

Oral History Interview

with

STUART SYMINGTON

Surplus Property Administrator, 1945; Assistant Secretary of War for Air, 1946-47; Secretary of the U.S. Air Force, 1947-50; Chairman, National Security Resources Board, 1950-51; Administrator, Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 1951-52; U.S. Senator from Missouri, 1953-77.

Washington, D.C.

May 29, 1981

by James R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

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FUCHS: I think we'll just skip down to how you happened to go to St. Louis with Emerson Electric Company; what was the driving force behind that?

SYMINGTON: I was president of the Rustless Iron and Steel. Corporation in Baltimore, Maryland, the plant headquarters. The owner of the company decided to sell it to American Rolling Mill Company; so it was sold to ARMCO. At that time I lived in New York, for a year or so went into various situations but really wanted to get back into plants. Some New York bankers came to me about a company in St. Louis in trouble, called

[2]

Emerson Electric. Inasmuch as prior to my going back into the steel business I had been head of Colonial Radio Corporation in Rochester and Buffalo, New York, owned 51 percent by me and my people, and 49 percent by Sears Roebuck, I knew something about the electric business, so went to St. Louis to discuss whether to go out as head of Emerson. We worked out a deal, so in September, 1938, I took over as Chief Executive Officer of that company.

FUCHS: Did you have any Missouri connections before that? Were you acquainted with...

SYMINGTON: I had a great-great-uncle, I think, who was commander of Jefferson Barracks around the War of 1812; and I had another great-uncle who lived for some years in St. Joseph, Missouri. Except for that, no known connection.

FUCHS: Okay. Well, then, how did you come to the attention of President Truman to receive your

[3]

appointment as Surplus Property Administrator?

SYMINGTON: In 1941 the War Production Board asked if I would go to England and find out how to build the first power gun turret plant in the United States. I discussed it with various people, including Jim Forrestal, who had been a friend in New York, also Bill Knudsen, and went to England in the early spring of '41; packaged their blueprints and returned to the United States to build a plant. This was well before we entered the war. The British were keen for 30 caliber guns, did not believe in daylight bombing. American experts said 30 caliber was not enough; we had to have 50 caliber, also said daylight bombing was right provided the planes attacked in formation, with 50 caliber guns. The prints the British had given us were all stressed for 30 caliber, so we had to revamp all our plans, including the purchase of machinery I had cabled for, in code, from England.

As a result, we ran into what well might

[4]

be called a mess. Certain equipment was already coming in we knew we didn't want because of the tremendous differences between 30 and 50 caliber stresses. As a result, we created a deep pit, you might say, problems that had to be worked out. Right about at the bottom of said pit, for possibly political reasons, we were investigated by the House Armed Services Committee, chaired by one Andrew Jackson May, who issued a dreadful statement about our plant; none of it true.

I immediately called May's office, but could not reach him. They said he was on his way by motor to his home in Kentucky. So I talked to other members of his committee, including Republican members, and they arranged to give me a hearing without him. As a result of that hearing, without Chairman May, said committee completely vindicated our position. Incidentally, May was a crook, later went to jail for accepting bribes. It was my first sad episode with Government.

[5]

We had basically a fine organization, but got caught because of 50 caliber needing different machine tools, etc., from what we thought was needed when we were in England.

FUCHS: Did you convert your plant, or was this a new plant?

SYMINGTON: New plant. Remember we were already working hard punching, drilling, cutting metal, days, nights, and Sundays; cutting metal for war orders, so there was little or nothing in it profit wise for Emerson, these turrets. There had been passed a heavy excess profits tax. This turret business was on top of our regular business. Do you follow me?

FUCHS: Yes.

SYMINGTON: Our regular business was going great guns, so for the turrets we had to build a new plant, did so in Florissant, Missouri. Not too long after our indictment by the House Armed Services Committee, I received notice that the

[6]

Senate War Investigating Subcommittee planned also to investigate Emerson. I had barely met the then Senator Truman, did not know him well at all, but had had enough of investigations and knew this new turret business took a tremendous amount of everybody's time. We had a little bedroom and shower built next to my office; sometimes wouldn't go home, because turrets were needed yesterday, especially after Pearl Harbor.

We had had enough of investigations, however; had much work in our three plants downtown. So I called our lawyer, Sam Fordyce, at that time one of the leading lawyers of Missouri, and said, "Please draw up a contract to give this turret plant back to the Government; they can take it. We'll get a big gold key and turn it over to them in Washington."

He said, "You don't mean that." We got into a bit of an argument. I finally said, "Mr. Sam (he was a lot older than I), let's get it straight. Do you want to be our lawyer or don't you?"

[7]

Fordyce said, "Well, if you feel that way about it, all right."

"Thanks, please get up the papers."

Several days later called and asked, "Will you have lunch with me at the Noonday Club?"

"Sure, I'd be glad to."

I went down. With him was my old and close friend John Snyder. There was a fourth place at the table.

FUCHS: Had you already met Mr. Snyder?

SYMINGTON: Yes indeed, He was Emerson's banker and one wise man, was with the First National, our leading bank. I noticed a fourth place at the table. About halfway through lunch in came Senator Truman. After awhile, Fordyce said, "Harry, Stuart's going to quit this turret business."

I remember well when the Senator turned to me, then asked, "You're going to quit, eh?"

"You're damn right."

[8]

"Why?"

"Well," answered, "our people can't turn around without some Government employee looking over their shoulder and telling them what to do. We've had it, don't want any more part of it."

The Boss then observed, "The boys on the Anzio beachhead aren't quitting."

That hit home, you know, but I replied, "But they don't have people all over them like a bunch of locusts, telling what to do, not knowing what they were talking about."

Again the Senator observed, "The boys on the Anzio beachhead aren't quitting."

I looked at Fordyce and Snyder. Then Mr. Truman added, "If I give you my word that this investigation will be orderly, and that at any time you have a real problem you can come to see me in my office, will you go ahead?" You know, the Senator had all that incredible quiet strength in him. I replied "Yes, we will." So we had the investigation; it was orderly, well

[9]

done. Hugh Fulton was the Commerce counsel. When it was over, the then Senator wrote a much appreciated report about us. Incidentally, Emerson ended up getting two more Army and Navy E Awards than any of its competition.

There's a story in *Fortune* magazine, late 1943 that gets into all this, our first national story.

FUCHS: What was the name of that plant?

SYMINGTON: Emerson Electric, of Florissant, Missouri.

FUCHS: It was a new plant. It was private, but built with the Government's...

SYMINGTON: The Government put up the money, sure, about 12 million dollars. Emerson ultimately moved everything out there, and got rid of its plants in the city, concentrated in Florissant, built our new plant on farmland. When Jack Kennedy went out there to speak over 20 years later, running for President, Florissant was a

[10]

small town. I have a copy of that article. Would you like to see it? [A Yaleman and a Communist." *Fortune*, Volume XXVIII, No. 5, pp. 146-148, 212, 214, 216, 218, and 221]

FUCHS: Yes,

SYMINGTON: It sums up the development of Emerson by October '43; tells the story. Here it is. I was not the Communist.

FUCHS: You were the Yale man?

SYMINGTON: Right. Rough title, but okay history.

FUCHS: Did you have occasion to go to Mr. Truman at any time about an investigation?

SYMINGTON: Never. His men came in, exactly the opposite of the hacks from the Armed Services Committee. They were quiet, respectful of our employees, just wanted facts. Everything was as it should be. The boys in the plant ended up by doing a mighty fine job.

FUCHS: Did they hold hearings?

SYMINGTON: They didn't hold any hearings; just had

[11]

the investigation.

FUCHS: Just had an investigation; there wasn't any kind of a formal hearing?

SYMINGTON: That's right. You sort of take me back. No, the report was quite laudatory. Then we branched out, did a lot of work, for example, on turrets we hadn't made ourselves; built a small plant over at Lambert Field, in St. Louis County.

FUCHS: What year would you say that was?

SYMINGTON: '43-'44 . Some in 1945.

FUCHS: Now, did you have occasion to see him again prior to when you were appointed to Surplus Property?

SYMINGTON: Yes. I went down with John Snyder to the announcement of his election as Vice President in Lamar, Missouri where this Vice President was born; and where he was formally told he would be the next Vice President; a delightful evening, crowded and messy; a big crowd, everybody bouncing around. After he was elected but before he was inaugurated, he had lost his voice, so he went over to French Lick, Indiana, by himself, Then John Snyder said, "Let's go over and see the President."

"Sure,"

Emerson had a plane, We were told the little runway was 1,500 feet, but our pilot came back and stated, "This is ridiculous, it's not more than 800 feet."

"Well, what will happen if we try?"

"We'll end up in a cornfield,"

"Well, cornfields are generally pretty flat, so let's go ahead." He did, and we did end up in a cornfield; later a tractor pulled the plane out.

We took our two pilots up to visit with the Vice President to be in French Lick. A fellow Democrat, Tom Taggart, owned the big resort hotel; and we had a great time. I

[13]

noticed the way the President-to-be handled our pilots. They had previously asked, "Do you think we could shake his hand?"

"Sure."

The President-to-be made them feel so good you know. We spent all that day and much of the next day with him. By that time our plane was pulled out and we flew back to St. Louis.

FUCHS: This was between the time he was nominated and sworn in as Vice President?

SYMINGTON: Right. Then after President Roosevelt was again sworn in, the Vice President was sworn in. John Snyder and I later gave a reception for him in the Carlton Hotel here, for him and Mrs. Truman. John would remember more about that than I. It was a very pleasant reception. I saw a lot of people for the first time that I got to know quite well afterwards.

FUCHS: Any anecdotes you can recall either at French Lick or at the reception? People are always

[14]

interested in these as footnotes to history; illustrative of his character and so forth.

SYMINGTON: Well, I remember when we were at French Lick Mr. Truman couldn't talk much, you see, because he had lost his voice. We had lunch. Suddenly he said, "I think I'd like to take a little nap, do you all mind?"

"Of course not," so Mr. Truman just put his head like this on his hand and promptly fell asleep at the table. I remarked, "That man's going to live a long time." He had the capacity to relax.

FUCHS: And he did.

Were you involved in politics in any way at that time? Did you go to the convention for instance?

SYMINGTON: No, I was a Democrat; my father was a Democratic judge in Maryland when he died. I was not sympathetic with more than two terms

[15]

for a President, which didn't put me into too good shape with all-out diehard Roosevelt people. I just thought it was wrong. Perhaps my father-in-law, a Republican Senator from New York, convinced me. The American people now believe it wrong, because they've limited the Presidency to two terms. Up to then, however, I had stayed out of politics.

I got to know Mr. Truman primarily through John Snyder. The day Mr. Roosevelt died, I called John, knowing how close they were. He was in Mexico, as I remember, said the President wanted him to come to Washington right away.

At the time, Emerson was working on a merger, so I later asked John if he would introduce me to the Attorney General whom I had barely met, Tom Clark, Snyder answered, "I'd be glad to. Incidentally, the President wants to see you. "

So, I went over to the White House, where the President said, "Stu, I want to dump a load of coal on you." The load of coal was to be

[16]

Chairman of the Surplus Property Board. In World War I, many concerned with war surplus disposal went to jail. Some people, friends, urged me not to do it. My father-in-law was a conservative Republican from New York. He thought Mr. Truman was pretty liberal, but said, "Of course, you should accept if the President of the United States asks you to help with his great job, you should be honored to accept." So, I never went to see Attorney General Clark on that private deal, the next day went over to the White House and joined Mr. Truman's team.

Whereupon Drew Pearson wrote three columns against me, heavily critical. What he didn't like was the fact I was a businessman. So I finally called Mr. Truman and said, "I know I'm giving you problems, getting a lot of bad publicity in the papers and all. Why don't I just go back to Missouri and you get somebody else for this job, My company is already having

[17]

problems, pulling out of military orders as the war winds down. Thanks to Pearson, Senator Joe O'Mahoney of Wyoming is running these hearings."

The President replied, "I'm not behind you 100 percent; I'm behind you 200 percent. Don't you take any sass from that O'Mahoney." The hearings were being chaired by Senator O'Mahoney, with whom Mr. Truman had served, He added, "Don't let him put you down, You're the man for this job and I want you there," That was the President's way. He always stood squarely behind those who worked for him. I was reassured, went down to O'Mahoney who was ready to start another hearing. O'Mahoney had been reading Pearson and liked the publicity; a nice fellow, Joe, but you know politics. As Chairman, he began telling me he wanted me to answer this, that and the other. So I said, "Now look, Senator O'Mahoney, I didn't want to come down here in the first place, only came because president Truman asked me. This is all

[18]

getting to be a big question with you as to whether I'm fit for this job. The publicity hurts me and my family. I suggest you call the President and tell him I'm not right for it. In that way I'll get out of your hair and his hair, and go back to my business. It is nice to have known you," O'Mahoney gulped, said, "Now, wait a minute."

I replied, "Don't worry about it."

Just then a bell rang for a vote, and he said, "I must go over to the Senate. Will you walk over with me?"

"Sure."

Halfway over Joe turned and asked, "If I put a statement out this afternoon that I think you're well qualified for the position, will you accept?"

"I would." O'Mahoney knew the President, didn't want to look him in the eye, was just putting on a show, and liked the Pearson publicity. Later in the Senate we became friends,

[19]

O'Mahoney and I. That's the story about how I came into Government, first as Chairman of the Surplus Property Board. Later I went to the President and reported, "You can't handle these disposals properly with a Board. I'm having trouble with the Board's Executive Assistant. He wants to run the show and tries to take over. So President Truman abolished the Board, appointed me Administrator. That ended any major problems. We had nothing more than normal ones, no major scandals.

Later the Administration wanted me to actually sell all remaining surplus by running the War Assets Corporation. I said I couldn't do it without some shoe leather. Everyone working for me as Administrator wanted to get back to normal activity; those assigned by the military or those anxious to get back to their business. They were asking me to build up a merchandising organization by means of a dying organization. I checked with people who knew more about merchandising than I. All

[20]

said, "You can't do it." So I asked for a highly thought of organization, the RFC.

They replied, "No, the RFC has too fine a name, but they are not salesmen; they're banking people."

I answered, "But you don't have to be a salesman if you take the best honest offer. That's all that's needed so long as there's nothing crooked." But I couldn't sell that. (Ironically, before I left Government, the Executive Branch, problems developed over at the RFC, and my last job before running for the Senate was RFC Administrator.) But in 1946 they refused to have the RFC involved, so I resigned.

Then John and Bob Rannegan said, "The President does not want you out of his Administration, offers you three positions: Assistant Secretary of State for Commercial Air problems, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Air, or Assistant Secretary of War for Air." Well, at

[21]

Emerson we had had no trouble with the Navy on contracts. They were experienced and efficient. There were some troubles with the Army, not too much. But the Air Force was sort of a bastard child of the Army, much like the Marines with the Navy. Everything had to be done over by the Army after it had already been done by the Air Corps, a mess. I originally came from Baltimore, near Annapolis, was Navy oriented, but thought my business experience could be of more service to the Army Air Force; knew it was a coming service because of all it did in World War II to help win. So, I took that latter job and stayed in Government.

FUCHS: They seemed to have you connected with the Air, why was that, for some reason in particular?

SYMINGTON: We had been doing a lot of work with most airplane companies, power gun turrets, putting them on planes. We put something on

[22]

most bombers built by the Army and Navy.

FUCHS: I thought maybe you had some prior connection with flying or...

SYMINGTON: I was never a flyer. It's a game I think--what's your first name?

FUCHS: Jim.

SYMINGTON: It's an art, Jim, that you either ought to get serious about or stay out of. When I was with the Air Force, pilots used to say, "I don't want to be the boldest, just the oldest."

FUCHS: To go back just a second when you went into the White House and you accepted the Surplus Property Board job, did you see President Truman personally then?

SYMINGTON: Sure.

FUCHS: Do you recall. anything that he had to say at that time?

[23]

SYMINGTON: I remember his saying, "I want to dump a load of coal on you," meaning the Surplus Property job. A wonderful part of Harry Truman was the way he would back you. Later I said, "We can't run this operation with a Board." John Snyder would help of course. He was as close to Mr. Truman as anybody when it came to such problems. So the President made me Administrator and it worked out. We had no serious problems. I went to Edgar Hoover and he kindly lent me an agent who, much later on, became a lieutenant general in the Air Force, fine man. I had some small problems with crooks, you might say. All the way we had few problems, but I would not agree to try to sell the stuff unless they'd give me some shoe leather. When you take what you can get you don't have to be a salesman.

One time I took one of the biggest sales executives in New York out to Chicago to give some advice. We went into a war surplus place.

[24]

I had made motors with Emerson, said, "We would like to look at some fractional horsepower motors."

The man said, "We haven't any of those today, but how'd you like a nice life raft?" I thought my friend, executive vice president of Graybar Electric, was going to faint.

FUCHS: Were there any other problems that you could think of as Surplus Property Administrator?

SYMINGTON: Some problems, but if you take a job like that, you want your people to handle as much as possible. I'd finally say, "Listen, you're supposed to make that decision yourself. Why come to me about it?" On that job, seldom did I see the President. He went to Potsdam that summer, then back to Missouri for a time; and then of course out to the start of the United Nations, in California, you know. I felt I had his confidence, so we worked on our own.

FUCHS: To your knowledge, was there someone other

[25]

than the president that was pushing you for one of these jobs that they offered you?

SYMINGTON: I think John Snyder probably told him I wouldn't steal the silver. He had been my banker, lent me money for my company.

FUCHS: Did you know Robert Hannegan in his earlier days?

SYMINGTON: I met him down here, didn't know him until after coming into Government.

FUCHS: You weren't privy to any of the discussions and so forth, different things that went on to make Truman the nominee in '44?

SYMINGTON: No. I've heard many different versions, some from Hannegan.

FUCHS: What were your principal duties as Assistant Secretary for Air? You were under Robert Patterson at first.

SYMINGTON: Yes. He was our boss, as Secretary of War.

[26]

I went to Genera. Spaatz, one of the great men of my life, chief of staff of the Army Air Force. A former Assistant Secretary, also an old friend before either of us came into Government, Robert Lovett of New York, a banker, told me what a fine fellow Spaatz was. Upon joining up I said to Spaatz, "There are two things I would like to do. One, give you all, if possible, the benefit of any business experience I've had, because your logistic situations are pretty well screwed up with the Army." As example, shortly after I came, the Army issued a directive that everything, I think over \$100,000 that the Air Force bought had to be reviewed by the Army. At one time it had been everything over \$5,000,000. Well, that meant all the work we did had to be done again.

"Would like to eliminate that duplication. The other: you and your staff decide what we should have from the Congress in the way of an Air Force, then I will try to sell that to Judge Patterson and the Bureau of

[27]

the Budget and the President and the Congress."

FUCHS: How did you find Patterson to work with?

SYMINGTON: Wonderful. Wonderful man.

FUCHS: No criticism of him? What about inter-service rivalry? It was quite rampant then, and do you think that was a lack of administrative ability in Patterson or is this something that nobody could really control at the time?

SYMINGTON: Well, it certainly had little or nothing to do with Patterson. FDR had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy. They told me, now forgotten, just how many pictures of ships they took out of the White House after he died. But he could choose good men. Of course Mr. Truman. Then General George Marshall, who was above politics; Ernie King, Chief of Naval Operations, a very fine man but partisan. The Navy did not want anybody to touch their Air. General Eisenhower, then Army chief of staff, agreed with President Truman and Secretary Patterson that

[28]

the nation needed a single Secretary of Defense, with the authority of administration over the Services as against just coordination. The Navy didn't want that. They had some able men like Admiral Arthur Radford, later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs under Eisenhower, who wanted to protect the future of Naval Air. The President and Eisenhower and Patterson were anxious to get that administrative capacity in the proposed new Secretary of Defense. Forrestal and his people were opposed; and when we finally did get a "unification" bill, it wasn't the bill we wanted at all.

FUCHS: It wasn't?

SYMINGTON: No. The Navy won their battle for "coordination" as against "administration." That, in effect, became Forrestal's great problem when he came in as the first Secretary of Defense. He had no true administrative authority. Later that authority was increased,

[29]

then increased again. The new bill violated one of the basic principles of management, namely, no responsibility without adequate authority. This is true especially in Government where you don't show profit or loss.

FUCHS: Do you think Forrestal was the main and telling factor in the Navy...

SYMINGTON: He and Admiral King and others like Admiral. Radford. Spaatz used to say, "There are two governments in Washington, the Government of the United States, and the United States Navy." I remember General Omar Bradley, normally a quiet man, calling some of the opposing admirals "Fancy Dans" in the public hearings. But those admirals were sincere. They didn't want anybody to touch Naval Air. Between the two world wars the Navy had been the force in being, You have to fight for your own team. I was Air Force. But the Navy felt they had a navy, and an army--marines--and an air force; and they wanted to

[30]

keep it that way. Between World War I and World War II, the Army hardly had enough money to buy food. There wasn't any Air Force, see what I mean?

FUCHS: Yes.

SYMINGTON: The Navy had its Army--the Marine Corps--and a Navy, and an Air Force. It would be their responsibility. They believed you shouldn't have had expensive and wasteful triplication. That was the thinking of some of the Navy people.

FUCHS: You think all of the wings should have either been put in under the Air Force or gone into the Navy?

SYMINGTON: Yes. When Spaatz thanked Mr. Truman for the "third Service," the President replied, "I don't want three, I want one." Spaatz often quoted this reply of the President.

As things developed, it had a lot to do with the problems of Jim Forrestal. He didn't

[31]

have the authority to properly handle his new job, but he had been the leader who fought for said job not to have adequate authority.

FUCHS: Why would he turn to Forrestal, he had really opposed unification, when it came right down to it?

SYMINGTON: Well, Secretary Patterson first turned it down. Forrestal had a fine reputation and was a good man.

FUCHS: Put responsibility to his country and the job ahead of...

SYMINGTON: Absolutely, always.

FUCHS: What did you think about the appointment at the time?

SYMINGTON: I was all for it. Forrestal was a good man, and he knew the Pentagon.

FUCHS: The Navy just had better public relations because they had been the first line of defense?

[32]

SYMINGTON: Right. My father-in-law was once Chairman of Military Affairs in the Senate, the latter part of the Wilson Administrations. He knew a lot about and was fond of the Army. He once told me that in the Twenties a regiment was ordered to move from Philadelphia to St. Louis, but didn't have enough money to ride by train, so they had to walk; added, "Many of them weren't there when the regiment finally got to St. Louis." Then later Herbert Hoover came in, and he even forgot about the Navy, or so the Navy thought. When FDR came in, things switched around for the Navy. Until World War II loomed, the Army was cut to the bone and there was no Air Force. The Navy was the force in being, operating in such places as Nicaragua and Cuba with the Marines.

FUCHS: Mr. Truman got into it with the Marines,

SYMINGTON: Yes, we all remember that one. But events forced a major change, before, during,

[33]

and after World War II, One day I was called up to Patterson's office, spring of '46, probably around the time of the famous Fulton Iron Curtain speech. Patterson called, "Come up here at 5 o'clock on the dot." There he had the Secretaries and the Chiefs, and Mr. Churchill. I'll never forget the latter's little talk. He said, "You know, everybody believes the miracle of this war was the atomic bomb. That is not true. The miracle of this war was after what you did, with your armed services between World War I and World War II, what was left"--and he mentioned Marshall, MacArthur, Eisenhower, King, and Arnold as I remember--"those men and their colleagues were so good, within four years they created the greatest fighting machine in the history of the world." Then he recited to us a poem. Years later, when in the Senate, I made a strong speech for the Army to have more money. A young lieutenant colonel, who later became Secretary of the Senate, was aide to the then Chief of

[34]

Staff of the Army, General Maxwell Taylor. His name was Stan Kimmitt. He heard my talk in committee and with some emotion left me the poem over there on the table after coming to my office. Note and please read it. As you will see, it is signed, "A Marlborough Veteran." Churchill was a Marlborough, and that's the poem he quoted to us in Secretary Patterson's office.

FUCHS: Very interesting. You have a good memory. You kind of had a little controversy over the seventy group Air Force, and I believe you and Forrestal, who was an old friend of yours, saw things differently in regard to that?

SYMINGTON: Remember those two premises I made; business administrative experience, and the rolling balls, the Air staff's wishes on the Hill. We knew we had to cut down, had been up to some 243 groups. So, I said to General Spaatz, "Look it over and please give me the

[35]

absolute minimum number we can have to carry out our assigned mission."

He said, "Give us some time."

Working with his staff, he came up with 70; and even cutting down to 70 was a very heavy cut. When Budget went below that I protested to the Bureau of the Budget and the Secretary of Defense. The Congress picked up our protest. Many Senators and Congressmen were close to some generals and admirals if they had been there for some time. They had appointed a lot of them. So there was no reason why they could not register their protest with influential members of the House or Senate Armed Services or Naval Affairs Committees. That was done plenty. I was satisfied with 70 groups.

FUCHS: Did you and the President ever discuss this?

SYMINGTON: In 1948, I don't know whether we did or not. In 1949 I know we did. The President had

[36]

a lot of us in the Cabinet Room and said, "This is the military budget this year. If anybody doesn't like it, now is the time to speak up, otherwise I'm going to believe you are supporting it." He was talking to a roomful of people, but looking right at me. I got the message, then said, "Mr. President, are you asking me to, in effect, perjure myself before a Congressional committee?"

The President thought for a minute, then replied, "Will you give me your word of honor you will not originate the question?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

Typical of Mr. Truman, he then said, "Tell them what you believe."

The next year it was decided we had to go even lower, much lower. I could see it coming; went to the President and said, "I do not want to leave Government if you want me to stay, but just can't take responsibility for cutting the Air Force any further."

[37]

FUCHS: What were they going to cut it to?

SYMINGTON: Oh, way down, well below 50 groups.

FUCHS: To fit the budget?

SYMINGTON: Yes, way down, 45, or something like that.

Yes, and it went down to 50-some I think in '49. I don't remember the exact figures; all this was a long time ago. Hardly had I left when we ran into the Korean war, doubled what I had asked for and doubled it again. I had told him I would stay in Government, be honored to, but not with the Air Force.

He asked, "Well, have you anybody in mind to replace you?"

I replied, "Yes, sir, I have somebody, the Chairman of the Presidents Air Policy Commission report, Tom Finletter, and I'd recommend him. He's also a good Democrat."

The President then said, "Is there anything you'd like to do?"

[38]

"Yes, frankly, and if you want me to stay, I'd like to run this new Atomic Energy Commission because I think this nuclear business is going to get bigger by the minute."

He replied, "I promised that to a law partner of Brian McMahon," the Senator from Connecticut; "a man named Gordon Dean. I have promised him that." I had a friend who was close to the President and close to me, Sidney Souers. Shortly thereafter, the same day, Souers called and asked, "We'd like to know,"--presumably he and the President--"would you be interested in being Chairman of the National Security Resources Board?"

I liked that, primarily for one reason. The Secretaries had been moved off, and properly so, of the National Security Council, NSRB would put me back on the Security Council by statute. There I could look in the eyes of those who were constantly cutting the services further down; and also, in discussion, get my thinking over

[39]

to the President. I took that job; after a year desired to return to Emerson, so told the President. He said, "I don't like what I hear is going on over at the RFC. If you'd go over there and straighten that thing out, I will not ask you again." So I did. That was in 1951; at that time the RFC was getting a poor reputation, political loans and some funny business. There were fine people there. I had also the priceless advice of John Snyder, who once ran it and am confident suggested the idea of my going over to the President.

FUCHS: I thought that there were some who felt the NSRB should have been under the Security Council?

SYMINGTON: I didn't and don't know anything about that.

FUCHS: Truman didn't know Sidney Souers when he first went to Washington, even though he was a Missourian. Do you know how he came to his attention?

[40]

SYMINGTON: I'm not sure that's entirely correct. Sid came from Southeast Missouri, where some of Truman's close friends, like Neal Helm--believe that was his name--were down there. Some of the President's friends and most ardent supporters came from that part of the state, Souers had a partner, whose name slips me, down in Kennett, Missouri. The President became devoted to Souers, without reservation. Sid saw him day after day, about every day, you know, he was in no real sense a political person. He loved the President, and respected the President. It was mutual. I know that, never heard Mr. Truman speak more highly of anybody than of Sidney Souers. But there were some people around the President--without getting into names--who apparently only wanted to tell him what they felt he would like to hear.

FUCHS: We would like to hear the names, you can...

SYMINGTON: I would not want to get into that.

[41]

FUCHS: Historians would like to hear that.

SYMINGTON: Would rather not. He had some devoted staff people; people like John Snyder, Clark Clifford, Charley Murphy, and Sid.

FUCHS: Then you felt that Souers as executive secretary of NSC did an excellent job?

SYMINGTON: As far as I know and ever heard, he did. Again, I never heard Mr. Truman speak more highly of any man.

FUCHS: In your boosting of the seventy group Air Force, Forrestal, I think, wanted 55 or 56; did you have some rather acid discussions with him about it? I know, for one thing, Drew Pearson made it seem like it was almost a personal feud with Forrestal.

SYMINGTON: That's a trouble with the press, one of the basic problems we have in America. They're often not interested in "content," rather in

[42]

"discontent." The degree of difficulties. Because of the infinitely superior position of the Navy in Washington between two world wars, and the little Air Force, part of the Army, sort of a stepchild; even after Mr. Truman established a separate service, at first it was really rough going.

One time I was talking to Air Chief Marshal Sir John Slessor, a great aviator, badly crippled in World War I flying for General Allenby in the Middle East, a wonderful human being. He once said, "You know, Stuart, the Royal Navy has one power the Royal Air Force has never been able to equal, the 'dining out' power." In effect, that was true at that time over here.

The Army and Navy were just as upset with what Forrestal gave them as we were. But, I think it's fair to say he didn't cut the Navy as much as the Army or Air Force. Royall, Secretary of the Army, was really in a stew about it. The 70 group program of the Air

[43]

Force by then also had some tremendous advocates in the Congress. It spread all around why we wanted 70 groups. Perhaps the chief advocate of that program, when he was in the House of Representatives, was Lyndon Johnson. I thought he and they were right.

FUCHS: Did you personally see the decline in Forrestal's health? What did you observe about that?

SYMINGTON: Very sad. At one time he even accused me of being responsible for an article which he said was coming out in *Time* magazine, the result of something Pearson or Winchell said about him; something about his jumping over the back fence when robbers came to the front, leaving his wife in the house. I knew nothing about it, immediately called Roy Alexander, formerly with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, currently running *Time*. Roy was a good friend of both his and mine.

He said, "My god, we're only running this story because we thought it would help him.

[44]

We wanted to correct that wrong story in that column."

Sometime later, early 1949, Forrestal called and asked me to get him a lawyer because, he said, "You are one of two people left I can trust and I want to change my will." I asked if he was sure, The reply, "Yes." So I got him a top lawyer, Paul Porter, who was very experienced in Washington politics. After they met, Porter called to say, "He's not in his right mind."

Didn't you tell me you talked to Bob Lovett?

FUCHS: I didn't personally.

SYMINGTON: Somebody did, I was told.

FUCHS: The man we had on the special project did.

SYMINGTON: I see.

Lovett knew also that he was going out of his mind. He was working very hard, his marriage was not going too well, and he found himself in

[45]

an impossible position, a position of working hard against Mr. Truman to prevent the job he ultimately would hold from having the authority he needed. He had been a strong advocate of "coordination" as against "administration." By the time we finally got a bill through the Congress it was not what Patterson, Eisenhower, and Mr. Truman desired. Clark Clifford knows that. As Counsel to the president he was instrumental in drafting it. But we didn't get that bill, because the Navy lobby was so strong. Vinson, Chairman of House Naval Affairs; Tydings, Chairman of Naval Affairs in the Senate, those people just did not want anybody to be able to tell the Navy exactly what to do. I don't blame the Navy, They were and are very strong, have their own Army, the Marines, and their Air. So when he became the first Secretary of Defense he found he didn't have adequate authority. I think I told you about his calling regarding the seventy group program, didn't I?

[46]

FUCHS: I don't recall.

SYMINGTON: One day Gene Zuckert, Assistant Secretary of Air, came in, terribly upset, saying, "We get only 3-1/2 billion."

And I said, "I'm sure that's not right"

Just then Spaatz came in the other door and said, "We only get 3-1/2 billion."

I said, "It can't be," So I called Secretary Forrestal on the open box and said, "I understand we only get 3-1/2 billion."

He replied, "Well, that's right."

"But you've never talked to me about it."

"I haven't had time."

"Well, I can't support it."

He said, "Then why don't you quit?"

I replied, "I won't quit, and I won't support it."

He said, "Come up here right away."

"Yes, sir," and I did. I said, "Based on my knowledge of the mission assigned us, the Air Force can't live with that amount of money."

[47]

Today that amount would buy about ten of the proposed new bomber. But that was all we were allotted, 3-1/2 billion. Actually, the whole Defense Department was allotted something like 13 billion 8. Way, way down.

We talked it out. I knew and he knew what would happen automatically when the proposed bill went to the Hill. Each Service had strong advocates up there, and all the companies were close to members of the staffs of the various Service Committees. There was no way he could have prevented the latter even if we wanted to.

There was a top secret new plane at Boeing, the B-52. Nobody should know anything about it. We all promised we wouldn't say a word. One day Scoop Jackson walked in with a photograph of that plane being towed across a road by the Boeing plant from one field to another with scores of people watching it from the road. All pretty silly, our not being allowed to even discuss it. Back to Mr. Forrestal. I

[48]

said I would support the bill, but if asked would have to reply, "I support the budget, but don't think we're getting enough money." What else could one do?

FUCHS: Did Forrestal hold regular staff meetings?

SYMINGTON: No.

FUCHS: Did you feel there was some lack of communication?

SYMINGTON: Not particularly. But the Secretary was getting very nervous. Even during '48 he was nervous, would often call up and ask a specific question. But I do not remember staff meetings with the Secretaries, certainly not on a regular basis.

As illustration, one day I got a call from the Secretary. He said, "I understand bombers cannot operate without fighter escort." On his staff he had no air Force representative, and the Navy was always working to be the

[49]

Service with maximum range. That was the principal reason they fought so hard against the B-36, which had very long range. The reason they worked for the B-47 was, although a fine airplane, the first jet bomber, it only had medium range. The B-36 was intercontinental.

To the assertion bombers could not operate without fighter escort I replied, "That's a lot of nonsense;" and I wondered where he got such misinformation,

He said, "Well, I get it on good authority."

"Well, it just isn't true."

He said, "Prove it to me. Come over to my house tomorrow night for dinner and bring somebody with you who can demonstrate it isn't true."

It all went back to problems we had talked about before, you know, such as the British not believing in formation bombing and not believing in daytime bombing. At first they just dropped bombs all over the place, didn't

[50]

have the Norden bombsight.

I called General Spaatz up right away, asked who would be the best person to take to this dinner. His reply, "LeMay." (General Curtis Lemay.) "I'll get hold of him."

Soon LeMay called. I asked, "Can you have dinner tomorrow night?"

So we had an interesting dinner; LeMay and Forrestal, John Sullivan, Secretary of the Navy, and an Admiral Parsons, who armed the first nuclear bomb against Hiroshima. The five of us had dinner. Towards the end, Forrestal said, "I've been told that bombers can't operate without fighters."

I replied, "You told me that and I said it was a lot of nonsense."

He asked, "Why do you say that?"

I replied, "Here's somebody who knows a lot about it from practical experience."

The Secretary asked, "General, what are your thoughts on it?"

[51]

"Well," replied LeMay, "one day in England we got our weather signals switched about a shuttle raid over Germany. The escort fighters didn't come up, so when the bombers, B-17s, broke into the sun around 20,000 feet we had no fighter escort at all; and when we hit the Dutch coast, we ran into the whole German fighter Air Force without any fighters at all."

Forrestal asked, "What raid was that?"

LeMay replied either Schweinfurt or Regensburg. (I can't remember, but it was one of those two.)

Forrestal observed, "You lost a lot of bombers, didn't you?"

LeMay replied, "Yes, sir, but we wiped the target off the face of the earth."

Forrestal asked, "How do you know that, General?"

LeMay put down the cigar he was chewing on and replied, "I led the first group, sir."

Forrestal looked at him a time, then said,

[52]

"That's good enough for me." And we never heard any more about it in any formal way.

FUCHS: Didn't they in World War II fly quite a few bombing operations without escort?

SYMINGTON: Yes, especially against Japan, but it was a tremendous advantage to have fighter support. That was why the capture of Iwo Jima was so important. You would only lose a fraction of what would be lost without fighter escort, but if you were willing to take the losses you could wipe out important targets. In Speer's biography-Hitler's architect-he says one more raid like the one on the Schweinfurt ball bearing plant would have been just about the end for the Nazis. Sure, you would lose more bombers without fighters, but, flying in formation, you could get the job done.

FUCHS: You could operate effectively.

SYMINGTON: Yes, but you could operate much more

[53]

effectively with fighter escort, especially as the range of fighters increased.

FUCHS: But you could operate without them? You could do your job?

SYMINGTON: You could, and we did.

FUCHS: Who was advising Forrestal? Do you have any idea from whom he got his information?

SYMINGTON: No, except from his staff and others. After he left, we had the famous "Revolt of the Admirals," summer of 1949. It was then that General Omar Bradley created a furor by calling some of the admirals, "Fancy Dans," The Navy people were determined to be the Service with

the longest range so they could maintain their treasured position as "America's First Line of Defense."

Each Service works to preserve its own territory. You can't blame them for that. That's why we worked for the new Secretary of Defense to be the boss, a true administrator,

[54]

not a coordinator. That's why--and Spaatz often told the story--when General Spaatz thanked President Truman for making the Air Force the "Third Service," Truman replied, "I don't want three. I want one."

At times things change. Modernity as against tradition. Some people in the Air Force now want to hold down the range of cruise missiles. The Navy and Army ask, "Why limit the range?" They are absolutely right in my opinion. Cruise missiles, for that matter ballistic missiles, can be fired from the air, from the sea, from under the sea, and from the ground. Just think of the billions you could save if the Services R & D worked together on these new weapons.

FUCHS: Did you know Eberstadt?

SYMINGTON: Yes. He and Forrestal worked at Dillon-Reed and he was a consultant to Forrestal. I was assigned the job of getting the unification

[55]

bill through the Congress; and to that end was assigned a young lieutenant general, brilliant, Lauris Norstadt, later head of SHAPE. Forrestal assigned Vice Admiral Arthur Radford, another brilliant officer, to oppose the unification effort.

One day Patterson got Eisenhower, Forrestal, and Eberstadt and me to meet in his office to talk about the proposed bill. The Eberstadt Report on the subject, when it came out, had recommended a separate Air Force, but it was loaded with "coordination" as against "administration." In this meeting I asked Mr. Forrestal, "Do you believe in that Navy report?"

He answered, "It's not the Navy report; it's the Eberstadt Report."

I said, "But the Navy paid for it."

Then Eberstadt interrupted to say, "Stuart, if you all will agree to coordination only at the top instead of straight administration, I think I could sell Jim [Forrestal] on a separate

[56]

Air Force." What he was actually saying was, "If you agree nobody can rule over Naval Air, we don't give a darn what the Army does with its Air."

The second time he asked, I answered, "Throw your 30 pieces of silver somewhere else."

Those of us who were for Mr. Truman's idea, "not three but one," knew how much saving there would be to the taxpayers of this country if we had true administration at the top. But Forrestal and the Navy just could not see it that way; and they had very great influence on the Hill. As an example, Ferd Eberstadt was a master of knowing people and getting around, and he was very bright and persuasive. He would go talk to Senators and Congressmen; and a bill of this character has many bases which must be touched before approval. Senator Saltonstall finally told his close friend Senator Wadsworth, "You better tell your son-in-law this is all he and his people are going to get out of our committee

[57]

[Senate Naval Affairs]." Saltonstall was quite a gentleman. So we took the bill as the Congress modified it and it had to be changed pretty quickly. As it came out originally, the Secretary of the Army or Navy or Air Force could, in effect, operate against the Secretary of Defense. You can't run anything like that. I had learned many years ago in private business never to take responsibility without adequate authority; and the new Secretary of Defense, as budgets were sharply cut, quickly found that out.

FUCHS: Was there feeling between Forrestal and Truman?

SYMINGTON: The story was around that Forrestal would not contribute to Truman's 1948 campaign. Louis Johnson, formerly Assistant Secretary of War under Roosevelt and former head of the American Legion, was very anxious to be Secretary of Defense. He had been Mr. Truman's fundraiser in 1948, primarily, through people like Harry Vaughan, another practicing Legionnaire, and

[58]

about as close to Truman as anybody, nice fellow, but not the wisest. Vaughan and other members of the White House staff were bitter at Forrestal because they didn't think he supported the President. Forrestal's great mistake: instead of coming in and saying "Congratulations on a wonderful victory; now I would like to resign as soon as convenient to you," he tried to stay on, didn't want to leave. This resulted in the rising criticism of him around the White House getting worse than ever. That's what Louis Johnson wanted; and he wanted the job, and he got it.

FUCHS: Why didn't he support him? Did he just feel his fortunes lay elsewhere? Why did he not support Truman?

SYMINGTON: Jim Forrestal was an outstanding banker. I'm sure he did not approve of some of President Truman's programs; and he was sure, as were most of my friends, that Dewey was going to win.

[59]

FUCHS: Did he expect to have something with the new administration?

SYMINGTON: I don't know.

FUCHS: He could have played it a little smarter, it seems to me.

SYMINGTON: All very sad.

FUCHS: Did you have any confidence that Truman would win in '48?

SYMINGTON: I honestly did not think he would win, gave him as much money as possible, and worked hard to help him in every way. I remember only two of my friends who believed strongly he would win; Clark Clifford and Bob Hannegan. Clifford was continuously impressed with the growing size of the crowds. There's a great story about Clark getting off the Truman train early one morning to buy *Newsweek*. He didn't know anybody had seen him get off the train. He looked at a poll

[60]

of the 50 leading political correspondents in the country. Said poll wasn't too favorable to Mr. Truman. It was Dewey 50, Truman 0.

In the meantime Mr., Truman had seen him get off the train, so when he came back, the President said, "Good morning, Clark."

Good morning, Mr. President,"

Did you buy anything out there?"

"No, no sir."

Truman said, "Let me see that poll." So Clark had to show it to him. The President looked up and said, "Well, they're all wrong." Some courage and some conviction. I'll never forget that big crow on the wall of the *Washington Post* Building when we all went down to meet him upon his return to Washington.

FUCHS: What was that?

SYMINGTON: About two stories high, a big black crow.

FUCHS: Really?

Who were your principal contacts in the

[61]

White House other than the president?

SYMINGTON: In the White House, I was fond of Charlie Murphy. Clifford was one of my closest friends. I was across the river--John Snyder was a very good friend. He was the one who probably got me into Government.

Some of them I did not get along with too well.

Mr. Truman studiously avoided giving power to his White House staff that has been characteristic of recent administrations. Staff people in the White House, with no responsibility but incredible authority is one of the reasons we're now in so much trouble.

FUCHS: How did you feel about John Steelman, the principal labor man? Do you have any reflection about that? It redounded to the disadvantage of the Department, of course.

SYMINGTON: I was never close to Steelman.

FUCHS: Recently there was an article about the

[62]

"Flying Wing" controversy between you and [John K.] Northrop.

SYMINGTON: Just a lot of nonsense.

The Air Staff, supervised by the Staff, always decided what plane to purchase. Then I was slated to tell the disappointed. The Air Staff only approved. That was their business, not mine.

When Northrop came in, very possibly I suggested he merge. The demand for planes after the war fell over 90 percent. When we talked, I might have said., "Why don't you merge with another company, one that already has some business." Very possibly I did mention Convair. They were one of the few that did have business. When years later I took over the RFC, they had made heavy loans to Northrop, and the RFC loan experts recommended we call the loans. I didn't want to do that if possible, so sent Jim Allen of RFC out to see Northrop, added, "Tell them out there I

[63]

want you on the Board because they owe us a lot of money. Then watch it for a time before we make any decision." Allen returned and stated, "They don't want me on the Board."

So I called Northrop and said, "Put Allen on the Board or pay the loan, one or the other, or I'll put you in receivership."

They put Allen on the Board, got a lot of subcontracting work. Sometime later Tom Jones was put in to run the place. He was a fine operator and fairly quickly turned the company around.

Still later, after they had turned it around, Allen offered to get off the Board, but they said, "We want you to stay on," which he did. And he became vice president and assistant to the president. Actually, therefore, I saved the company instead of putting it in receivership. Incidentally, the so-called "Flying Wing" was never put in production. Aerodynamic experts said it was fundamentally unsound. In the over thirty years since, it

[64]

has never been recommended, or any design remotely like it. Again, however, it was never my decision.

FUCHS: Did you deal with [George] Elsey in the White House, along with these other gentlemen?

SYMINGTON: He was an assistant to Clifford, a fine man, a great public servant. Dave Bell was also a great public servant. James Webb--couldn't say enough for him. As Director of the Bureau of the Budget, he appeared tough about Air Force requests. But that was his job.

FUCHS: Now Zuckert was one of your assistants at one time.

SYMINGTON: Yes.

FUCHS: Good man?

SYMINGTON: One of the best, Later Eisenhower put him on the Atomic Energy Commission. Still

[65]

later President Kennedy made him Secretary of the Air Force.

FUCHS: There was an Under Secretary, Arthur Barrows, whom I know very little about. How would you characterize him? What was his principal duty?

SYMINGTON: Well over fifty years ago I was making radio loudspeakers and radio sets in Rochester, New York; pretty young and inexperienced; but we survived the depression. The buyer of radios at Sears at that time, head of the hardware department, was Arthur Barrows, a stern son of a Vermont minister, and a very bright merchant; a superb administrator. Later on, after we sold the radio company to Sylvania Products, before I went to Emerson, Barrows had become president of Sears Roebuck. General Wood was chairman, Barrows president. When I came into Government, Barrows had fairly recently retired as president of Sears. Our problem in the new Air Force was that so few people

[66]

really understood business methods. There was no reason they should, Most of it had been done for them by the Army.

As example, once there was a discussion with Spaatz. He was raising Cain because before we became a separate Service nobody represented the Army Air Force up in the head man's office. Later Eisenhower took Norstadt away and put him up on the Army general staff. But anyway, the next minute Spaatz was saying, "Nobody who likes to fly wants to sit behind a desk."

I replied, "Well, you've got to make up your mind, which do you want?" See what I mean? So where we could get the most logistic help was from civilians experienced in the business administration field. So I went to Barrows and pleaded with him to be my Under Secretary; as able man with great prestige, former president of the biggest retail company in the world. He finally agreed and was a great help to us.

[67]

I remember one time, he was on a War Policies Committee or something with the Under Secretary of the Navy and Under Secretary of the Army. One day he came in and said, "I'll never, ever go to another meeting with those men. Nobody has any authority. Nobody can reach a decision. All we do is talk. Here was a man trained to know the importance of decision. So I said, "Well, we'll see if we can fix this." He became chairman of that committee, was sure to be fair. Then we began to move towards better understanding. He was a great help to all three services. He had worked like hell all his life, one of those fellows.

FUCHS: Now did he leave at the same time you did?

SYMINGTON: I don't remember; maybe before, maybe after.

FUCHS: What did you think about Louis Johnson? Do you remember how you felt at the time?

[68]

SYMINGTON: I never thought he was the right man for the job, because he had characteristics, not the right characteristics, for a chief executive. Upon becoming Secretary of Defense he was determined to cut everything. His chief Assistant Secretaries were pretty political. Not Regular Army. One was Paul Griffin, good fellow, former Legion bigwig. Another, Louis Renfrow, from Missouri, also had been a Reserve Officer and Legion bigwig; both friends of Johnson's in the Legion. Also, as Secretary, Louis Johnson was rough on subordinates in public; and that never sat well with the rest of us.

FUCHS: Was the feeling that Johnson was going beyond even what the President wanted in the way of reduced budget?

SYMINGTON: I think so, At a meeting of the Secretaries and the Chiefs, I remember General Joe Collins saying, "Mr., Secretary, this is the last

[69]

time I will ever approve a reduction in the United States Army while I'm Chief of Staff." Nobody could believe their ears, Johnson said, "Will you repeat that statement?"

Collins did, Joe has this episode in his excellent book. Morale went down. Forrestal was a big, broad, thoughtful man. I never felt the same way about Louis Johnson. The latter's big disagreements were with Dean Acheson. I don't think he had any concept of the limits of his authority.

FUCHS: I wouldn't think he would be Dean Acheson's kind of a man in any way.

SYMINGTON: We felt one of the reasons Averell Harriman came back into the White House was in effort to straighten this out. I believe the military should be wary of diplomacy until war is declared; then the State Department should keep its nose out and let the military do whatever is necessary to win. Then we

[70]

wouldn't get into these "non-win" wars. Try to stay out of wars, but, once in, do what is necessary to win.

FUCHS: Was your first knowledge of the bomb when it dropped?

SYMINGTON: I had little or no knowledge of it.

FUCHS: Any prior indications of the bomb?

SYMINGTON: I knew something was going on, but not what. It was a well-kept secret. This was before my work took me to the Pentagon.

FUCHS: Amazing.

SYMINGTON: In those days secrets were well kept. Recently General Gavin gave me a book on the Normandy invasion. Our feint towards Calais with Patton was successful to the point where Hitler and perhaps Rommel felt that was where the big one was going to be, when actually it was already going on, under Bradley towards

[71]

Cherbourg. In real danger sometimes even a democracy can really keep a secret. Even Mr. Truman didn't know much about it until he became president.

FUCHS: The National Security Council, of which you became a statutory member, how did you feel about its authority, its operation, the work of it?

SYMINGTON: A superb idea, well-conceived, and at least in my day well carried out. One of the three great improvements I'd make on our present system would be to have a super cabinet, of course the President and Vice President, State, Defense, Treasury, perhaps the Attorney General, and the heads of the party in power from the Congress, meet say every Thursday, once a week, to go over proposed legislation for the next week instead of just shipping it up with no really effective advance notice. The President and his Cabinet and staff would get opinion from

[72]

the heads of his party in the House and Senate, their thoughts as to chance of passage, etc.; in effect, a caucus, the president of course chairing the meeting and, after discussion, making the decision. Jimmy Carter had no such relationship and it hurt him badly in the long run.

FUCHS: Some lack there in liaison or communications?

SYMINGTON: Something was wrong. At first Reagan did a superb job in trying to bring the Democrats around to his thinking. His whole approach to the Congress was much better; and President Truman, President Kennedy, President Johnson, and President Ford had the great advantage of having worked on the Hill with the Congress. So did President Nixon, but after a time he became sort of a loner.

FUCHS: You think Carter came in rather naïve...

SYMINGTON: Upon coming to Washington he continued

[73]

to run against Washington. "Send me up there; I'll kick the bums out." That was the net of much of his campaign; and when he got up here as President, instead of saying, "Now, let's get together, fellows; after all politics is politics," he continued to run against people who were important to his ultimate success; this as I see it.

FUCHS: He believed what he was saying. It doesn't work that way in Washington, does it?

SYMINGTON: The greatest political remark ever made for my money was made by Governor Al Smith, Democratic presidential candidate in 1928, when he said, "In business you can tell 'em. In Government you've got to sell 'em."

FUCHS: There was Johnson, he had so much going for him, then he came a cropper in Vietnam.

SYMINGTON: Yes. It's important to be smart in the job, but also important not to be too smart.

[74]

FUCHS: Did you ever have much contact with General Marshall who Truman, of course, practically idolized?

SYMINGTON: Yes indeed. I thought he was a great man, close friend of my father-in-law. In 1946 Bob Hannegan and I went out to China with a message Mr. Truman wanted him to come back to Washington. He was out there trying to help with the rapidly deteriorating Chinese situation. We were riding around Nanking together when he suddenly turned to me, the General did, and said, "Symington, you make me feel old. I danced with your mother-in-law at your wedding when I was a Captain." A truly great man. I think Mr. Truman admired him as much as he did anyone.

One day I asked Mrs. Marshall, "When did you and the General start going together?" Mrs. Marshall was a friend of my mother in Baltimore, where my father was a judge. One day a client came up to Mrs. Marshall's first husband--I think his name was Brown--and said, "If you had tried

[75]

my case properly, I would have won, but you lost it," then pulled out a gun and shot him dead in the street.

Years later, so she told me, she was staying down with a friend at one of the Army camps in the South. Someone asked her to dinner. Her dinner partner was an officer named Marshall. After dinner this officer asked, "Can I escort you home?" She replied, "I was going to get a taxi, but that would be very nice of you." So they got in his car. "I suddenly turned and said, 'This is not the way to my home,'" He replied, "I know it." That was her first knowledge that General Marshall had been smitten with her rare charm. This story she told me herself.

FUCHS: Very interesting.

Did you have very amicable relations with Gordon Gray and Francis Matthews?

SYMINGTON: Sure. We had the famous so-called "Revolt

[76]

of the Admirals" in 1949, and somebody wrote a terrible attack on General Vandenberg, who by that time was Chief of Staff, the aviatrix Jackie Cochran, and me, and it was passed all around town. I went to Speaker Rayburn and asked for a hearing. He persuaded Chairman Vinson to hold them, was supposed to have said, "Let's get Stuart's integrity cleaned up and then we can go ahead with the Government." Rayburn and Vinson, two outstanding public servants.

FUCHS: What was the accusation with Jackie Cochran?

SYMINGTON: I don't remember too much about it, all kinds of stuff. Mostly all lies. So I persuaded Mr. Rayburn, and he in turn persuaded Chairman Vinson to give us those hearings. Get the record of them, summer of 1949. I was sworn in, sat down at the witness table, was about

ready to testify. Suddenly Mr. Vinson, always Navy, but a fine man, asked, "Is Mr. Cedric Worth in the audience?"

A big guy in civilian clothes answered, "Yes, sir."

[77]

So Mr., Vinson had him come up, sit down by me, and asked, "Do you know who wrote these charges against the Secretary and General Vandenberg?" All this in an open hearing.

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Because I did."

There was a rush for the door on the part of the reporters. Later it came out that Worth, a former Marine, was working in the office of Dan Kimball, then Under Secretary of the Navy. Steve Early at that time was Deputy Secretary of Defense. He called and said, "Stu, I want you to put a statement out that you have full confidence in the United States Navy." We talked, I saw no reason, so he, in effect, ordered, "Come down and see me," which I did. He then said, "This is a serious business." They had found out that Worth was working in Kimball's office. "As a citizen, regardless of all this infighting in the past, you must put out such a

[78]

statement and quick." I respected Steve Early plenty, so replied, "you write the statement and I'll sign it," which he did and I did.

Francis Matthews, Secretary of the Navy, came down to the office and was kind about it, saying, "As long as I live, I'll never forget this."

Those were some days.

FUCHS: Admiral Denfeld.

SYMINGTON: He was Chief of Naval Operations. But to us the real boss man was Radford. After these hearings he was in trouble, sort of exiled to Hawaii. Later, going through Hawaii to Korea, President-to-be Eisenhower with to-be Secretary of Defense Wilson, Wilson was impressed with Raddy and brought him back to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He was a superb Chairman, maybe the best. Very fair to the new Air Force. In the past he had fought for his team, always a good thing to do around this town.

[79]

FUCHS: Now, at the time of the Korean war, you were still on the NSC when that started, weren't you?

SYMINGTON: Sure. As Chairman of the NSRB I was a statutory member then.

FUCHS: '50-'51. How did that affect your operation? I believe there was some feeling then that mobilization should be centered in the NSRB and Charlie Wilson thought there should be a separate agency.

SYMINGTON: Charlie Wilson of General Electric came in later. Our job developed into working mostly on scarce materials, tin, aluminum, steel. I remember recommending to the President price and wage control. He replied, "Never under me." I said, "Then we're going to have to increase our capacity of many metals and materials. I remember the steel figures, 90 to 130 million tons or something like that.

He replied, "Okay, that's all right, go

[80]

ahead. But no overall price and wage controls."

Then Wilson came. By that time my job was pretty much over from the standpoint of setting policies. I wanted to go back to my business, to Emerson Electric. They'd held the job open for me, in the meantime had made my executive vice president, president. I was to come back as Chairman and CEO. Naturally I couldn't hold any title when in Government.

FUCHS: Someone has written that you had defended centering mobilization in the NSRB rather vigorously, and you in a Cabinet meeting one time got rather vehement about it. Do you recall anything about it?

SYMINGTON: No. I had some antagonism in the White House staff, don't know much about what some of them thought or did or said, just went ahead and did the best I could with some mighty fine people, really wanted badly to get back to private business.

[81]

FUCHS: You went over to Reconstruction. Now how did that come about? Do you recall any conversation with Truman about it?

SYMINGTON: Sure. With the utmost respect I told him definitely, "I want to leave the Government."

He replied, "If you really do, Stu, okay, but I'll tell you what I wish you'd first do. I've heard there is trouble over at the RFC, if you go over there and straighten it out, I'll promise not to ask you again."

John Snyder knew me, trusted me, was proud of the RFC he had built, wanted it cleaned up after stories of loans being "peddled." I am sure he spoke to the President.

Friends of the President, Ed Pauley out in California was one, reported in that some in the RFC ruling clique were actually selling loans, going up and down his state announcing, "If you want an RFC loan, you have to talk to me first."

[82]

When I went over, ran into a surprising situation. The RFC Board rarely met and really didn't know what was going on. The Executive Secretary of the Board was actually running the place. Then I found my own office had been bugged. This man had a direct connection with an underling in the White House. After a time I called him in and said, "Look, we're not going to have a Board anymore. The President has just signed an order abolishing the Board, making me the Administrator. (Incidentally, the President did this three times for me; in the NSRB he gave me the authority, and abolished the Boards regarding Surplus Property and RFC, three times.) So, to that RFC executive secretary, I said, "Therefore, there is no job for you here."

He replied, "This comes as a great shock."

"Sorry, but that's the way it is."

About an hour later this man came back to see me and announced, "I've decided not to quit."

[83]

I replied, "That is your decision."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Call a press conference in an hour, tell them you're being discharged for insubordination, add that some peculiar things have been going on which we plan to investigate further. Then you'll never get another job in Government."

He wrote his resignation out in the room of my secretary before he left; and that was that.

FUCHS: Did he leave the Government then?

SYMINGTON: A few weeks later one of those White House underlings called and asked, "Would you object if this man got a job in a different agency?" I replied, "No. Just keep him away from here."

FUCHS: How did you find out your office was bugged?

SYMINGTON: Another employee, wise to what was going on, tipped us off. The RFC had some truly fine people, but the wrong crowd had maneuvered into control. In any case, it was bad. Once found

[84]

out, however, it was rapidly straightened out.

FUCHS: One question. I don't quite understand. This Board was set up by statute. You went in as Administrator of RFC, could you dismiss a board like that?

SYMINGTON: In the case of the Surplus Property Board it was changed to make me Administrator, eliminating the Board by Executive action. This could not be done with the National Security Resources Board, formalized by statute, so the President took the authority of the Board away and gave it to me as Chairman. I don't remember just how it was done with the RFC, but the Board slipped away and I ended up with adequate authority as Administrator, with the responsibility.

FUCHS: Oh, Truman did. But you persuaded him to do it?

SYMINGTON: There was never any persuasion. He was a man of total integrity, wanted it cleaned up;

[85]

and when he gave you a job to do, he gave you the authority to do it. That's why we all were devoted to the man.

FUCHS: I see. You had that authority as Administrator to abolish the Board if you wanted to.

SYMINGTON: I don't remember just how it went, but do know the Board became powerless, never met, and I was given full authority. Snyder was the expert, another man with total integrity, and he wanted the agency that he did so much to build to be run properly.

As mentioned, people were offering to get RFC loans for a fee. The RFC Board, in the main, did not really know what was going on.

FUCHS: Did you mention any name

SYMINGTON: I don't want to get personal. Much of it, however, came out in the papers. There was a Congressional investigation. It was all cleaned

[86]

up. In previous years the RFC had operated in superb fashion in the interest of the country during the war days; it was run by people like Jesse Jones and John Snyder; and years later,

when I went over to the agency, there were many fine people still there, most holdovers from the war years, experienced in the business of lending the people's money.

[87]

INDEX

Acheson, Dean, 69

Air Force, U.S.:

- bombing tactics, 48, 49-53

- budget cuts, 34-37, 42, 46-48

- business methods, 66

- creation of as a separate service, 55, 56

- "70 Group" controversy, 34, 35, 41-43, 45

Alexander, Roy, 43,44

Allen, James, 62, 63

ARMCO (American Rolling Mill Company), 1

Armed Services, mobilization in World War II, 33

Army, U.S., budget cuts, 42

Army Air Force, U.S., 21, 22, 26, 29, 30, 32, 42, 56, 66

Arnold, General Henry H., 33

Assistant Secretary of War for Air, 20, 21, 25, 26

Atomic bomb, 70, 71

Atomic Energy Commission, 38, 64

Barrows, Arthur, 65-67

Bell, David, 64

B-36 bomber, 49

B-47 bomber, 49

B-52 bomber, 47

Boeing Aircraft Company, 47

Bradley, General Omar N., 29, 53, 70

Budget, Bureau of the, defense cuts, 35

Carter, Jimmy, 72, 73

Churchill, Winston, 33, 34

Clark, Tom C., 15, 16

Clifford, Clark M., 41, 45, 59-61, 64

Cochran, Jackie, 76

Collins, General Joseph, 68, 69

Colonial Radio Corporation, 2

Congress, U.S., 56, 57, 71-73

Dean, Gordon, 38

Defense, Department of, 68, 69

Defense, Secretary of, 45, 55, 57

Denfeld, Admiral Louis, 78

Early, Stephen, 77, 78

Eberstadt, Ferdinand, 54-56

Eberstadt Report, 55, 56

Eisenhower, General Dwight D., 27, 28, 33, 45, 55, 64, 66, 78

Election, 1948 Presidential, 57-60

Else, George M., 64

Emerson Electric Company, 6-10, 12, 15, 21, 24, 65, 80

[88]

Finletter, Thomas K., 37

"Flying Wing" controversy, 62-64

Ford, Gerald R., 74

Fordyce, Sam, 6-8

Forrestal, James V., 3, 28-31, 34, 41-48, 50-58, 69

French Lick, Indiana, 12-14

Fulton, Hugh, 9

Gavin, General James, 70

Gray, Gordon, 75

Graybar Electric Corporation, 24

Griffin, Paul, 68

Hannegan, Robert E., 20, 25, 59, 74

Harriman, Averell, 69

Helm, Neal, 40

Hoover, Herbert, 32

Hoover, J. Edgar, 23

House Armed Services Committee, 4, 5

House Naval Affairs Committee, 45

Inter-service rivalry, U.S. Armed forces, 27-32, 45, 47-49, 53-56, 66-68

Jackson, Henry ("Scoop"), 47

Johnson, Louis, 57, 58, 67-69

Johnson, Lyndon B., 43, 72, 73

Joint Chiefs of Staff, 68, 69, 78

Jones, Thomas, 63

Kennedy, John F., 9, 65, 72

Kimball, Dan A., 77

Kimmitt, Stanley, 34

King, Admiral Ernest, 27, 29, 33

Knudsen, William, 3

Korean War, 79, 80

Lamar, Missouri, 11, 12

LeMay, General Curtis E., 50, 51

Lovett, Robert K., 26, 44

MacArthur, General Douglas, 33

McMahon, Brien, 38

Marine Corps, U.S., 29, 30, 32, 45

Marshall, Mrs. George C., 74, 75

Matthews, Francis P., 75, 78

May, Andrew J., 4

Mobilization for the Korean War, 79, 80

Murphy, Charles S., 41, 61

[89]

National Security Council, 38, 39, 41, 71, 79

National Security Resources Board, 38, 39, 79, 80, 82, 84

Navy, U.S.:

- air power, 27-30, 45, 48, 49, 56

- budget cuts, 42

- Congressional lobby, 45

- status between World Wars I and II, 32, 42

Newsweek magazine poll, 1948 Presidential campaign, 59, 60

Nixon, Richard M., 72

Normandy, France, 70

Norstadt, General Louis, 55, 66

Northrop Air Corporation, 62, 63

Northrop, John K., 62

O'Mahoney, Joseph, 17-19

Patterson, Robert P., 25-28, 31, 33, 45, 55

Pauley, Edwin W., 81

Pearson, Drew, 16-18, 41, 43

Poll (*Newsweek*) 1948 Presidential campaign, 59, 60

Porter, Paul, 44

Presidential campaign, 1948, 57-60

Press, the, 16-18, 41, 42, 59, 60

Price controls (Korean War), 79, 80

Radford, Admiral Arthur W., 28, 29, 55, 78

Rayburn, Sam, 76

Reagan, Ronald, 72

Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 20, 39, 62, 63, 81-86

Renfrow, Louis H., 68
"Revolt of the Admirals," 53, 76-78
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 13, 15, 27, 32
Royall, Kenneth C., 42
Rustless Iron and Steel Corporation, 1

Saltonstall, Leverett, 56, 57
Sears Roebuck Company, 2, 65
Senate Naval Affairs Committee, 45
70 Group Air Force, 34, 35, 41-43, 45
Slessor, Sir John, 42
Smith, Alfred E., 73
Snyder, John W., 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 21, 23, 25, 39, 41, 61, 81, 85, 86
Souers, Sidney, 38, 39, 40, 41
Spaatz, General Carl, 26, 29, 30, 34, 35, 46, 50, 54, 66
Special Committee of the Senate to Investigate the National Defense Program (Truman Committee) 6, 8, 9, 10, 11
Steelman, John R., 61
Sullivan, John, 50
Surplus Property Board (Administration), 15-20, 23, 24, 82, 84

[90]

Taggart, Tom, 12
Taylor, General Maxwell D., 34
Third term for President tradition, 14, 15
Time magazine, 44
Truman, Bess Wallace, 13
Truman Committee (Special Committee of the Senate to Investigate the National Defense Program), 6, 8, 9, 10, 11
Truman, Harry S.:
 and Air Force budget cuts, 35, 36
 and Air Force, creation of separate, 42, 54
 Committee investigates Emerson Electric Company, 8-11
 French Lick, Indiana, trip to, 12-14
 Lamar, Missouri, notification at ceremony, 1944, 11, 12
 National Security Resources Board, appoints Stuart Symington Chairman of, 38, 39
 and the Presidential campaign of 1948, 59, 60
 Price and wage controls, opposition to, 79, 80
 Reconstruction Finance Corporation, abolishes Executive Board, 82, 84, 85
 Reconstruction Finance Corporation, appoints Stuart Symington Chairman of, 81
 Secretary of Defense, supports creation of new Cabinet post, 27, 28
 Souers, Sidney, relationship with, 40, 41
 Surplus Property Board, appoints Stuart Symington Chairman of, 15-19, 23
 Symington, Stuart, appoints Assistant Secretary of War for Air, 20, 21
 Symington, Stuart, first acquaintance with, 6-8

Vice President, Inauguration as, 13
and White House staff, 61
Tydings, Millard E., 45

Unification of the Armed Services, 28-31, 45, 53-57

Vandenberg, General Hoyt V., 76, 77
Vaughan, Major General Harry H., 57, 58
Vinson, Carl, 45, 76, 77

Wadsworth, James, 56
Wage and price controls (Korean War), 79, 80
War Assets Corporation, 19
War Policies Committee, 67
War Production Board, 3
War surplus, 23, 24
Webb, James E., 64
White House, 15, 16, 27
White House staff, 58, 61, 64, 80, 82, 83

[91]

Wilson, Charles E., 78-80
Winchell, Walter, 43
World War II:
 bombing tactics, 51-53
 mobilization, 33
 Normandy landings, 70
Worth, Cedric, 76, 77

Zuckert, Eugene, 46, 64, 65