getting something done to implement programs. As time went on, I

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felt that he became more and more adept at handling problems, he realized very quickly the things that should be done, and how to get them done. What I'm really saying is that as the months went by and as I saw him more frequently and under varying circumstances, I felt that he was growing in stature every day, that he was becoming not only a very fine President from the point of view of character, appeal, and so on, but in sheer ability. Of course, I would say it was a great shame that the country lost his leadership in November of 1963. It was a great loss really because he hadn't at that time, in my opinion, by any means reached his full powers, by any means demonstrated what he would be able to do as his experience deepened, as his abilities broadened with the passage of time, with experience and with thought and reflection on his part.

CLIFTON: I'll ask a final question. As you know, when we were working with him, he was forty-four, forty-five, and forty-six years old. Yet I never felt, even though I'm six or seven years older than he is, that there was any age difference between the people. I don't think he made you feel old or young. I think it was strictly a man-to-man relationship that he developed with people he liked.

WHEELER: Well, he was very direct, as you know. He had no apparent inhibitions about speaking very frankly to people, at least he didn't with me. He was very frank, very outspoken. I'm not saying this in the terms that he would tell you what he didn't like, but just what I'm really directing this remark to is the subjects upon which he would speak in your presence with no apparent thought that this was a subject he shouldn't discuss with you because it wasn't necessarily your immediate business or that he had any fear that you were going to misuse what he said in any way. He was, as far as I'm concerned, extremely frank and open in his manner every time I had to deal with him. Of course, one of the things I liked about him particularly was the fact that he had an extremely fine sense of humor. I know that he was a very sensitive man in many ways, particularly as regards bad publicity in the newspapers, but on the other hand, it isn't very often that you find a man who was really as quick-witted as he was in the ad lib area and the way even when things were looking pretty bleak was able to turn a joke. In fact, on one occasion

during the Cuban affair, why he turned a joke by quoting a passage from Shakespeare, which is a rather unusual attribute these days.

CLIFTON: Well, I remember he used to love to ask the various Chiefs their opinion on how they'd handle something.

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He especially enjoyed getting General Shoup [David M. Shoup] to give the standard marine response that a marine could solve any problem. Then he would chuckle because he knew what the response would be when he asked the question.

WHEELER: Invariably. Invariably.

CLIFTON: Well, thank you very much, General Wheeler. I think this will be a great contribution to the Kennedy Library and the oral history. I know that when the historians in time memorial start researching these files, they'll find a good strong commentary on what the Command-in-Chief did in those years.

WHEELER: I hope so.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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