

Oral History Interview
with
EUGENE M. ZUCKERT

Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of War for Air, 1946-47; Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, 1947-52; and a member of the Atomic Energy Commission, 1952-54.

Washington, D.C.
September 27, 1971
by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

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HESS: To begin this morning Mr. Zuckert, if you will, give me a little bit of your background; where were you born, where were you educated, and just what are a few of the positions that you have held?

ZUCKERT: I was born in New York City and spent my early years in the New York suburban area; principally Westchester County, and was educated in the public schools there. And then I went to prep school in Connecticut, then to Yale College, then to Yale Law School, and was a member of the first combined Yale Law-Harvard Business School course which then Professor William O. Douglas, and now Justice William O. Douglas started. He was then Professor at Yale Law School and the combined course was really the foundation of

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everything that happened to me afterwards.

In 1937 when I graduated from law school, and finished the combined course, I went to the SEC where Douglas was then chairman; I transferred to New York in the SEC, and in 1940 went back to Harvard Business School to teach in some of the early industrial mobilization programs they had. During my time there as assistant dean and assistant professor, I taught in something called the Air Force's Statistical Control School, which trained officers for the Air Force statistical control system, the only unified statistical control system that any of the services had in the war. And that also was kind of a major factor in what happened to me later.

I had been trying to get into the services, get my release to go into the services. I met Stuart Symington and he became interested in me and wrote a letter about me to James Forrestal, who was Secretary of the Navy, and as a result of that I received a commission in the Navy to go into their new inventory control program.

In 1945 Symington, who was then a manufacturer in St. Louis, was appointed by the President to become

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Chairman of the Surplus Property Board, as it was then. I got back from a trip shortly after he took office and found a directive from the Under Secretary of the Navy telling me to take myself over to the Surplus Property Board to work for Chairman Symington.

He was only there about six months after I got there -- September '45 to early winter of '46 -- and he was appointed Assistant Secretary of War for Air, which was a post that had been held by Bob [Robert A.] Lovett during the war. Symington said to me, "Since you have been in this air force business why don't you come on over and see what it's like?"

So, I worked for Symington as Assistant Secretary -- no, not as Assistant Secretary, as his special assistant. My title was Special Assistant to the Secretary of War, but then I was really his assistant and worked there and was probably his top civilian assistant. And in September 1947, of course, the Unification Act had passed and we had a separate Air Force and Secretary Symington asked me to become an Assistant Secretary.

HESS: Since you've mentioned Justice Douglas, as you know he was prominently mentioned for the vice-presidential

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spot both in 1944 with FDR, and Mr. Truman tried to get him to run as Vice President in 1948. Since you knew him, did you ever hear him speak of those events, why he may not have chosen to accept?

ZUCKERT: No. I never talked to him. My relations with him were personal and principally earlier, although I did see him a lot in the later years.

HESS: All right. What are your earliest recollections of Mr. Truman himself?

ZUCKERT: Well, I guess my earliest recollections are from some of the functions I attended at the White House where I got to meet the President. He was always cordial to me personally, he knew me by name, but I couldn't ever say that I was close to the President.

HESS: Did you know Mr. Truman at all during the time that he was a Senator?

ZUCKERT: No, I didn't know him. See he was in the Senate up until what... '45, and of course I was a Lieutenant, (j. g.) in the Navy so that my chances

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of knowing many Senators wasn't very good.

HESS: All right, now you've mentioned Mr. Symington for one, just what kind of a man is Mr. Symington? How good of an administrator is Mr. Symington?

ZUCKERT: Well, I thought he was among the top three administrators that I've ever met. He was a fast mover, he liked a young team and he gave young people a tremendous amount of authority. He was fun to work for because he was very graphic in the way he expressed things. You sit around today and the people who worked for him back in the old days remember some of the Symingtonisms that we heard back in '45 , '46 , '47.

He was very effective with the Congress. One of the things he taught me was that an administrator in one of these jobs, if he's going to be good, he just can't be partisan, he's got to work with both sides of the Congress and he spent a tremendous amount of his time working with the Senators and Congressmen. He was in many ways a nervous operator, I mean you always had to be on top of a situation immediately. He responded very quickly. We always were afraid if we told him

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something that he might pick up the phone and do something about it unless we could keep him calmed down. He had a great grasp of -- well there were two things that I think he had. One was he had a concept of what I call defensive administration, and I've talked about it many, many times. A concept of defensive administration to build up the credibility of an organization.

Take the Air Force for example, we were a young organization with people who hadn't had much administrative experience, or certainly hadn't had much Washington experience, who were manning the top jobs. And if we were to build up the credibility for that organization a lot had to be done, because our people would dismiss the Air Force as a bunch of fly boys and the like.

Symington -- to be brief about it unless you want more information -- Symington's concept of the defensive team revolved around the General Counsel to make sure that everything we did was legal and that people would have a feeling of confidence in our action; the controller, to give a feeling of financial responsibility in the organization; the public relations fellow, he wasn't

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there to "puff" the organization he was there to protect the organization; and then the legislative liaison the same way. Symington wanted to be sure that our standing on the Hill was good, that we knew what was going on, on the Hill. And finally the cop. We had a very bad incident in the Air Force in 1947, just before the Unification Act, and Symington -- well, this goes back to Mr. Truman. Symington did something analogous to what he had done in Surplus Property. When he came here in 1945 Mr. Truman told him, and Symington told this story many times, he said, "Stuart, there are going to be a lot of people try to steal," he said, "I want you to go over to J. Edgar Hoover and have him give you the best man that you can get and make sure that the stealing is kept to a minimum." He said, "Otherwise it will engulf you."

Symington got a fellow by the name of Joe Carroll who was a tremendously able fellow in Surplus Property. Well, we had this bad incident in the Air Force in 1947 where an anonymous letter concerning a retired general had been batted around and nobody had investigated it, nobody in the military had wanted

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to investigate it. Symington got himself Joe Carroll again, put him in uniform, I don't remember whether it was a colonel or a general officer, but put him in charge of something called the Office of Special Investigations. And that office is in the Air Force today.

Joe Carroll eventually became the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency and a three star general. For a non-rated officer to get that kind of recognition long after Symington had gone, proves a lot to me.

The important thing about this defensive operation of Symington's was that the members of the defensive team that I enumerated, General Counsel, Comptroller, Public Relations, Legislative liaison, the cop, reported direct to him. This kind of shook the military, but he wanted to be sure that there were no barriers between him and what he felt were the sensitive, vulnerable areas where he or the agency could get badly hit.

The other thing -- I have talked about the defensive team -- the other thing about Symington is that he was a great concept man. Symington really had more to do, I think, than any other individual, with the rebuilding

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of the Air Force in the 1946, '47, '48 time period. You've probably run across it in the Archives, the Air Force seventy group program. Symington, I think, was in a large part responsible for the creation, and if I recall correctly, by the President, of the Finletter Committee which turned in the report that recommended a rejuvenation and building back the Air Force after the thing fell apart really in 1945, and 1946, and that there were no plans for building it.

Symington would take something like that and work on it tirelessly. He'd get concerned with little things -- criticism of him or the Air Force -- once in a while they were the kind of things that made him nervous, but most of the time he operated on the high priority issues.

I remember one time I was trying to interest him in a project of my own in connection with the disposition of surplus property, and every time I came to his office my paper would be at the bottom of the pile instead of at the top of the pile. Finally I had to conclude it was on purpose. So I asked him and he looked at me and he said, "Gene," he said, "with me number one is

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number one, number two is number two, and number three is number three, and after that," he says, "it doesn't matter whether it is number four or number fifty-four." So Symington had a tremendous ability with great intensity to keep his eye on what he thought were the major problems of his administration. This plus the defensive operation, plus his knowledge of the Air Force, which he had gotten as an Air Force supplier prior to World War II, these were the things that, in my book, plus his fine intuition, his strength and his personality made him so successful. Of course, we had some rough times, and we had some rough times with the President, and the Director of the Budget, because of our desire -- our feeling that it was necessary -- his feeling really, to build back the Air Force, and the conflict that this created with the budget considerations, the ceiling budgets, which haven't changed much since 1947.

HESS: Was this during the time that James Webb was Director of the Budget?

ZUCKERT: That's right.

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HESS: Was he the Director of the Bureau of the Budget that seemed to want to cut back on defense measures more than the other directors? Or did it just come about in that time?

ZUCKERT: I don't know whether it was the timing, and as I told you before, I can't remember dates, but I know that Jim Webb felt, and made no bones about the fact that he was operating under the President's instructions. And I remember one confrontation between Webb and Symington where this came out pretty clearly. Both of them thought that they were working for the President, but Webb I'm sure, at least -- I'm not sure -- at least it's always been my observation over the years that I've been connected with these defense problems that the President has a political problem. What's feasible, the science of the possible as far as getting appropriations from the Congress, and I think that he charged Webb with waging the battle for that. I'm sure Webb must have been there when the Congress gave us more money than the President wanted to spend and I can't remember the years, it probably was '48 or '49. And Jim Webb, as you know, and as you've seen in NASA, a tremendously forceful person, and Symington was an

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equally forceful person and the confrontations were pretty vigorous.

HESS: We'll probably have more questions on that same subject but just what is your general opinion on the necessity for unification, for the unifying of the armed forces, which was one of the big subjects of this time, one of the big problems.

ZUCKERT: Well, I think that it was absolutely necessary that the forces be unified. In the first place, you didn't have joint planning that was really worth the name, you didn't have, under the old system of the Secretaries of War and Navy with no one over them you didn't have an arena in which you could make sure that the separate services were not each seeking to fight the whole war for which they were planning. You just had no way of controlling them. And when Mr. Forrestal came in, Mr. Forrestal had been Secretary of the Navy, he had an idea that he could coordinate the services and still achieve some of the objectives of unification without falling into some of the dangers that he feared and made his support of it pretty reluctant.

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HESS: Do you think he retained sort of a Navy view when he was Secretary of the Navy?

ZUCKERT: I wouldn't characterize -- I'd say that it was a natural view for Mr. Forrestal as a person. Actually his view was a lot different from the real Navy view, but I think he had some reservations.

HESS: The admirals?

ZUCKERT: The admirals. Their feelings were pretty strong that this unification was a terrible thing and you only accepted it under Forrest Sherman because you had to. And Mr. Forrestal, I was very fond of him, but he had -- obviously all of us have faults -- if he had a fault that seemed apparent to me, it was too much of a propensity to see both sides. And, in other words, not be tough enough in making a decision that would hurt somebody and making it stick, and I think that it was this basically...

HESS: He tried a little too hard to see both sides, is that right?

ZUCKERT: Yes. That's what I would say. And he could see

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the Navy point of view, and there are some things that are wrong with unifying the services, for example, you do stifle service initiative, but it just wasn't in the cards with war getting to be as high technology as it was and the cost of things beginning to mount. And of course, we thought costs were high then; look at what we have today. Unification just had to be.

HESS: One of the fears expressed more often by the Navy was the possible loss of the air wing, its Air Corps, to the new emerging Air Force, as well as the Army Air Force going into the Air Force, many of the admirals were fearing that the Navy Air Force would also go.

ZUCKERT: Well, this was because of General [Carl A.] Spaatz and people like him, and General Hap Arnold felt that there only should be one air force but the Navy is politically savvy, tremendously savvy organization and they were able to work out of the problem. They were against it and they fought it as long as they could and when they didn't fight it they learned to live

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with it.

HESS: Do you think -- now they did retain the Navy Air Force.

ZUCKERT: Sure.

HESS: Do you think that it would have worked to the country's advantage if all of the air units had been brought together?

ZJCKERT: I'm not so sure. I'm not at all sure since I've seen the resurgence of the Army's Air Force. Of course, I'm devoted to the Air Force and the Air Force people. But I think an organization gets into the what you might call the "father knows best" philosophy, and they tend to become unresponsive to the needs and ideas and new concepts of another organization which is required to call upon them for service. This is a pretty common phenomenon, not just in the military.

It's a funny thing, whenever you get a war you always have to reorganize logistics organizations because they tended to become a law unto themselves, the Supply Corps in the Navy, the organizations out at

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Wright Field, and I'm afraid that an organization like the Air Force with strong people in it, would have tended to not be at all sympathetic for example with the carrier force. I don't know what the rights and wrongs of carriers today is, but we almost had a revolt in the Navy in 1949.

HESS: The revolt of the admirals.

ZUCKERT: The revolt of the admirals. I think you'd have had a much more serious situation if you would have in any way permitted the Air Force to have taken over the aviation functions.

HESS: And that's when Admiral [Forrest P.] Sherman came in and Admiral [Louis E.] Denfeld left.

ZUCKERT: Yes. I was at Greenbrier at the Joint Chiefs Conference with Secretary Johnson. And he congratulated Denfeld upon his reappointment, and Frank Matthews was present. A few days later Denfeld was unreappointed.

I think that when you reorganize something you can go too far and destroy the important elements

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of what you're trying to reorganize, I think if they had taken on this, I don't think we would have gotten unification.

HESS: All right now, as we've mentioned aircraft carriers, now the controversy over the B-36s and the aircraft carriers, that's pretty well documented in the hearings, but on April the 12th and

the 13th of 1948 , Secretary Symington,. who was Secretary of the Air Force at that time, testified before a committee of the Congress that the United States required an Air Force in excess of that supported by the President, and Mr. Forrestal as Secretary of Defense, that you have already mentioned.

ZUCKERT: Right.

HESS: Just at that time what seemed to be the relationship between Secretary Forrestal, the new Secretary of Defense, and Stuart Symington. What was the relationship between those two men?

ZUCKERT: Of course they had a very close personal relationship back in the '40s. Now I don't know how far back

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it went. I told you about Secretary Symington writing Forrestal as a result of which I went in the Navy. I think when Symington came here to Washington as Surplus Property Administrator he lived out at the Chevy Chase Club first and Forrestal got him in there and he used to play golf with Forrestal frequently. There was a very close relationship. I think the divisions between them began with relation to the Unification Act. I think the reluctance of Forrestal, and it never got to be an enmity or anything, but I think that's -- you know how honeymoons are, they break up after a while. I think there was some deterioration of the relationship there and I'm sure that there was a deterioration in the relationship as a result of the Finletter Committee and the Brewster-Henshaw Committee where Symington testified so strongly for the Air Force seventy group program.

I was in the office one day with Symington, the squawk box rang and it was Secretary Forrestal and Forrestal forbade him, in my hearing, from testifying for the seventy group program. Symington said, "Oh, but I'm going to have to testify under oath,

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and this is what I believe." I'm paraphrasing.

About five minutes later I was still in there , Forrestal called up and reluctantly said, "Well, I guess you'll have to testify the way you believe," and that was pretty tough for Mr. Forrestal to concede.

HESS: Mr. Forrestal resigned in March of 1949. Do you recall anything in particular about the unfortunate mental breakdown that overtook Mr. Forrestal? Did you see any early signs of that?

ZUCKERT: In one way I did. I think Marx Leva -- I don't know whether you've talked to Marx.

HESS: Yes sir.

ZUCKERT: I went to a Joint Chiefs dinner for Forrestal, and my memory is bad as usual, it was probably at the Mayflower, coming home in the car I was disturbed that night by my observation of Forrestal.

HESS: Is this close to the time of the resignation?

ZJCKERT: Yes, it was undoubtedly after he had resigned, and it was a going away party for him, both McNeil, who was

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the controller for Forrestal, and Leva...

HESS: Wilfred J., I believe.

ZUCKERT: Yes, that's right, he was later with the Grace outfit, both Mac and Leva have mentioned this to me since. I don't remember what disturbed me, but it was something about the way he acted. I said, "This man will either be the Barney Baruch of the next generation or something terrible is going to happen."

HESS: What made you think so?

ZUCKERT: Just something in his manner, it was just sort of a haunted quality I think.

I remember when one time when we were in the budget hearings, he set up a committee to try to cut the budget and I was a member of the committee, and it was a snowy day in December, and I think it was in '48. He resigned in '49 didn't he?

HESS: Yes.

ZUCKERT: It was in '48. It was within a few days of Christmas, and he came around at 5:30 or 6 that night

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just as we were breaking up and invited me to go home to dinner with him. I thought, "My Lord, a man, Secretary of Defense, and a few days before Christmas, inviting an Assistant Secretary to go home to dinner with him." I sensed a tremendous loneliness and thought it was pretty obvious.

HESS: He had been selected as the first Secretary of Defense back when the National Military Establishment came in, in 1947. What is your opinion as to why he was selected as the first Secretary of Defense?

ZUCKERT: I think it was to try to keep the Navy on board. If they picked [Robert P.] Patterson or Symington I think it would have upset things pretty much. Was it Patterson or was it [Kenneth C:] Royall? Anyhow, the answer is an easy one regardless of who was Secretary of War at the time, because the Army had been the originator of the unification legislation back in those hearings. (Wasn't it introduced before Truman became President in 1945?) So I think it was typical of just a lot of things the President did. To keep the show going.

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HESS: The art of the possible.

ZUCKERT: That's right.

HESS: A sop to the Navy, but to try to keep things going.

ZUCKERT: But Forrestal had such a good reputation, you can't call it a sop, but it was the way to go if you wanted to keep the Navy on board.

HESS: I have heard, but also other people say that it is not true at all, that Mr. Forrestal may have been on the way out early in 1949 even if his health had not degenerated, because of a supposed pro-Arab, pro-oil, anti-Jewish attitude that he may have had. Do you care to comment about it?

ZUCKERT: I've heard that story too, but I don't know whether it is true, but I know one thing that Mr. Forrestal is supposed to have said which was relayed to me back in those times, "you know, if there were 6 million Arabs in the Bronx too, we wouldn't have this problem."

HESS: More Arab votes, instead of Jewish votes. Well,

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they did mostly vote for the Democratic Party at that time, didn't they?

ZUCKERT: That's right.

HESS: All right, now when Mr. Forrestal left, Louis Johnson was selected as the Secretary of Defense, appointed the next Secretary of Defense. Why in your opinion was Louis Johnson appointed Secretary of Defense?

ZUCKERT: Well, he was personally well-known to the President. He was a power in the party, he was a finance raiser for years and years. He was big with the American Legion if I recall, and he had been Assistant Secretary of War under Woodring, wasn't it, and had that big fight with Secretary of the Army -- Secretary of the War back in '41 -- '40. Louis Johnson's mobilization activities were part of the reason I went to Harvard, he was responsible for getting these industrial mobilization courses going at the Harvard Business School and I was brought back to work in those courses.

HESS: Under Harry Woodring, was it not?

ZUCKERT: Woodring, it wasn't Durham -- no, it was Woodring,

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of Kansas.

HESS: Of Kansas.

ZUCKERT: Johnson was a powerful guy, he was a good lawyer, senior partner of Steptoe and Johnson, still one of the best firms here in town so that I think he had all the tickets for the job.

HESS: What changes did he seek to implement in routine, or policy? What changes come to mind when you think of Louis Johnson coming taking over.

ZUCKERT: It was incredible -- the whole thing was incredible. He knew no more about the administration of a 15 billion dollar operation than -- well, maybe some people would say than I do. But he just didn't know what was involved. He appointed Steve Early as his deputy secretary, Steve was a wonderful fellow, but Steve's field, as everybody knows, was public relations. He was Roosevelt's...

HESS: Press Secretary.

ZUCKERT: Press Secretary for years. And Steve knew no more

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about administration than Louis Johnson did.

HESS: Just what did Mr. Early do in the Pentagon?

ZUCKERT: Well, I think Johnson became inordinately concerned with how he would look in the press and on the Hill. I think he thought that the job really depended -- this maybe is a cruel overstatement -- but depended more upon his public relations than on what he did. Oh, I think he was supremely confident too for the first few months that what he wanted to do could be done by directive. This was, one of the things. I remember his getting up and I don't remember where it was, saying that the budget was 15 billion this year, was going to be 14 billion next year, and 13 billion the year after. The whole thing was an incredible performance, and there was none of the understanding of how tough the inter-service problem was and he forgot that maybe he would wish he had maintained a strong force. Maybe it's just charitable, maybe it's Freudian, but I've forgotten most of those things, it was a terrible time.

HESS: During that period of time was when there were great cutbacks as you mentioned in the budget and in

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the armed service and when the Korean war came we found ourselves under equipped to handle the situation properly. Secretary Johnson received a good deal of the blame, if there is blame, to be given for this. Is that fair, or do you think that Secretary Johnson may have been carrying out orders from the President, and from the Bureau of the Budget?

ZUCKERT: I think it had to be, I mean you couldn't have done this, but I don't recall -- unfortunately I don't remember -- recall the environmental aspects of the time, but we run into these situations where military expenditures became inconvenient, and then you start to cut them. Then events intervene, and the national policy changes.

Korea was, some people have said, a reflex action by the President in that he was determined we had to go into Korea, we had to have the forces capable of doing so and we didn't.

This is semifacitious I guess, but the great thing that the Russians did for us, the Communists did for us, was they started the war in the end of June when

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we still had lot of money lying around and we could do an awful lot of things very fast at the end of the fiscal year. And we reprogrammed funds and did things, for example to get the B-26s out of overhaul and all sorts of actions we could take that we couldn't have taken if we were at the beginning of the fiscal year.

We had tremendous flexibility, it was a very fortunate accident. But it was rough. Things were going down hill, we were closing bases, we had to reopen, and well, it was just, I don't know how to express it, you just met yourself going where you'd been.

HESS: There are some other things that we want to come back to just a minute, but let's pursue this just a little bit further. At the inception of the action in Korea, what other actions do you remember being taken, just what did you do at this time. What were your duties:

ZUCKERT: Oh, I had a funny job. Let's see, Korea now, Symington had gone...

HESS: That's right, and Finletter was there. Finletter

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came in in '49.

ZUCKERT: And there's a -- maybe I'd better tell you the story before I forget it. When Finletter came in and brought John McCone in with him, I had some talks with Finletter. I never had any great unpleasantness with him, but I took a trip to Europe in June of 1950, because...

HESS: The same month as the Korean invasion.

ZUCKERT: This was at the -- this was -- let's see. There had been the Berlin airlift and we had the program of -- we'd gone on a program of basing bomber squadrons if I remember, bombers were over there, in England, Norway and -- oh, we were going on a big construction program, peripheral base program, and I went over there and went to Saudia Arabia and...the place we have just been thrown out of.

HESS: Libya?

ZUCKERT: Libya, to see what the effects of this program would

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be on the Air Force and I never knew it until years later, but in the period that I was gone it is alleged to me that Finletter went to the President and asked to have me replaced and...

HESS: Why?

ZUCKERT: Well, I don't think we were too simpatico. We had known each other during the Finletter Air Policy Committee, but there was no great feeling between us. I think he and McCone wanted their own show, which is quite normal. I never knew anything about all of this.

But years later I was told this, the President brought up Finletter's desire to replace me at the staff meeting one day. Apparently Don Dawson, Steelman and Landry, all went to the President and persuaded him not to do it. And the amazing thing is, they never told me.

Well, this is a little indication of how strong that little group was around him which relates to some of the things that you were interested in when we started. I had been Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, I forget what my title was -- management, I think I -- and my relationship was such with Symington that

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I could do almost anything. He stuck to principally the policy and major and specialized problems that he was interested in. And I worked on, oh, the development of the controller concept; I had the whole base program; I had personnel under me, I managed the security program. Remember those were the days when we had hearings on throwing people out because of Communist connections. I had that whole program under me.

I had a lot of miscellaneous management functions and worked very closely with General McKee, later the Vice-Chief of Staff, and later the Vice-Chief of Staff of the Air Force, then FFA Administrator. He came in, in '47 and during my years in the Pentagon until '52, he and I worked very closely together and we were the continuity management. And I could speak for Symington, and he could speak for the chief. This left the chief free and Symington free to handle the specialized problems, the big problems.

When Finletter and McCone came in they acted together. The only thing I didn't have was procurement in the old days, Arthur Barrett formerly of Sears Roebuck had procurement. Finletter and McCone, they

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worked together as if they were one person, and the joke around the building was I was Assistant Secretary in charge of everything having to do with day to day operations, except for the Reserve Forces, but they were worried about the strategy, NATO, nuclear -- the development of nuclear weapons, all these things that I didn't get into. And as I say, there was a lack of simpatico between Finletter and myself. It was kind of understandable that I would get into the continuity type problems which he looked at as of minor importance.

HESS: But still you stayed on in this position until '52.

ZUCKERT: Yes, see I didn't even know in '52 about...

HESS: The fact that he had...

ZUCKERT: ...about the fact that they were so unhappy with me.

In '52, I might as well tell that story too. In '52 Symington had gone, it wasn't the same exciting life that we had before. It was always interesting with Symington and you knew what was going on, and it was pressure and it was fun, a different tempo of operation.

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This is nothing in derogation of Finletter but it was different.

I have been with the Air Force since February of '46, so I decided I wanted to get into private industry and made some efforts in that direction. No, it wasn't -- I tell you it started -- I know when it was because it was in the fall of '51 and I decided I wanted to get out. One day Don Dawson had lunch with me. Don and I had worked together on two projects which I should mention. And Don was a good friend of mine and he was obviously quite close to the President and he said, "You shouldn't get out of Government," he said, "you belong in Government."

And I said, "Well, I'm not going anywhere here."

And he said, "What jobs would you like if you had your choice?"

Well I said, "I thought about that, and I can speak freely because none of them is open."

And he said, "What are they?"

I said, "Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission," (I thought, if I'm shooting, I might as well shoot high when somebody asks), "Chairman of the

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CAB or a member of the Atomic Energy Commission."

And I said, "I can say this because there is no vacancy in any of the three." Two weeks after I said this to Don, Sumner Pike resigned as a member of the Atomic Energy Commission, so I was three lengths out in front as a candidate long before...

HESS: Long before anybody else got started.

ZUCKERT: ...anybody else got started. And then Steelman and Dawson and some friends of mine who were outside of Government, got the thing rolling a little bit. And I had learned long ago if you want a job, the worst thing you can do is be active in the campaign, so I did nothing. They talked to the President, and convinced the President it would be a good idea, and he talked to McMahon who was Chairman of the...

HESS: Brien McMahon.

ZUCKERT: ...Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. Brien was from Connecticut and I was from Connecticut and Brien hit the ceiling because I wasn't his choice, I had been told that Tom Dodd (later Senator) was his choice. Here I was listed on my appointment as being from Connecticut and he didn't want to have

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it charged to him as being his appointment, particularly because he wasn't very happy about it. I know he wasn't very happy about it because he told me so. But anyhow the President did it and in February 1952, or January 1952, I was appointed a member of the Atomic Energy Commission.

HESS: That's fine, we'll cover your AEC years just a little later, but you mentioned former Senator Thomas Dodd, the man who was censured by the Senate. Do you recall why the President did not appoint him?

ZUCKERT: No, I didn't ever know. I just kept out of it. As I say, in the first place, you get yourself in an embarrassing position if you're active and you don't get the appointment, and in the second place, you do more harm than good because you're too subjective about it.

HESS: That's right, let someone else carry the ball, you look less pushy.

ZUCKERT: Of course, Symington was a big help too, I must never neglect the tremendous debt that I owe Stuart

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Symington. I wouldn't have been there in the first place, and I never would have had the other opportunities if it hadn't been for Stuart.

HESS: One more question about Louis Johnson. Shortly after he took over, as you recall, he cancelled the contract for the super carrier, which displeased John L. Sullivan very much, who was Secretary of the Navy. Do you recall that episode?

ZUCKERT: I sure do. I do, I remember Sullivan stalking out of the building on the day of his resignation. Not the day of his resignation, the day of his farewell review or whatever they had there, and of course, he was quite a hero to the Navy. And I guess he had gotten pretty close to Johnson and I guess that it had gotten rough.

HESS: And Francis Matthews, I believe was the next Secretary of the Navy.

ZUCKERT: Frank Matthews was Secretary and I guess it was Frank who was there when Denfeld was supposed to be reappointed and then wasn't reappointed. Those were

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pretty rough days.

HESS: How would you evaluate the effectiveness of just those two gentlemen as Secretaries of the Navy; Sullivan and Matthews?

ZUCKERT: Well, John was good because he was popular, and I think he was a good service secretary, but in fairness to John, I don't think we'd come far enough along in the unification process so that a service secretary realized also that he had a broader responsibility to the administration than he had now.

This is always a tough one and I wrote an article about it in *Foreign Affairs*, the role of the service secretary, and John, I think, was too strongly for the Navy. This is not criticism of him, but I think this -- Secretary of the Navy, Secretary of the Army -- there's a long tradition of the way in which they operated, and may be saying this because I'm partisan, but I think that civilian control was much more evident in the Air Force. (A). It was new, and (B). Symington was a strong person, and (C). He had set up things so that civilians had a larger say. I don't think that was as true in the other departments.

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HESS: The Navy Department and the Army Department had been there for years.

ZUCKERT: If you get a weak Secretary they erode the authority of Secretary and then the next fellow that comes in doesn't really know what he can do.

Now one of these things for example was the [Hyman G.] Rickover problem in the Navy. It took an awful lot for the Secretary of the Navy to get Rickover made an admiral.

In the Air Force, the secretaries, early secretaries, realized that one of their strengths, great strengths, was the clear authority over the promotion process, and we participated actively. And as I say, this is just one of the hallmarks of a different kind of civilian control in the Air Force from what it is in the Navy and Army. And I'll bet my life that within ten years the Air Force will be the same as the other two services.

HESS: In just about ten years?

ZUCKERT: Well, I say ten years, I don't know. I think the deterioration...

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HESS: Did you have troubles from the generals coming in and telling you what to do?

ZUCKERT: I had more trouble in 1946 than I had in '61.

HESS: You did?

ZUCKERT: Yes.

HESS: Why?

ZUCKERT: Well, there was a lot of inexperience in the Air Force. We had one of the things which was our great accomplishments, I remember I tried to initiate. I had been, as I told you, in this statistical control business. We had some of the elements of business management concepts in the Air Force during the war to a greater extent than the other two services. That was the unified statistical control system. It was primitive but it was effective. In 1945 somebody had written General Arnold and Lovett a memorandum, and I don't know whether it was Tex Thornton or not. In it they had proposed the development of a true controller concept in the Air Force. They called it in those days

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a controller, but the military are allergic to the concept of controls in a staff office. They think "control" and "command" are pretty synonymous. And I was aware of this memo before I went in in 1946. And when I came in, in '46, one day I went in to Symington and he said, "Do you know, why is it I have to launch an expedition every time I want to get a figure around here?" And I mentioned this concept of a "controller" and he said, "Show me the memo."

So I gave him the memo and I got myself in a lot of trouble with the top -- no, not General Spaatz, but other officers, who were afraid of this controller concept, and they fought pretty vigorously, it finally took Symington to order it directly, and he had to get pretty stiff about it. There was a lot of things that you tried to do that the military would either through inexperience or because of traditional ideas, would tell you that you shouldn't do it this way. You got a lot of resistance.

HESS: But you had less trouble in 1961?

ZUCKERT: I knew the people and I also knew what could be

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done and what couldn't be done. Now a service secretary will always be criticized, either that he's too sympathetic with the service or that he isn't sympathetic enough, that's just one of the perils of one of those in the middle jobs and that's the service secretary's role.

HESS: Just as an opinion, but back during the Truman days do you think the Navy's admirals had more control with the Department of Navy than perhaps the Army's generals did over the Department of the Army? Was the Navy the more difficult service to try to get along with?

ZUCKERT: Oh yes. In the first place, the Navy had a much clearer party line than the Army had, and I think the Navy admirals were abler than most of the generals that I ran across.

HESS: How about General Marshall?

ZUCKERT: I only saw him as Secretary of Defense. I saw Eisenhower as Chief of Staff, but I never saw Marshall as Chief of Staff. When I saw Marshall as Secretary

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of Defense he was a very tired man. He used to take long afternoon naps and I didn't think he was a really tremendously forceful secretary.

HESS: He was there for one year. As you know he came in, in September of '50 and left in September of '51. Mr. Lovett I believe also came in with him, is that correct?

ZUCKERT: That's right, Mr. Lovett was Deputy Secretary. And then I think when Mr. Lovett left, Bill [Williams C.] Foster became the Deputy Secretary.

HESS: Did Mr. Lovett seem to do most of the day-to-day chores at that time?

ZUCKERT: Yes.

HESS: Take the load off of the General's shoulders, more or less?

ZUCKERT: Yes, and then we had other strong people there like Anna Rosenberg, you know, and she was something to work with. I enjoyed that tremendously. But Marshall would concern himself with things like universal military training, which of course, we in

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the Air Force were very much against. We had a volunteer force and...

HESS: Why were you against UMC?

ZUCKERT: Because we wanted a volunteer force...

HESS: All volunteers.

ZUCKERT: ...and we could get it. In the Air Force we considered ourselves, and our requirements, more technical, and we were afraid we would get a higher percentage of the less qualified people. This has always been one of the fights over there. This came up during the Korean war, not in connection with universal military training, but with just the draft; the Air Force could get all the people that they wanted and...

HESS: You didn't want to be connected with the draft.

ZUCKERT: That's right. And we also didn't want the grade fours (lower intelligence) in the percentages that we would have to take them if the Army was to be able to man their organization.

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HESS: Well, back to the days of Korea, and of course, the invasion was in the latter part of June of 1950. Just where were you at the time that you heard the news of the invasion?

ZUCKERT: I got it on the phone at, I don't know whether it was 2 o'clock in the morning or 3 o'clock in the morning, or something like :that.

HESS: What was your reaction, do you recall?

ZUCKERT: Oh, why, completely startled, because -- well, I had no intimation of it, and I had no intimation that we would go into Korea if anything happened.

HESS: Do you think that we should have gone into Korea? Do you think that we handled that correctly?

ZUCKERT: Oh, I think so. I think that there was one clear case where the Chinese moved. You can talk about whether or not they would have moved in Vietnam, and you'll never know, but in the Korean thing they certainly did move.

HESS: It was a few months after the invasion. It was in

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the fall when the Chinese first started to come.

ZUCKERT: That's right, that's right. I'm saying, as the things progressed...

HESS: As it progressed.

ZUCKERT: ...there were lots of Chinese.

HESS: That's right.

ZUCKERT: That's right.

HESS: Just one general question: There was a good deal of criticism at the time, and in the years since, of our fighting a limited war. And as you recall, in April of 1951, General MacArthur was dismissed. One of the reasons for the dismissal was that General MacArthur wanted to carry the war a little further than what the administration wished to do. There were other ramifications, other aspects of the dismissal, but that was one. What was your view of a limited war, should we have tried to fight a war as we did in Korea, or should we have tried to follow more of General MacArthur's advice and clean it up?

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ZUCKERT: Well, it probably is conditioned by what happened in Vietnam, but I don't think you ought to, I think you can get lost so easily in a ground war and if you go on there's no real stopping place. I think there's quite a difference between defending South Korea, and even though it eventually ended in a stalemate, from trying to win the war and go on into China.

HESS: All right, now, a few moments ago we mentioned some of your duties, some of the things that occupied your time at the beginning of the Korean conflict.

ZUCKERT: Well, as I said, I had all the day-to-day functions under me, so I was...

HESS: You were a pretty busy man at that time.

ZUCKERT: That's right, and I was working with General [Edwin W.] Rawlings in connection with our budget problems. I was working on the personnel problems, the kind of problems with Anna Rosenberg that I have talked about; what kind of military establishment were we going to have; what was the Air Force going to do; the whole base situation, the opening of bases for the

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build-up. And because of my relationship with Finletter and McCone, or lack of it, I really didn't get into the policy side of the business. It was the running of the nuts and bolts.

HESS: Mr. Finletter of course, took over in 1949, this is 1950. As you know, Mr. Truman was in Independence the night that he was informed of the invasion, that was on a Saturday night, he came back here on a Sunday, and then there was a meeting at the Blair House and among those present were Secretary of Defense; Dean Acheson, Secretary of State; Secretary of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Frank Pace, Francis Matthews and Thomas Finletter. Did Mr. Finletter tell you later what was discussed at that meeting at the Blair House?

ZUCKERT: No.

HESS: He did not. All right, before we leave Louis Johnson, he resigned in September of '50, shortly after the invasion, what would be your opinion of his effectiveness as Secretary of Defense?

ZUCKERT: I thought he was an unfortunate choice, by

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temperament and...grasp, I think would be the word I would use, for Secretary of Defense.

HESS: What word?

ZUCKERT: Grasp. I don't think he understood the problems, I don't think he understood the services or the necessity of preserving a viable force structure.

HESS: And you have mentioned a couple of times that part of your job was dealing with Congress, and with general congressional liaison. How would you evaluate the importance of that aspect of your position?

ZUCKERT: Well, I was really not so much in the legislative end of the business, I was in the problems with the Congressmen, the base problems, the personnel problems, the constituent type of problems. I was quite active in the appropriations field because of my role with the controller. I might have responsibilities in connection with pieces of personnel legislation for instance, or housing, that was one of the big ones back in '47, '48, '49, you might call it the whole support area as it affected the Congress. And I had

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good relations on both sides of the aisle, in the Senate and House, and these were useful in stopping crises before they became crises; strong people like Maybank and Bridges and...

HESS: Is that generally how work is carried on with the Congress, working with people with whom you are particularly friendly with on the Hill?

ZUCKERT: No, I think you have a logical number of people that you've got to work with, the ranking members of the Armed Services Committee, and the Appropriations Committee principally where your focus of attention will be, and the staffs of the committees.

HESS: We've mentioned several of the members of the White House staff this morning, Mr. Landry and Mr. Dawson, and Mr. Steelman, but did you have occasion to work with any other members of the White House staff, for instance, Clark Clifford or Charles Murphy?

ZUCKERT: I knew Clark and I knew Charlie, but I never worked with them. You see, being in the support end of the business I was not involved in the high policy problems

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that affected the relationship between the administration and the Defense Department.

HESS: Fleet Admiral William Leahy was the Chief of Staff of the President and he retired in March of '48. Did you have anything to do with Admiral Leahy?

ZUCKERT: I just knew him.

HESS: All right, and the Military Aide was Major General Harry H. Vaughan.

ZUCKERT: Yes, I knew Harry, always had wonderful relationships. He'd call me up on little errand type of problems, you know, the same kind of things you get with the Congress. I also got investigated by the successor to the Truman Committee, because of the grant of the Legion of Merit to General Vaughan. And the staff members on that committee, William Rogers, now Secretary of State, and "Frip" [Francis D.] Flanagan with the -- of the W. R. Grace Company, he's a Washington representative here, both have been good friends of mine ever since. It was sort of a witch hunt, I don't remember what General Vaughan had done, but he certainly

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deserved a Legion of Merit as much as a hell of a lot of people who got it.

HESS: I also recall there was a time that he accepted a decoration, I believe from Argentina, and there was a good deal in the paper about that.

ZUCKERT: I didn't have any problem with that, but that involved the State Department, I think.

HESS: All right, and the Naval Aides were James K. Vardaman, James Foskett, and Robert L. Dennison.

ZUCKERT: Well, I knew Bob Dennison fairly well, he became an admiral afterwards I remember, and Vardaman I only knew slightly. He was from Missouri if I remember, wasn't he?

HESS: That is correct, he was from St. Louis.

And then we've mentioned Major General Landry, and he was Air Aide from '48 until '53.

ZUCKERT: That's right. That's right. And if I remember, he was in General Spaatz' office, that's where I got to know him. I first met him in 1946. We were close

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friends of the Landrys

HESS: As he was Air Aide and you were associated with the Air Force, did you work more closely with General Landry than some of the other members of the White House?

ZUCKERT: Oh yes. Yes.

HESS: Do you recall any particular episode, any particular job that you may have worked on with him, that might illustrate a relationship?

ZUCKERT: No, they're the little kinds of things that where the Air Aide will call you up and say the President's interested in this or that or something, or somebody has talked to the President and he's asked me to take care of it, and you push it around and see what can be done with it.

HESS: All right. Anything else before we move on and spend a few minutes on AEC matters?

ZUCKERT: There was one other thing I wanted to mention about Don Dawson. I said there were two projects he

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and I were involved in.

HESS: That's right.

ZUCKERT: I think John Macy was involved in one of them. John and I were asked to try to help him on this problem of getting a systematic way of finding out who might be good people to get for government jobs, presidential appointments. And we had a great many meetings on this and I think we actually got some rosters together. A start was made on it in Don's time, up to then I think it was pretty hit-or-miss, not only in Mr. Truman's time but previously.

HESS: Do you recall what criteria you used to try to decide who would be good prospects for the Government?

ZUCKERT: What we were trying to do was to get a system for locating able young people around the country, younger people, who might be pried away from industry or the law, and who would be effective government administrators. The emphasis on politics was very low key.

I remember we had quite a few Republicans around.

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Jack [John F.] Floberg who was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, now executive vice president for Firestone, was a Republican. There were quite a few who turned up in subsequent administrations if I recall. Don really tried to do a job of getting some kind of a system, rosters, something, to get a start on this problem of locating people.

The second one I worked on with was (and I think this was my idea, but it may not have been, remember you always get more proprietary as you get older), the idea of getting the Little Cabinet together so that we could have better relationships among the other Assistant Secretaries throughout the government, e.g. Assistant Secretary of Commerce, with the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, etc. And we had a series of meetings, which everybody thought were great, where we would get together and I think it was once a month or something like this, have a Cabinet officer in there, have an informal dinner. As a result of it we got a lot better communication across the executive side of Government. People I still hear from.

HESS: Did those Little Cabinet meetings continue on through

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the rest of the Truman administration?

ZUCKERT: I think they did, if I recall, and memory is hazy on this, and I knew it was picked up in the Eisenhower administration.

HESS: And it was helpful to you in the Truman administration.

ZUCKERT: Oh, it was very helpful in the Truman administration. Of course, in the Eisenhower administration, I was not exactly the most popular man around, I served one year in the Eisenhower administration and was not reappointed -- a year and a half -- and not reappointed by the President.

HESS: Before we move on, let me just ask your opinion of the two men that you served as Secretary of the Air Force; Symington and Finletter. How would you compare those two men, which would you think was the better administrator?

ZUCKERT: Well, there was no question about it, Symington was a great administrator; I don't think Finletter was. But mostly, as things evolved, most of the administration became McCone's job anyhow; most of the direction and

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the big holes that were made. Finletter was more the reflective type, he would go into a meeting for three hours, or a discussion with Norstad for three hours on the strategy regarding the deployment of bombers. He was interested in the big issues, he regarded the operational problems as being a distraction. I'm sure he had considerable influence on Air Force strategic thinking, at least until he and General Vandenberg came to a parting of the ways.

HESS: He left the nuts and bolts issues to someone else?

ZUCKERT: That's right, and he had a great many think groups. He had to surround himself with a lot of people who did his high-level thinking for him. Of course, he was a very articulate person and he was very effective before the Congress. He was not an administrator in any sense of the word.

HESS: And moving on to the Atomic Energy Commission. During the years that you served there in the Truman administration, Gordon Dean was the Chairman?

ZUCKERT: Yes.

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HESS: And Henry D. Smyth. And then Thomas E. Murray and then in '52 T. Keith Glennan were the other members, correct?

ZUCKERT: Well, Glennan came before I did and I came in '52. I think Glennan came in the fall of '51.

HESS: He is not listed in the *Official Register* for '53 though.

ZUCKERT: No, I think he resigned in the fall of '52.

HESS: Just for a moment, let's discuss those men. What kind of a man was Gordon Dean, was he an effective administrator?

ZUCKERT: Gordon Dean was a very effective chairman of the AEC. In the first place he was very close to McMahon, he had been law partners of McMahon. In the second place, he was very close to the President, and he acted as our main channel of communication with the President and he kept the commission's relations with the President absolutely on a first-class basis.

Gordon also was effective because he was courting a lady whose father was a very conservative Republican.

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I never could figure how he had such good relations with people like [Henry C.] Dworshak of Idaho and people like that until I found out that he was courting this lady, he eventually married her.

But Gordon was magnificent with the Congress. He was a clarifier, and a smoother of operations. He could get people to work together. He wasn't a first rate administrator, but then there was considerable discussion, Glennan and I on one side and everybody else on the other, as to whether you had to be a good administrator in the AEC; we had differing views on what is the job of the commissioners. This occupied a lot of time and got a lot of attention.

HESS: What did you see as the proper job of the commission?

ZUCKERT: Well, I'd come from a military organization -- you'll have to remember that the commission was evolved out of a Corps of Engineers organization from the Manhattan District. There were a lot of similarities between the AEC's version of the Corps of Engineers and what I have seen in the services. And I felt that it was our job as commissioners to be sure that we had adequate control

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over the continuity of the establishment. If this is difficult in a service where you're the boss and the secretary, you can imagine what it's like if you've got a committee running the operation.

I had a pretty rough time because of my feeling and Glennan's feeling, that we should be much more active in our supervision of the staff and work. For instance, over much opposition I established, or was permitted to establish, a budget review committee, on which I served, in spite of the fact that I was commissioner. Everyone said, "Well, how can you serve as a commissioner with members of the staff and review your own action?"

I said, "It's strange, but you just do it." The purpose was to give the commissioners a much better grasp of the important elements of the budget.

I also was responsible for getting, as controller of the AEC, the same individual who had been our controller in Surplus Property, our top financial civilian in the Air Force; when Symington was head of the National Security this man was his top financial officer in the National Security Resources Board, and later Symington's

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controller in the RFC. I'm an administrator and I tend to think like an administrator, and maybe this is wrong, but I did feel that, for instance on questions of budget or procurement policy, that the staff of the Atomic Energy Commission had a degree of self-righteousness that I'd rarely seen approached in any organization. You know we do it that way because we've done it that way and that's the right way and that's the way we've always done it, and that's the way it should be done from here on out. So this produced quite some active problems for me.

Before I forget it I had two interesting encounters with -- affecting the President -- they were not problems actually. The first was in 1952, we were going to have a shot called the Ivy shot, this was the first H-bomb device, thermonuclear shot (this incident has been written up, perhaps you know it).

You know how it is when you set up a program, you set a date when the culmination is going to happen. And somebody set up the date, or everybody agreed on the date of November 1st, 1952. Well, out there, November 1st was a Saturday, and it was

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the Saturday before election, before the Eisenhower-Stevenson election. All of a sudden it occurred to me one day, I said, "My God, if this thing goes three days before election, if there is any leak of the first thermonuclear shot, it could be of importance. If there's any leak, somebody is going to accuse President Truman of having played politics with this weapons shot." I brought this concern to the attention of Gordon Dean and he went up and talked with the President about it, and I got more than I bargained for. Gordon came back and he said, "The President agrees with you." He said, "You go out there and see if you can get that shot stopped." So, I got my fanny in an airplane, out to the West Coast, which in those days was prop airplanes.

HESS: It took a little while to get there.

ZDCKERT: Then I was given some admiral's plane -- I ranked some admiral out of his airplane in Honolulu and churned out to Kwajalein and then to Eniwetok, and I spent many days there and tried to see if we could get that shot postponed. And finally they gave me the responsibility of determining what should happen.

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Well, finally I decided -- I guess the day before -- that be cans of the weather predictions, we should permit them to go ahead. And of course, there was no leak, as there had been a leak at one shot before. I remember Senator Ed Johnson of Colorado had leaked something from a shot. So...

HESS: A news leak?

ZUCKERT: Yes. It didn't work out badly. The Ivy shot was a good example of the way the President worked, the way we worked with the President, Dean's influence with him.

HESS: But you did decide to go ahead and have the shot on November the 1st?

ZUCKERT: Yes. And also the President's fair mindedness, his concern showed his determination to be nonpolitical where big things were concerned.

There's another thing I should tell you about the President, going back to the Defense Department. There was no politics in connection with the procurement. The President always said, and I think he always meant it,

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he thought politics had no place in Defense.

And we didn't get the same kind of static from the administration, the White House group, that we got in the early days of the Kennedy administration. Just one example, we never used to give anybody a beat on making an announcement of a procurement. Now it's become standard

practice. It's a little political tidbit, that they hand a Senator or a Congressman or a Governor or someone. Under Truman, and this was by his own wish, we didn't ever do that.

The other, going back to Atomic Energy Commission, the other, I came after the decision to build the thermonuclear bomb. So, all I got was kind of a reflection, the waves of reflection of the things, but I used to hear about it from Dean and Smyth and those boys.

HESS: What did they say? Now Lewis Strauss was one of the main advocates for the hydrogen bomb, correct, and he had retired before you joined the commission.

ZUCKERT: That's right. But Lewis unfortunately came back in '53.

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HESS: Did you say unfortunately came back?

ZUCKERT: Yes. I had a difficult time under Lewis Strauss.

HESS: Why?

ZUCKERT: We got involved in the Oppenheimer case, everything was a dog fight you know. Do you remember the Dixon-Yates business? It was not a pleasant year. I still consider myself a friend of Lewis' but it was no fun.

But in 1952 Lewis had gone. It was obvious that the President had made the decision on the H-bomb, everybody agrees he made the decision. But he never got into any of our more normal problems, for example the problem of whether to develop a second laboratory at Livermore because there was a fear in the Air Force and in the Defense Department that the people down in Los Alamos didn't really want to build the thermonuclear weapon.

We had a lot of big problems on our hands. The weapons expansion program, development of civilian legislation in the '54 act, but I don't recall the President ever being actively interested in it.

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One of the unusual things though was the last week that he was there. We went over to pay our respects and say good-bye to him, and seeing him at that office, and he had that big globe of the world, you know, I saw it again when I was out to the Library. One of the things he said has always stuck with me. He said, "During my time in office, because of the airplane, the world has shrunk from this size (the size of the globe) to the size of an orange." This and some of the other things he said indicated such a perceptive grasp of what had happened to the world when he had so much to do with shaping events. Then he went home and I think it was the next week or so he came out and said, "I don't think the Russians have -- was it the thermonuclear weapon or the atomic bomb?"

HESS: The atomic bomb.

ZUCKERT: The atomic bomb.

HESS: He thought they had a device, but not necessarily the capabilities of building a bomb as such. Did it surprise you when you heard about his statement?

ZUCKERT: It knocked me right flat.

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Gordon Dean was still chairman of the commission; he stayed a little bit into the Eisenhower administration. And Gordon Dean was in a hotel, I think in Toledo, and the press reached him in the middle of the night, and they said, "President Truman has said this."

Gordon Dean categorically said, "The President could never have said that. He couldn't have said it because intelligence information was so clear." So we were shocked, and I've often wondered how it happened. Perhaps when he got back there in Independence you know, and he walked down and the place looked pretty much the same, the problems and the worries just kind of receded from him, but it was one of the most amazing 180s that I've ever...

HESS: I've talked to the reporter that filed that story, and he said that he was extremely careful before filing it to have Mr. Truman okay it and read it to be sure that it was exactly as he had stated.

ZUCKERT: Gordon Dean checked that later and the reporter, if I remember the story, the reporter went back to President Truman and cited to him what Gordon Dean had said and Mr. Truman reiterated.

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HESS: As you will recall, the first detection of an explosion within the Soviet Union was in 1949.

ZUCKERT: I think in 1949.

HESS: They had the airplanes flying through the clouds searching for radioactive material.

ZUCKERT: But the amazing thing was the compression of time between the first atomic explosion and the first thermonuclear. If I recall it was in 1949 or a little earlier that Oppenheimer said that the Russians wouldn't have an atomic weapon for twenty years.

HESS: That I don't recall. That I don't. Anyway when the explosion did occur, and when the cloud appeared and the plane flew through, there was some speculation at the time, some people thought that it was not necessarily a bomb but could have been an explosion in a plant, in a Russian plant. Remember that?

ZUCKERT: I remember that. And that was while I was in the Air Force, because I knew -- I knew very little about -- I had a "Q" clearance, but I knew very little

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about atomic energy, I had never taken the standard course, but I had something to do with the organization of the Atomic Inspection Agency. It wasn't to do with its starting; I didn't have any connection with that, but some problem came up in connection with it that I was required to solve.

HESS: With the airplane that was going to be used for the detection operation?

ZUCKERT: No, this was the organization in the Pentagon, I think a man named Northrup was the civilian head of it. I don't know why it comes back, but it does. But you might be right, that might have been the first explosion, but I think the first announcement of a weapon was in '52 and I know that on the night of the first thermonuclear shot I was in the office of the AEC, so it had to be '54 maybe, and my wife was sitting with a vacant seat next to her seeing "Guys and Dolls" at the National Theater, so...

HESS: But you weren't there that night.

ZUCKERT: I was at the AEC that night, working on the release.

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There's one story about Mr. Truman that occurred long after he left, which has always been an amusing memory for me.

When I was Secretary of the Air Force, I can't remember what year, I went out to Kansas City to give Mr. Truman an award. I wouldn't be surprised if it was -- let's see, I served from '61 to '65...

HESS: Was this the time that you stopped by the Truman Library?

ZUCKERT: Yes, it was the same time I stopped by the Truman Library. That night we gave him some kind of an expression of appreciation for his part in getting the Unification Act through. They had a reception, a little private reception, up in that suite in the Muehlebach; is it called the Gold Suite? Something like that. And Mrs. Truman was there, and my wife has always -- my wife's a New Englander and she's always been a great admirer of Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Truman's way of putting things, so succinctly like New Englanders do. So Mrs. Truman was reading the evening's program, the President sitting over here. She said, "Address, Harry S. Truman!"

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He says, "Mother," he said, "I don't think I'm making any address tonight."

She said, "You better not, because if I had known you were making an address I wouldn't have come."

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about a few of the other members of the AEC? How about Henry Smyth, anything in particular?

ZUCKERT: Oh, he authored the Smyth Report, he was a very studious person, a very fine person. I'd try to whip him up to some of my causes sometime. He and I signed a letter to Eisenhower protesting the Dixon-Yates decision.

HESS: The selling of the power plants to private industries.

ZUCKERT: This was the creation of a -- let's see, Dixon-Yates. That was the financing of a plant by private industry. It was going to be operated by private industry to supply the city of Memphis, so that TWA wouldn't put the power in there. And eventually, of course, produced a tremendous amount of embarrassment for the administration. It probably cost Lewis Strauss confirmation as Secretary of Commerce.

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HESS: Weren't there plans afoot at the same time to sell many government facilities?

ZUCKERT: I don't think they were going to. You know that's terrible that I can't remember the details of Dixon-Yates.

HESS: I could very well be wrong on that, I thought that was part of it.

ZUCKERT: I remember the utilities were going to operate the facilities. Instead the power was going to be supplied I remember, to the city of Memphis and the argument was that this would require TWA to build the facilities instead and therefore they were going to finance the operation by private utilities.

I used to say about Dixon-Yates, that in Washington when you get an idea that's just so smart that you wonder how you possibly could have been smart enough to think about it, you had better forget it.

HESS: Why, because it won't go over?

ZUCKERT: Well, because if it's too smart, something going to happen to it, and that was just too smart. That was

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the combination of Lewis Strauss and Dodge, Director of the Budget.

You asked me a question and I didn't respond. What was it?

Oh, you asked me about Smyth and I. Murray was a strange individual in a lot of ways, he had something like eleven children, he was an ardent Catholic, one of the highest decorated lay Catholics. He'd been appointed by Truman I believe -- yes, he may -- had to be, Truman made all the appointments before I went in.

HESS: Truman made the first appointments to the AEC.

ZUCKERT: Murray had been the receiver of the Inaver Rapid Transit back in the '30s and he was very active in a behind the scenes way in Democratic politics, quite wealthy. He was very difficult to get along with because he went his own way, he was very ardent, on expansion of the program, on the development of the thermonuclear weapons and also the increase in exploration and development of sources for uranium. He had a few things that he would push.

Glennan had had a varied career. I think he had been in the movie business for RKO, during the

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war he ran a laboratory for the Navy. He was president of Case Institute, he was very enthusiastic individual. He had very much, as I've pointed out before, the same views on organization that I had, he found himself very much frustrated in the commission, because of the committee type of operation.

He was one of the founders of the Atomic Industrial Forum. He saw this coming as a necessity. He was a strong private industry man. He was a very useful member of the commission. One of the things he did was -- when he came into the commission, sat down, said, "What am I supposed to do?" Well, there wasn't anybody to tell him, there was nobody to indoctrinate him; he had to design his own indoctrination program. He resolved that wouldn't happen again and he drew up the indoctrination course that I took when I went on the commission. This was a real necessity for me because in college I had gotten 59 on my final physics exam, when 60 was passing, so I probably was the least educated commissioner they had ever had. And then let's see, Murray, Smyth, Glennan and Gordon Dean.

Gordon we've talked about. Gordon had a great magic, he was a great writer and he presented things

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beautifully, and he's just one of the most effective people working with the Congress that I've ever seen.

He didn't do as well with the Defense Department because there was a fellow by the name of Bob [Robert] LeBaron, who was on a military liaison committee. He was thoroughly anti-AEC. You know the military never got over the fact that the 1946 act had given the production to a civilian agency.

My observation really was that it was a good thing that another agency was created to develop and produce these weapons, because if it had been under the Joint Chiefs, which was the way that military people wanted it, in the state that the Joint Chiefs were then, in 1947, and perhaps even today, the weapons development would have been seriously delayed because it would have gotten into the roles and missions fight. This was always the great weakness of the Joint Chiefs.

I think the program would have gotten submerged in intra-Pentagon debate, because remember in 1945, when they dropped the bomb, only one service could carry it and that was the Air Force. It wasn't until '49 that we began to get tactical weapons, and that fool army cannon, the atomic cannon, I think you had a lot more

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vigorous and diversified atomic energy program than we would have had if it had been under the direction of the military. The way it worked redounded to the benefit of the military.

HESS: A short time ago you mentioned that when you first came to the commission that you heard stories about the development of the thermonuclear bomb. What were those stories?

ZUCKERT: Oh, I heard the stories which have been printed a great many times about the great debate and the presentation by Oppenheimer. Apparently Oppenheimer's presentation left the President really cold. I don't know whether this is true or not, but I heard it from the people who were there.

This was another one of those Truman decisions that I think will make a man go down in history as having been a great President who made the big decisions: Korea, the NATO, Marshall plan, and the building of the thermonuclear weapon.

Of course, it's clear to me that maybe thermonuclear weapons are a great menace, and they should be curbed. I mean obviously they are bad for the

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safety of the world, but I wouldn't have liked to have lived in the world in the atmosphere of the '50s with the Russians having thermonuclear weapons and our not having had them.

HESS: How much of the commission's time was given over to the development of peacetime nuclear or thermonuclear uses?

ZUCKERT: We spent a lot of time, as I say, we hammered out the '54 act. Of course, the act was introduced in the Congress, but we did an awful lot of the work behind the '54 act, which was the foundation of private power in the nuclear business. We paid a lot of attention to the development of radioisotopes, all of us were active in that matter.

HESS: We hear a lot in the news today about opposition in certain sectors to the development of nuclear power plants. What's your view on that?

ZUCKERT: Well, I feel the nuclear plant will turn out to be the source of thirty, forty or fifty percent of our power by the year 2000. But one of the basic reasons for the opposition is that if you ever did have an

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accident, it would be a terrible, terrible thing. Unlike the conventional power plant blowing up or an explosives plant going up, your danger is much more extensive, so from the long run point of view, it isn't a bad thing that the development has been slowed down and the great reemphasis has been placed upon safety. I really think that the environmental effects of nuclear plants (e. g. thermal pollution), is exaggerated. What I'm concerned about is the safety aspect.

HESS: Could a plant of that nature explode?

ZUCKERT: Oh, sure. Surely if you don't have redundant safety measures, you could get a disaster. The important thing is to make sure that the chances are one in a hundred million.

HESS: What do you see as Mr. Truman's greatest domestic achievements?

ZUCKERT: You know that's strange, I've always looked, probably because of the field I was in, I always looked at the accomplishments that had to do with the

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world, like the dropping of the first atomic weapon. I always have felt that this was one of the most important decisions -- not most important, but that it's one of the most misunderstood decisions. If they hadn't dropped that atomic weapon, nobody in the world would ever have believed...

HESS: That we had it?

ZUCKERT: They might have believed that we had it because we could have demonstrated that, but nobody could have believed what it could do, what its possibilities were. Even with an atomic bomb having been dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the period when I was in the commission, we always had people saying, "You aren't telling us enough about the atomic bombs, and about the thermonuclear weapons."

In fact, what was there to tell them? They didn't need to know how it was made. But there was this absolute -- really the basic inability to comprehend it, and I think that by dropping the bomb (this is a macabre thing), but by actually demonstrating what it could do, it has produced much more realism in

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people's mind, of the necessity to control these weapons and their proliferation. To my mind, it's made a careless use of atomic weapons much less likely than there would have been if they hadn't actually been used. Back to Mr. Truman, I always think of him in connection with the other decisions of course, Marshall, NATO, and the Korea decision.

On the domestic front, I don't know. I would have to go back and refresh my memory. I remember little things like the railroad strike, but -- full employment I guess in -- what was that, in '49?

HESS: The Full Employment Act of '46.

ZUCKERT: '46. Of course, I'm always wrong on these things, not for fifty or a hundred years, I've not had much practice but I think that Mr. Truman will be considered to have made the big decisions wisely. I think that those of us who were close to it, close to any administration, I don't care which one it is, always see the imperfections.

HESS: Anything else to add on to this point?

ZUCKERT: No, I was just going to say the imperfections

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such as -- oh, -- I don't think the President's strong suit was administration, but I don't think that when you look back over history, a man can be a wonderful administrator and still not have been a very good President. I think the President had a great common denominator approach, magnificent intuition, wonderful commonsense, and an understanding of the system and an understanding of the American people.

HESS: What was one of the signs of his lack of administrative ability?

ZUCKERT: Well, I thought the White House organization was rather primitive, but on the other hand you look now and...

HESS: It was a rather new idea back in those days.

ZUCKERT: Sure, well, the expansion -- Roosevelt I guess was in there with the...

HESS: The "Anonymous Assistants."

ZUCKERT: The "Anonymous Assistants," with Jim [James H., Jr.] Rowe and people like that. And I think that the idea or the need for it, the demand for it, a big organization

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of the White House, hasn't yet fully been solved.

Sometime I'll have to study that problem, of why it came about that we could go from a very personalized White House such as Truman had with mostly friends on his staff, or got to be friends with him, pretty informal operation, why we would go on from that to what we see today under.

HESS: Do you think that Eisenhower's Chief of Staff Sherman Adams and his setup was part of the evolutionary process?

ZUCKERT: Oh, yes, and even though it didn't work with Sherman Adams, for a lot of reasons, I think that people began to see the necessity to take some of the burden off of the President.

HESS: Did you ever speak with Sherman Adams, as you stayed on for a short period of time?

ZUCKERT: No, but Gordon Dean had some pretty unsatisfactory interviews with Adams. Adams was a pretty insolent, high-handed little man and the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission was not used to talking with a subordinate, or being talked to in the way that Adams

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did. This you didn't get in the Truman White House, you could get to the President when you wanted to speak with him.

HESS: Just as a final recapitulation, would you briefly list the times that you may have met with President Truman or saw President Truman, to see if we are leaving anything out.

ZUCKERT: I don't remember any informal meetings that I had with the President.

HESS: Both at the time you were at the Pentagon and at AEC.

ZUCKERT: No, I can't recall. There were a lot of big occasions.

HESS: State occasions and things of that nature?

ZUCKERT: The Democratic Jefferson-Jackson Day dinners, the parties in the White House garden, that type of thing, but I don't recall ever meeting with the President as an Assistant Secretary.

HESS: Did you go to the convention in Philadelphia in 1948?

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ZUCKERT: No.

HESS: Did you try to keep yourself separated from politics?

ZUCKERT: We were kind of expected to keep ourselves separated from politics. This ties in with what I said about President Truman in the Pentagon procurement field. I did go to a meeting in Chicago one time, a Democratic meeting. Symington was there, and the President came, and Senator Barkley was there and you'd see one of these men, they had panel sessions. But most of the time we were encouraged not to get into political business. We always contributed as top assistants, of course, but outside of that we were not active in politics.

HESS: Did you think that Mr. Truman was going to win the election in 1948?

ZUCKERT: I certainly did not. My wife did, but I didn't.

HESS: Just a brief question about 1952: Who do you think that Mr. Truman would preferred to have seen as Democratic standard-bearer in 1952? Any opinions?

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ZUCKERT: Well, I don't ,have any opinions, I just can't conceive that Mr. Stevenson was his cup of tea.

HESS: Two dissimilar types.

ZUCKERT: That's right, Truman after all basically was a politician and Stevenson never was, I don't mean that in any denigrating fashion to the President. I think you've got to be a good politician to be a good President.

HESS: Do you have anything else to add regarding Mr. Truman or your position with the Air Force or the Atomic Energy Commission? Have we covered everything that you would like to say?

ZUCKERT: Good Lord, when I started out I didn't know how I was going to say anything, and I've been talking for two hours and fifteen minutes.

HESS: Well, we thank you for your time.

ZUCKERT: That's all right, it's been a pleasure being with you.

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