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INTERVIEW WITH WILFRED J. McNEIL
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, COMPTROLLER 1947 - 1959

by

ALFRED GOLDBERG AND HARRY B. YOSHPE
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Yoshpe: Mr. McNeil, before we get into the Comptroller area, I would like to ask something about Mr. Forrestal. I wonder if you would give us your impression of Mr. Forrestal as an individual, his philosophy, and some of the problems which weighed so heavily on his mind and may have affected his health.

McNeil: Well, I would consider him one of the deepest thinkers of his time. Certainly he was a great American. His foresight was, I think, very evident. For example, as far back as late 1945 and early 1946, according to his notes and logs, Forrestal tried to show that we were still in trouble. Because the war was over, most people seemed to think that the United Nations would solve most of our problems. He was concerned with so many areas of the world, the stability of which was basic to American interests. I'm sure this concern about Communist aggression and threats was one of the things that led to his sickness.

Some people give different reasons, but I had the feeling that more and more as time went on, he thought he had failed to alert Americans to the problems that they were going to face in the years to come. It was so evident from little snatches of correspondence. In reply to a personal note from Palmer Hoyt, publisher of the Denver Post, late in the summer of 1944, Forrestal pointed to Americans' curious nature; they will label anyone

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"a goddamned fascist or imperialist" if he suggests that we act in accordance with our security needs, while lauding "Uncle Joe" as "a fine, frank, candid and generally delightful fellow," easy to deal with when he tells us frankly and explicitly that he needs the Baltic Provinces, half of Poland, all of Bessarabia, and access to the Mediterranean (see Forrestal Diaries, p. 14).

I know he was disturbed when Acheson made his speech saying we had no interest beyond the Japan Sea, because he knew that left a hole in the dike. And in conversations not necessarily part of the official papers in the Pentagon, he foresaw the troubles that would show up later. He favored very much, for example, the Administration having some ability to show the flag in the Mediterranean. He knew if there was a vacuum, somebody would move in. I think America owes him a great deal because he was one person who did his best, and actually more than he thought - alerting America to the troubles we were to face in the years to come. He was a dedicated worker - he came early, stayed late.

One of the interesting things -- if you check the luncheon records, you'll probably find every day of the year he had some able or noted person for lunch who could give some advice or assistance. If Ghandi would visit the United States he would have Ghandi for lunch. He had the ability to pick up the phone and ask for help. For example, Eberstadt was probably the most frequent; he'd drop everything he was doing and come down and spend a day or a week. Forrestal commanded the assistance of all the knowledgeable researchers in the country. He was working for the United States and had to convince the people they should do a little bit, too.

Yoshpe: Do you have any notion how early in his Administration he showed signs of some of his problems? Can you sort of pinpoint it in time?

McNeil: It would have to be late '48 or early '49. At the time we didn't think too much about it. I was sitting just next door down the hall, and I saw him a number of times every day and therefore I didn't notice the change. Except, I remember, Max Leva and I urged him to take a week off -- two weeks off, go play golf - do something - forget it. Thinking back, we should have been more forceful. He was carrying a tremendous load. I think he was a bit disappointed also because he didn't have the full support of Truman the previous fall, the election year - 1948 - after that it got rapidly worse.

There was a columnist who lived out in Silver Spring. I forget his name. He probably ran more stories on the subject than anybody else. Quite critical of Forrestal. The real crisis came, I think, when differences of opinion developed between Forrestal and Stuart Symington, Secretary of the Air Force. Symington went to Los Angeles and made a very critical speech. I don't even remember the details of it. I do remember that the only answer then was for the two people to discontinue relationships. But Forrestal didn't do it. Truman would not support him. That must have been in the Spring of '48.

Yoshpe: The swearing in of Forrestal took place, as you know, on September 17, when President Truman was still on the Missouri, before he got back. Was there some urgency that prompted Truman to say go ahead without him?

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McNeil: As I recall it, there was trouble in the Mediterranean. Italy had had a number of government changes, and the Soviets were in control of all of Greece except perhaps isolated areas. There was some urgency. It was an international affair; it had nothing to do with things in this country.

Yoshpe: Why did they wait two months to get him sworn into his job?

McNeil: The law provided for 60 days - did it not?

Yoshpe: I don't remember now.

McNeil: The Department of Defense officially began the day after he was sworn in as Secretary of Defense.

Yoshpe: Well, was there any reason for the delay? The law was enacted in July. Is there any reason why he wasn't sworn in earlier?

McNeil: Yes - the 60 day interval after passage of the legislation but I don't think at the time that anybody saw any significance in the situation. It takes time - here's a brand new job - you don't start the next morning - you get the boys in and talk about your plans, space, the number of people - the kind of people we want. How big a staff you're going to have. Probably more mistakes have been made by starting a business too early, than taking time to draw your breath and think through at least an initial organization. I've done that several times - started too early when I probably should have taken another week to get my ducks in a row. You do remember there was some crisis at the time.

Yoshpe: The key staff agencies of the Military Establishment - JCS, Munitions Board, Research and Development Board - were pretty much carry-overs of the joint agencies that had been in existence prior to the

Unification Act. As you know, those joint agencies operated on the philosophy of mutual agreement - one hundred percent agreement rather than under the concept which was required later of being staff arms that would give defense-wide advice to the Secretary. So, obviously, you had a problem of transition from the type of agency that existed prior to '47, to the type of agency that was expected after the enactment of the unification law. Was there a difference in outlook which might have created problems for the Secretary of Defense in using these agencies truly as staff agencies?

McNeil: Yes, I think most people knew or felt that in time these so-called independent agencies, which were using the committee system approach, would become more of a staff to the Secretary. But you shouldn't do it all at once, even if it was possible. I think we recognized at the time that the Munitions Board, the Research and Development Board, and various committees represented some of the best talent in America. And you probably were getting as competent advice from one source as the other. It was just a question of control. And true, on the committee system you have to get agreement and really, they don't have the power to police what they recommend. The fact remains it was not a crisis matter. It's just like the discussion regarding the establishment of the National War College. Forrestal believed you don't just cram everything together and expect it to work. These things are a matter of transition; they take time. Just in conversation, we guessed it would probably be 20 years, before real results were to be achieved, and it has been. It'll probably take more before Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Officers understand the

problems and capabilities of each other. The most valuable part was not just the education but the fact that they worked together for one year without having to report to somebody on a staff relationship.

We didn't have a master plan to achieve a particular goal by any certain date, the legislative requirements taking full time. OSD grew more or less like Topsy because Forrestal did not create a big staff in the beginning. Next Forrestal believed, and I was in the middle, that about the only way to enforce some decisions was through the money route on the theory that if there isn't any money, nothing happens. That caused some controversies, of course. In getting answers and getting information, you had to develop certain skills, etc., so you gradually developed the staff arrangements, the staff philosophy rather than the Committee approach. And then, of course, when you went on through the Johnson, Marshall and Lovett periods to the Wilson period, Wilson said, we'll make the transition clear and official and go the "Vice President route" or Assistant Secretary route rather than Chairman of the Munitions Board or Chairman of the Research and Development Board route. It's kind of a natural evolution. Meanwhile, you left no weak spots, no real weak spots in the organization.

As I told Fielding Eliot one time, Forrestal had an insatiable curiosity for facts from all angles, even in his staff. Of course, if you get too many facts you're inclined not to make any decisions, unless there's a clearcut pattern. It has weaknesses, but I think if he were here today and we had an energy crisis, he'd have an outside committee because he'd want to know, for example, what somebody else down in Houston thought about the oil situation. No matter how competent he thought his own staff might be in

this field, I think he'd still be searching for weaknesses in proposed solutions and more information. He had an insatiable curiosity for facts.

Now, peacetime recruiting for senior positions in the military is always a problem. That was one of the reasons that I and some others felt very strongly that the Army, Navy and Air Secretaries should be continued as Cabinet Members. A few people like Donald Dawson (at the White House) and others, and I'm afraid even Marx Ieva, agreed with them. Initially this arrangement put the Secretary of Defense one layer above an ordinary cabinet member. Later there was one department - one cabinet member with three major divisions. One reason I did not favor the change was because the minute you downgraded the job, you increased the problem and difficulty of getting the right people to do it. The succeeding reorganizations tended to emphasize that point. That's why on the Blue Ribbon Panel, I disagreed with the downgrading of the Service Secretaries.

Goldberg: It gets increasingly difficult to get good people for those jobs.

McNeil: During a war when there's patriotic fervor you can get a lot of people to come - the list expands tremendously. I think you'll have more trouble in any peacetime period.

As for organization - in a place as big as this, it wouldn't disturb me a bit to see the Army, Navy and Air considered as major subsidiary corporations. In such a case in private life, you certainly have a president of a major corporation, - you expect them to have and accept responsibility to carry on a lot of their activities and then you tie together their efforts at the top. That was the original Eberstadt philosophy, as you can

well see. As I say, Forrestal felt that way very strongly, too. I think he felt that way in the beginning, and I think he would still feel the same way.

Goldberg: But wasn't one of the problems there that these in many ways were competing organizations? They were perhaps competing for resources to a greater extent than would subsidiaries of large multi-division organizations.

McNeil: Well, no, I don't think so. There was competition for resources and duplication, yes, but the results were pretty good. I think you'll find in the competition between Chevrolet, Pontiac, and Oldsmobile, each of them has cars almost the same length, horsepower, etc. I'm sure their sales are greater than they would be otherwise. I think, for example, during the war the Army Air Corps stressed the development of the liquid-cooled engine. The Navy went very strongly for the air-cooled, and of course air-cooled proved to be the engine we needed. I'm sure if the Army Air Corps had been the one agency, everything would have been liquid; we wouldn't have been in the best position.

I think you'll find a myriad of illustrations of that kind. Take the development of the missiles, for example. The Redstone was liquid fueled. The Navy couldn't use liquid oxygen in the confined space. I'm sure if Army hadn't done it, we probably wouldn't have made the progress in solid fuel missiles. It was a pretty important element. So I think a little competition is not too bad.

Goldberg: My thought concerned the competition for the limited resources and the choices which had to be made.

McNeil: Yes, but one of the first things I think one has to do is list all the things you have to do; would like to do; you go over it and you end up drawing a lot of red lines through various requests making reductions in amounts in an effort to come out with what you think is the best use of what is available. But unless it's stated pretty clearly, the good things could drop out. I recall before the DoD was created, the Navy Department was holding some budget hearings, and the Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance knew things were pretty tight. Postwar, Truman had a ceiling of 5 billion or something like that for the Navy and further development of the proximity fuze was dropped. As I went down the list, I noticed it wasn't in it, so we wrote that in. The proximity fuze was continued and of course it's still effective today. Not until you made a complete shopping list could you evaluate the importance of the things he did have in it. The Services presented Lovett with the first Korean War Budget in the spring of 1951; it ran about 10⁴ billion dollars. It looked like 50 billion would do the job. By taking the 10⁴ billion and examining each program, it turned out that you got an adequate force and a good distribution with 50 billion. I never worried too much about charges of fortifying the moon and all that sort of thing; I never worried too much because that is the job of the Secretary and the Staff not to kill ideas at the beginning but to see that they are kept under control.

Goldberg: Who did the looking at and evaluating of the lists and made the choices?

McNeil: Well, I was accused of it, and the evidence would probably

point in that direction but it wasn't that simple. On the missiles -- I would suggest getting an ad hoc committee to take a look -- the K.T. Keller Committee. We got some experts from Esso, Standard Oil research and so forth. So, for example, I took the action of killing the Redstone missile and substituting the Pershing for it. I talked to the President about it, and I wrote it in the budget and told the Army about it. It wasn't my decision - it was the decision of all the information I could get from everybody else that would tell you what seemed to be worthwhile. Fortunately, I had a staff that was pretty good at getting information. So, really, I would say the Secretary of Defense did it because he knew what we were doing and continued to charge our group with assembly of all pertinent information, subject to appeal.

Goldberg: Did he check the list after you had gone over it?

McNeil: On scores of items - yes.

Goldberg: Then you did the spadework.

McNeil: Yes, that was our job. To give an example, on the B-52. Nobody quarreled about the B-52 being an item the Air Force should have. But the Air Force in those days was a new outfit. The Navy, for example, had had an engineering department for 150 years. Here was a Service that was recently divorced from the Army and had no long experience in engineering. Therefore, when a private contractor proposed a schedule of a certain number of aircraft per month, they could make it sound quite plausible. When they proceeded to execute the contract, they started to build more tails than they did fuselages - not coordinating lead times --so if you ever had a change you had a lot of scrap. We talked to Wilson about it.

He sat down with Twining and his group and worked out a schedule, and it seemed to work out very nicely for the next few years and kept Boeing's production facilities active and did it on a quite orderly basis. A problem like that was taken to Wilson. As a matter of fact, on most of the major problems on major missile or aircraft programs or ship programs - we did the work. The component said I think you're right, I agree with it; otherwise we went to see the boss. Fortunately I had bosses who would take time to look into it - Wilson, Forrestal. It sounds quite arbitrary, but there were very few arbitrary decisions.

Goldberg: There was a good deal of give and take with the Services and everybody involved in the process?

McNeil: I think it was healthy in that respect, though sometimes unpleasant at the moment. But some of my best friends are people I had to go through it with at the time.

Yoshpe: You mentioned before that Mr. Forrestal was a strong believer in budgetary control as a condition for efficient management - this is right up your alley. The design of a single, integrated budget for the entire military establishment was a major accomplishment because it reflected in dollars, the development of plans for a unified operation of the military forces. Your hand was very prominent in this field. I know about the work you did with the Voorhees Committee and the tremendous amount of planning that was done in getting that committee going. Can you give us your thoughts as to how you went about this job of formulating an integrated Defense budget?

McNeil: Well, first, the dollar is probably the only common denominator we've got; whether it is transportation, ditch digging, research, or

what, it's the only common denominator. Using the dollar sign you can start to put things in focus. Then the dollar amounts can be a reflection of what should be a good basic operating plan. You can't change big organizations overnight, so therefore if you ever get to approach a good plan you can't get off the track too far in any one year. Nor is your organization flexible enough to change it too rapidly.

I think the first thing you try to do when you want an integrated budget is to talk about an integrated plan. One of the big problems, of course, was getting an integrated plan because - for example - the Air Force and Navy were at odds over carriers and strategic air concepts. So you had violent differences of opinion. But you had to get some resolution of the two. At first you weren't sure, but you took into account the reasoning of both sides with any expert advice obtainable until you were a little more sure. The integrated budget to be good, means it's a dollar sign on a good plan.

Yoshpe: At what point in the history of the Office of the Secretary of Defense would you say that you achieved this objective of a well-integrated budget?

McNeil: Well, I never was satisfied, but I would say probably we got the first real advances about the time that Lovett became Secretary. He understood the problem. The first supplemental for Korea was the first time. Up to that time the budget limits of the President had created a lot of dissension between the Services. We had no problem integrating a budget where everybody got most of the programs they requested. It's when one Service gets thirty-five cents on a dollar and another sixty cents on the

dollar and another a different percentage that you have trouble. Obviously you're not doing it right if you make them all the same. A lot of these military people are pretty decent people. If you produce something logical they don't mind. If they think you're arbitrary, they're tough customers. I think one of the things that disturbs me most about the Pentagon today was in 1966 when they changed the Navy organization. The Navy organization used to be, from a business standpoint, a good one. The Chief of Naval Operations commanded the fleet and had charge of training. The civilian side of the house reported to the Secretary, the Bureaus reported to the Secretariat. You had a customer-supplier relationship. If you have that in any organization, your problems come to the top very quickly and you can manage by exception. At the present time the Secretaries of the Services are not necessarily informed of anything that happens.

Goldberg: Could it be that they went ahead with it because by that time the Secretaries of the Services already were really on the sidelines in handling big problems.

McNeil: What they are doing is inviting the elimination of their jobs.

Goldberg: There has been consideration of that, no doubt, off and on for some years.

McNeil: The customer-supplier relationship, if you can get it developed to the right point, is the best form of organization.

Goldberg: I wonder if I could ask you now to speak to the question of the munitions shortage during the Korean War? We discussed that with Mr. Pace, and he gave us his understanding of it. I'd be interested in what you have to say about it.

McNeil: Well, it's really a long story in itself. You recall that Secretary Johnson made reductions under the direction of the President. It was not possible to have everything you wanted. The Administration didn't expect troubles, even though Forrestal had done his best to alert them. The budget ceilings of the time resulted in some shortages. Johnson was Secretary, of course, when the war broke out. You started to get reports pretty quickly - trucks, tanks, spare parts, short here and there. We put a task force to work on it very quietly. I don't think you'll find any written reports because we didn't seem to need it. I got a Colonel Holcombe, for example; General Marshall had used him as his eyes and ears in Normandy. I thought it would help if he looked at it from his standpoint, a kind of an audit approach. So I had Colonel Holcombe in Korea right quick. Well, he is the one who reported, for example, that they were mashing up brass shellcases, understanding that replacement ammunition would have steel shell casings. I knew from the Munitions Board effort that the Army was not being successful in developing the steel shell casing. So I think we put in motion papers telling the Army not to destroy the brass shell cases but to get them back and let's get them into shape, until the Army solved its steel shell case problem. It was primarily 105 shells, incidentally. But through the people I sent over there to take a look -- and I kept them there practically all during the war on their own kind of rotation -- you would get the replies of such people as the Commandant of the Marine Corps -- "No, we have plenty. Our problem is targets more than expenditure of ammunition." One senior member of General Van Fleet's staff said we're making 110s out of our 105s, firing for effect. We couldn't find any evidence we were actually

short of ammunition or targets to shoot at. We tried to use that as a method of getting fast reaction on the paperwork in the Army. You'll find that in some of the hearings before Margaret Chase Smith. I was accused of drawing a chart to set out how far a piece of paper had to go before they could order replacement shells. It was something like 10,000 or 20,000 miles through 16 different hands before you could get it moving. But I think the history will show there was not really a shortage of ammunition at the time. The shortage was forward where they had to carry the ammunition up on the backs of the Koreans.

Goldberg: But the Army did try to respond back here to what was considered an ammunition shortage and tried to increase production after it received a great deal of publicity.

McNeil: Yes. As I recall there was no question about money. It was agreed that there were restrictions on use. It was administrative and not money.

Yoshpe: Would you say that unification resulted in noticeable economies?

McNeil: No.

Yoshpe: Would you elaborate on that?

McNeil: We are not speaking of effectiveness. We're just talking about cost. I think each time you put a new organization on top of 2 or 3 others you increase the overhead. I think you take the number of Admirals, Generals -- the rank and file structure, you find that it is inflated. If the Air Force sends a General to a committee meeting you've got to have a lower or upper half Admiral; you can't have a Captain going to represent you. I think single supply systems, for example, are wasteful because

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usually your spare part order goes through another and additional channel. I seldom have seen cases where adding huge size to huge size becomes an economy. Actually real economies come from the efficient operation of the myriad of activities and organizations making up major operations. I thought that situation led to some changes in the 1949 Act which was then known as Title 4 of the National Security Act. Some things which have been developed, such as the working capital proposal, encouraged economy by forcing human nature to work for you - not against you. For example, it took 4 years to develop it and we had to get the help of Eberstadt and Hoover to convince Byrd and Saltonstall that doing so didn't diminish their control.

So I thought if we could make it easy for one service to use the facilities of another - as a paying customer - we probably would obtain most of the economies claimed for direct administrative control. That was the basis for establishing the Military Sea Transportation Service. Even with unification you couldn't get the Army and the Air Force to willingly use the other service. You could not get Navy willingly to take a hundred million from their budget for MSTS -- I think this was their thinking -- even if you marked it up separately, if they had to do housekeeping for the other Services. Only if you have the supplier-customer relationship and the customer paid his bill, do you have the incentive for economy. If they could get the other Service to do it for them cheaply they could buy more.

Goldberg: But you spoke of the single service buying. I suppose you really mean DSA, for instance, as representing in effect a duplicative device rather than a genuinely useful one.

McNeill: There were so many examples - buying paint. You can't buy all Services' paint with one order. Now you get your best price for buying it in reasonable quantities so that some of the 400 manufacturers in the

country -- some manufacturers don't have much business in August-September -- so you can get a good price. You know, buying 12 carloads of aspirin doesn't get it any cheaper than 2 carloads. Once you get into volume, sometimes the very magnitude of the order itself costs you money.

I think effort towards standardization is excellent. But there again you have the example of the TFX -- trying to design one airplane for two services with different requirements. I think if you could get enough people to say, well Air Force has got an engine that can probably do the job, you won't have to develop a new one, you get about all the benefits you could get. So you find the F-14 has some of the elements of the F-111, but it is a different aeroplane. When you take a land-based aeroplane and modify it for carrier use you have a lot of modifying to do. So if you standardize by components or in pieces, you probably accomplish things more quickly. That perhaps doesn't answer your question.

Goldberg: Yes, it does. There are some interesting points involved there -- you mention using modified land-based aircraft operating from carriers. There has been some thought given to that in recent years.

McNeil: We talked about it on the F-15.

Goldberg: Yes, and even the Air Force version of the F-4 which might be a good deal easier than the F-15.

McNeil: It was easier, yes. You could fly a carrier-based plane ashore, but a land based plane from a carrier is a different animal.

Yoshpe: Now I understood you to say, Mr. McNeil, that you didn't have any noticeable economies. Would you also say that you had greater efficiency without greater expense by such new arrangements as MATS and MSTTS and in the traffic management field?

McNeil: I think that in certain of those fields you had increased efficiency; you had more for your money, primarily because of the business type operation authorized by Title IV of the National Security Act Amendment of 1949. I don't think that necessarily was a result; that might have been done in any case. What I am trying to say is that I think there's a tendency sometimes, has been, and always will be, if you have a difficult problem to solve, you don't solve it with anything you've got today, you've got to get a new law or job sheet or something to solve it - frequently the answer is right before you.

Goldberg: But in the absence of a new law or a new organization you might not get two Services such as the Army and Navy agreeing to work jointly and solve the problem.

McNeil: During the war there used to be a common saying that the quicker you got away from Washington the more unification you had -- naturally.

Yoshpe: Mr. Forrestal used to comment quite often in his addresses, "Don't expect too much economy." On the other hand, Johnson kept showing the tremendous savings that he was achieving during his Administration. Would you say that Johnson's presentations were phony?

McNeil: I think of Johnson primarily as being a good soldier. I think probably the actual text of his presentations might have been technically quite correct, but undoubtedly reduced overall effectiveness. I am sure they were. It was the tone and flavor -- for example, "if they hit us at 4:00 - we'll blow them out of the air at 5:00." That type approach. I think he made that in a speech or Congressional hearing. He put that kind of flavor on what otherwise was probably a technically correct presentation.

After all he was a good soldier, and the only time he ever shifted the responsibility for so-called savings was during the MacArthur Hearings. He said in one sentence or two -- the President ordered the cutbacks, so the cutback to the 13-14 billion dollar level as a budget ceiling was at the President's direction. I know that Johnson and Early did not know this in advance of a meeting in the White House in July of that year. I know that. So some of the things that he did, in retrospect, probably helped to create the problems we had in Korea.

Forrestal was concerned in the fall of 1947 when they were having some trouble in the Middle East. I recall Forrestal said, "Mac, would you give me an outline of what forces we could move in to that area if the decision is made to do it." I made a quick check and I found that about 84-85 thousand would be the maximum force we could assemble to do it. You could hardly fill the vacuum left by the British moving out of the Middle East. Certainly not an effective force. Then he asked Al Gruenther and me to prepare a presentation for the President. (It took 60-90 days). We started with how much of an increase in the Defense budget might be possible without injuring the economic fabric of the nation; what level or percentage. That was just one approach. That study came out with - if you have the will you can do 15%; if you don't, 5% is a big load. So somewhere in between probably is the way you go. We developed a plan where the price tag on that budget was 17½ billion. We thought that having shrunk the overhead, after the conclusion of World War II, perhaps if we increased the force somewhat, all the increase could be productive. That was one of the theories behind it.

I recall - I was leaving at that time. I didn't know Mr. Johnson; I had packed up what little I had to take. The day before he became Secretary, we

agreed that I wouldn't stay permanently, that I would stay 30 days and that's all. At the end of 30 days he suggested I stay another 30, which didn't bother me much. Meantime we commenced to see a little eye-to-eye. The first months were a little rough but I thought in the last 6 months he turned out to be a pretty good Secretary. At one point I asked him, "Well, all right if I stay around - what is your number one objective in this building?" He said, "to make a Colonel a Colonel again." This goes back to inflation.

Yoshpe: You mentioned that Johnson's figures on economies were probably sound.

McNeil: I didn't mention that the President did not buy our presentation of 17½ billion, which Forrestal thought we needed at the time to keep control of the world situation.

Yoshpe: Getting back to Johnson again - as you well know, he took an awful beating from the press and from various Congressmen, especially when Korea broke, for having cut too much muscle. Do you feel that he was unduly pilloried by the press and others?

McNeil: Well, yes. I don't think we can expect the press to be completely balanced. If the story is completely balanced the headlines are bound to be less interesting. You have to attract attention some way. Yes, I think he started out to be a good soldier, carrying out the President's orders and getting the military establishment down in size. And what size is enough? All you could get for 14 billion at that time! Yes, I thought they were a little bit rough. But he had a flair for the dramatic which sometimes backfired.

On the reduction of installations - the right way to do it was to do it gradually. Whenever the time comes to close training stations, do it quietly. Do all the advanced planning you can as far as the people working there in the local community, etc. You don't make a national issue out of it. Johnson, however, took the dramatic course. Telegrams were sent. That was one mistake. We had listed 300 installations we didn't think were any longer necessary. I think most on the list were pretty good. A wire was sent to every member of Congress -- Western Union didn't even deliver half of them -- inviting them to come to the auditorium here in the building, the following morning, at which time the list was read. Well, that's enough to be a national story. Well, the same thing has been accomplished gradually many times. When you reduce the size or eliminate a particular recruiting station, training station, Navy Yard in New York, for example; whenever the thing came up he had a tendency to dramatize, and it would backfire when things didn't go right. On the whole, however, Johnson did a pretty good job, I think. In any case the cutbacks were the result of Presidential direction.

Yoshpe: As late as early 1951 Johnson said he didn't know why he was fired. Do you know why he was fired?

McNeil: No, except for the public criticism - the press criticism of Johnson was more than the Truman Administration could take. I was in the Pentagon that Saturday, Tony Leviero of the New York Times called and said, "Was Johnson fired?" I said, "I don't think so, why?" I had 8 or 10 calls in the next two or three hours. Johnson used to spend his weekends in Charleston, W. Va. So I called Steve Early out at Burning Tree. He said,

"Mac, there's nothing to it." Then he called me at 6 o'clock and said, "I've gotten some of the same calls, I think there is something to it." So the next morning I went over and we sat on the porch and talk@d, and we decided we wouldn't bother Louis that night. We were down here in his office at 7:00 or 7:15 the next morning. Johnson knew there was something wrong when he came in the office, because Steve Early never came in early. He said, "What's wrong?" Early replied (I would have taken 5 minutes to break the story), but Early said, "You're fired." Johnson said, "I'll find out," and he put on his sailor hat and went to the White House, came back an hour later and said, "I am fired." I'm sure the pressure, the Korean War wasn't going right. I remember the Koreans were coming down toward Pusan; I'm sure that was it. Plus the fact that Symington and he didn't get along and Symington had left and had gotten a public relations man from St. Louis who I'm sure was helping the press write these stories.

Yoshpe: Would you say his bad relations with Acheson had something to do with it?

McNeil: It could have. Although on 10 or 15 occasions, I suppose, I was there when they were together and they didn't seem to be enemies. They weren't necessarily friends, but there was no evidence of hostility. There were three of us testifying one day, Johnson, Acheson, and I. The Senator from New Hampshire, Styles Bridges, said, "What about the staffs - don't we have overdrawn staffs at some of these Embassies, etc.?" And Johnson said, "Yes, I think we do." He said, "Mac calls them flower arrangers!" That kind of needle -- it takes you weeks to get over it.

Goldberg: There were occasions when Johnson was hostile to Acheson. There are minutes of meetings when he was not only hostile but downright nasty.

McNeil: Johnson was a lawyer, and attorneys sometimes make wild statements and then go to lunch together.

Goldberg: I want to ask a question about the changeover from the Truman - Lovett period to the Eisenhower - Wilson period and some of the problems that you carried as a result of that. There was, of course, the budget shift which resulted from the "New Look", particularly the increased emphasis on the Air Force and air power at the expense apparently of the Army and the Navy. What was happening in the Department at that time? What were the effects as far as the other Services were concerned? Here once again after they all had plenty of money during the Korean War, a ceiling was imposed, and the division of the funds was certainly much more unequal than it had been during the war or for that matter even before.

McNeil: Well, a good many factors entered into it. The first was the predominant position the U.S. was in as far as big weapons, atomic weapons, were concerned. The U.S. dominated all phases of that -- the development of the weapon itself as well as the means of delivery. Our expected antagonist didn't have the various means of delivery that we did in any way, shape or form. If you're going to live within a certain amount, I'm sure the budget balancing had to be a big share of the reason. But you start to figure out what is the most important thing to win a big war. It doesn't mean that you don't have to spend something on the 2nd priority and the 3rd, but you do more to take care of problem No. 1. So when the four new Chiefs were named it was decided to send them down the river on the Sequoia with the understanding they'd come back with a statement of national policy in a page or two to which they all agreed. All the staff were senior, able citizens who'd been through a great deal and had a lot of

the responsibility at the time. And Radford, who was probably Naval Aviator Number 1 at the time, as far as leadership was concerned and quite a Naval protagonist, went along with the idea that our air striking force should be number one. It's almost that simple. Other things you'd recover from, but this was one you couldn't.

Goldberg: This was an interesting shift for him from 4 or 5 years before, wasn't it?

McNeil: Yes. Although a lot of people think he had a single track mind, he didn't. He was quite amenable to discussion. He'll take strong positions but will change if someone will show him. He agreed on that. I've known him for quite some time; his father and mother lived just three blocks from my wife's family. Anything else you could recover from, but this was one you couldn't.

And at that time you had another situation. The record would agree with this. So long as the world thought you would use the big weapons, you would get along with forces much smaller than you can if they feel you're in doubt. Like today, one of our troubles is that everybody is in doubt whether you would or wouldn't. That's why you have to have strong ground forces; you have to have strong tactical air; you have to be strong everywhere. But if they knew darn well that big weapons would be used if and when we had to, you could get along with forces much skinnier than you would otherwise. That was a factor. As long as Eisenhower and Dulles were in those positions, that was the situation. The minute there started to be weakness in the evident willingness to use it if you had to, hoping you never would, you had to do a little more for brushfire or smaller wars. That may be an oversimplification but it's

just about that simple.

Goldberg: Were you in general accord with this approach?

McNeil: Yes, again because we were predominant; there was obviously willingness to use it. Not that you were ever going to do it, but the world knew that we just weren't going to put up with nonsense.

Goldberg: Did you feel that there might be any bad effects on the Army and Navy as a result of this policy?

McNeil: Well, at the time the Navy was relatively modern. Armies can be developed in a shorter period of time, if you have clouds coming up. I don't think the risk was quite as great as it might seem, but just the same they got less.

Goldberg: How much influence do you think George Humphrey had in helping to formulate this approach? How much effect do you think his ideas about the budget and the impact on the economy of very large Defense budgets had on this approach?

McNeil: Well, they had their effect unquestionably. He came over for lunch occasionally. It was what you'd expect from a Senior Vice President who had responsibility for money. I don't think he ever took a strong position: "that you shouldn't do it, it will cost money." Frequently he would say it's worth it. I'm sure it had an effect on the President. The President was thinking the \$34-35 billion dollar bracket was up about where we should be running. All these changes take place over a long period of time. You don't build an Air Power overnight. You have an example in the aircraft carriers. Nobody in the world has ever been able to develop an aircraft carrier force or able to use it -- all during the war, France, Germany, England -- nobody except the Japanese. It's not an easy job. It takes time to develop them.

Goldberg: I want to raise a question which has been prominent in recent times. That is the withholding by the President of funds which have been voted by Congress for specific programs, such as the funds for the bombers back in the 50's. What was the position of the Department at that time on the subject?

McNeil: That was quite an issue. I forget the amounts of money. About 6 or 7 hundred million, I think. The House action came out with some reduction from Defense requests, not much but a little bit. So to that extent we disagreed. But Cannon and Taber were the Chairman and Senior Republican. The Appropriations Committee was quite powerful in those days - much more so than at the moment. And they thought that the Air Force was getting programs underway that they weren't quite ready to handle. They weren't thinking about Defense -- as much as you've got to get this new outfit on a solid business approach - you just don't feel right about the program. Of course, the Air Force and the air power people were really putting the pressure on. The final result, which probably has never been touched on, is that the two of them made a visit to the White House, and Truman said he would withhold it. You'll find in the Act the words "appropriated for 1950 and 51", as I recall it. That was the compromise they made. The money was good for two years. That was before we got continuing money. They agreed there was some merit to both sides and that was the solution. It really didn't solve much, because the Air Force and the air power people wanted it used, but that was the solution they came out with at the White House, which supported the Secretary of Defense and Truman's position.

Goldberg: I was thinking of another and later instance where Eisenhower did the same thing.

McNeil: Yes, it was a case I had something to do with, because of the substantial appropriations made to air. The Air Force had no engineering staff of its own and no adequate organization of its own really to supervise in private plants. There had been money appropriated, but it had not been obligated. The result was they were buying parts and pieces of things on the installment basis. When you took a look at what probably could be done and what would be a smart production layout you come up with close to \$4 billion dollars, as I remember, maybe a little more, of obligational authority that just was not needed.

Goldberg: And the President withheld how much?

McNeil: Well, he withheld it from obligation and of course the following year's budget was smaller. By that time we got continuing money for the Air Force. Which was one of the things we got done for the Army even though the Army legal staff did not agree.

Goldberg: Do you think it fair to say the Air Force had no engineering capability during this period? They had had an engineering division since World War I days.

McNeil: No, I wouldn't say none. They weren't big enough to handle the load.

Goldberg: They were obviously greatly diluted by World War II. The enormous growth certainly did affect the quality. They had some very good engineers during this period.

McNeil: Well, I should correct that. I know several competent people. I really should include engineers and engineering staffs too, people who were contracting, supervising, financing -

Goldberg: I think you're correct there. I think it got to be so big, they grew so rapidly, that they got choked.

McNeil: Lovett was Assistant Secretary at the time, during the war.

Goldberg: Yes. And he probably did a great deal, I guess, to help with that particular aspect. A bit later -- I guess about '58 -- you remember the President invited the Congressional Committees to go ahead and cut his budget. Particularly the Defense budget. I think that either he or Mr. McElroy used the term, "Hold our feet to the fire." You may remember that. What was your reaction to that at the time?

McNeil: Hold your feet to the fire - I remember that remark. I just don't have an opinion.

Goldberg: Did you feel it was an inflated budget? I guess many of them are, but did you feel it was an inflated budget?

McNeil: What year was this?

Goldberg: '58 - '59, I guess. Mr. McElroy was the Secretary at the time. What I'm really getting at is, what do you think is the effect on departments when Congress is told by the President to go ahead and cut this budget - it's undoubtedly inflated - it had a lot of water in it - we've done the best we can - you go ahead and cut it!

McNeil: Well, I don't think much of it. It's the wrong way to run a railroad.

Goldberg: Was that your reaction at the time?

McNeil: It probably was. I don't recall. It didn't make that much of an impression because I don't think it changed any of our relationships with our committees. I used to have charge of the Defense interest in the Appropriation Committees, and it really didn't make an impression.

Goldberg: I don't think it made a whole lot of difference; it was just rather startling and it got a great deal of attention at the time because the President and McElroy had both made these remarks to the same effect. I wonder if we could ask you to spend a little time talking about the Secretaries with whom you worked and giving us a thumbnail sketch of your estimation of them.

McNeil: I was Acting Defense Secretary for 10 days.

Goldberg: When was that?

McNeil: Wilson couldn't get confirmed.

Goldberg: You've already talked a good bit about Forrestal and Johnson -- I wonder if you'd tell us your estimates of Marshall and the others.

McNeil: So frequently in this country - with the Good Lord helping, we get the right man in the right job at the right time. If a pretty able guy has the job at the wrong time he doesn't look very good. When Eisenhower was selected as the Supreme Commander in Europe I think he probably did a pretty good job because it wasn't a squads right and squads left job; it was a job of getting along with Churchill, Alexander, and everybody else. So you have to take that into consideration. I always thought a great deal of Forrestal, as I mentioned, for a number of reasons. For one thing, he was always looking ahead, he had a pretty sharp idea of what might be the possibilities, and he was up to date on what the best thinkers in the country were thinking about. After 6 months, Johnson started to do a pretty good job, and even in the opening stages of Korea he had an awfully good grasp of how big an operation that might be. There were people at that time who believed it was the beginning of World War III. Some people wanted to close

down and convert selected plants immediately, etc. He had a pretty good grasp that it would be a \$50 billion problem in two or three years. So he was commencing to get on top of the job because he was a very able and bright person. Grandstanding probably diminished his stature.

On General Marshall as Secretary of Defense, I would not in ordinary times call him ^m great. I saw no great results of his administrative ability. He was the right person at the right time in Korea, when there was dissension in the country, some of Congress wanted to go wild and shut down industry, convert, etc., knowing there would be a war. He went along with the idea that you could increase the Nation's readiness to a reasonable level and stay that way as long as we were in trouble in the world. Only George Marshall could probably have sold that idea and made it stick. So in many ways he was great. He had stature; he had integrity. However, a few people thought that another very able person ought to be with him at the time. That was Lovett.

Goldberg: What about Lovett?

McNeil: Marshall was here for about 12 months. Lovett had already done a good job as Assistant Secretary of War for Air. Marshall trusted him completely, of course, when he was Under Secretary of State. I think Marshall admired his diplomatic skill and ability, which the place really needed. The job of being Secretary - you have to have some diplomatic ability. He really was the general manager of the department when Marshall was Secretary. I don't mean Marshall was a figurehead, because he did express his views on some subjects. But Marshall had UMF as one of his main hobbies at the time. Lovett could disagree and do it so nicely. Lovett was a very able person.

Goldberg: He was quite popular with most of the people he worked with.

McNeil: There again, when he became Secretary, he had \$50 billion and not \$14 or \$15 billion to work with.

Goldberg: That would help in any popularity contest, wouldn't it?

McNeil: I don't mean that to detract from him because his job of management was a little bigger. I remember when the B-52 was proposed. The Air Force proposed the first 25 at a cost of about \$450 million. Well, I had a couple of the staff who were pretty good in the aviation business, and they came up with \$1.750 billion. I was thought to be anti-air at the time, so I got a bit of criticism when I took the position that the cost would be far above the early estimate. Lovett didn't buy our approach, so he got two or three able people from New York, and they came back with \$1 billion, 725 million. We started to get along pretty well. But if he wasn't sure of something, he tried to find out. He played the whole thing in low key. His testimony was quite precise. I think that most people, when he told them something, believed him. His credit was good.

Goldberg: I would think so. How about Secretary Wilson?

McNeil: There again, we get back to the period that he served in. There was a case where the national policy had gotten to where we had to be in a high level of readiness, trying to run a budget without peaks and valleys, and managing the business on as smart a basis as you could. He knew more about production than probably any previous Secretary. The situation about the B-52 later - I remember one day when we worked from 3:00 p.m. until 10:00 at night, General Twining and his staff sitting across the desk; Wilson would stay half the night working on a production problem.

I'm sure nobody could buy cheaper than he could. He had a peculiar kind of approach to that. If the Service had a good dependable supplier, good products, didn't chisel, he would do all he could to lean towards the producer; a producer that did a good job day in and day out, one that didn't just cut something in order to get the business at any price. He wasn't a price-cutter. He'd work it out smartly to get the man a decent profit and kept them running the business smartly. At the time, for example, Air Force had 50 or more tail surfaces for the B-52 that were made at Wichita before they ever got some of the other components. Wilson would see that quick. Things out of phase. That's what General Motors was quite proud of; they kept everything in phase and they did a hell of a lot of business. Wilson was not a bad diplomat either even though he said some things that created stirs. When he went abroad he never created any problem. He was respected. I would say the Armed Services, the Chiefs at the time, with the possible exception of Ridgway, thought he was probably number one of all.

Goldberg: Why did he step out?

McNeil: $5\frac{1}{2}$ years. He had planned to stay only for the first 2 or 4 years.

Goldberg: So, he really planned to go and had reached the point where he was ready to go. It was his initiative. That brings us to the last one - McElroy.

McNeil: McElroy was an able person in a different way. Without downgrading him at all, he was more of the salesman type. He grasped the nature of the product very quickly. He might not have known what the horsepower

or the power thrust of a jet engine meant or something else, but if he had confidence in the people who presented it to him, he could do a very excellent job of putting it in with other pieces and making a good story in court and telling people about it. You have to remember the Department of Defense was pretty lucky on its first people who occupied the position of Secretary. They were all honest people with integrity - this is number 1 in this business. If they do their level best and they're honest in their intentions and objectives, you probably get a staff that does its best too. So Wilson could command a lot of loyalty. So did McElroy, but he was a little different. McElroy, I think, felt he ought to have more direct control, whereas Forrestal and Lovett would control through the money channels instead of the command channel. If we had the standard of McElroy over the next 50 years, we wouldn't suffer. He was very bright, very able.

Goldberg: Yet there were times when he gave the impression of being otherwise. He gave the impression that he really didn't understand what this budget was all about. On that one occasion - he said something like, "Well, I can't really vouch for all of this, it is just too big."

McNeil: Well, it could have been an intemperate remark. For example, the Head of Research and I were at odds on the budget; so McElroy decided that we should go down the Potomac on the Sequoia.

Goldberg: Who was that?

McNeil: Herb York. So we went down the river and Mr. McElroy acted as Judge. At the time I thought we were doing quite a lot of research which was just paper shuffling. We identified quite a few areas, and we needed money for hardware, and we can't cut the research in that business either - that was the only question we had.

Goldberg: Why did McElroy leave?

McNeil: I recall that two years was what he said he would do.

Goldberg: I would like to pursue another subject and try to look at it from your standpoint as Comptroller during this period, particularly the 1950s. There was then and there is now a great deal of attention being paid to the so-called arms race, a competition primarily between the United States and the Soviet Union. Of course, in this country one of the major impacts obviously was always on the budget and one of the major influences on the programs was the budget. So there was an interaction all of the time between the programs and the budget. Also, to what extent did technology itself force the pace on our side? Were we reacting to the Soviets, were they reacting to us, or were we simply following the basic pace of our own technology? Was that forcing our R&D and our acquisition of weapons? What role did the contractors play? I would be interested in your thoughts on this subject. It is a rather important one right now because we are looking at this problem all the way back to World War II for current and future purposes.

McNeil: That's a good question. One part of the question touched on contractors: There isn't any question but that sales efforts on new gadgets, improved models, etc., etc., have created part of the demand; there isn't any question. I think Eisenhower put it pretty well in one of his last statements. But I think people should read the whole paragraph, not just a sentence about the military-industrial complex. You've got that in the scientific field also. Only the charts are different; that's the only thing I see different.

Truthfully I don't know what the rate of replacement or acquisition should be. Except you had best look as far ahead as you can and see that you really don't leave any wide gaps or vacuums. But if you let the various forces play a little bit, the people with money always want to spend less, which is all right. The contractor wants to sell more, researchers want to do more and make obsolete everything they have done before. If you get free play you could probably get as good results naturally as any other way. But just to sit down and write out a policy, I don't quite know how to do it. Looking back there are times we could have gotten along probably with somewhat less -- carried somewhat less insurance than we did carry. I'm afraid I can't give you a concise answer.

Goldberg: Well, nobody can, really. Will you speak to how the decisions were made, on the major weapon systems for instance? It is very difficult to determine this from the documents. A lot of things happened and a lot of things were done that never got into the documents. You have given us some very interesting insights into the budget process and your approach to it and how some decisions were made about some programs. Here we are talking about the major research and development and acquisition programs of the Department of Defense and how we decided on which ones, how large they would be, how we would time them, and all the rest of it. This is a major factor, of course, in the competition between us and the Russians. There is the notion among a lot of people in this country that for a good part of this time we were really competing against ourselves, more than against the Soviets.

McNeil: Well, let me take a missile program for example. Before I go into that, let me say that over the years I think we would be wrong not undertaking research, for example, unless we had already identified the

mission. I am not going back to basic research; I am talking about a very indefinite range. So I wouldn't object to research for something we don't quite see the use of at the moment. Because I find that practically everything we have got from telephones up and down is useful and has some value. So these black or white categories where you've got to have a formal request for a proposal or something like it before anybody can do anything, can stifle an awful lot of inventiveness.

Going to a major program, I will talk about the Redstone and the Polaris, and bring in the Pershing missile at the end of it. The problem went on day after day, month after month, with no single crisis point. This competition was between the Army and the Air Force, although the Army should be credited with years of work in the early stages of development. The Navy also felt they had to get into the missile business, without question. But they didn't have anything to promote. They joined with the Army Jupiter program as a combined effort, not because they wanted to do business with the Army but because they wanted to preserve their position in the missile business until they had their own and because they could not use liquid oxygen in a confined space.

Goldberg: They had done the same thing originally with nuclear weapons and fissionable materials some years before, insisting that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have control of those.

McNeil: Prior to the Jupiter, the Redstone Missile was developed, and, of course, Werner von Braun was quite disappointed when it was discontinued. He was the world's leading exponent and developer. But the Army tried selling Redstone as a mobile weapon - a battlefield weapon. Anybody could see what the Redstone Missile at short range could go to a predetermined target from

a predetermined launch stand. But it wasn't something that could be moved around the battlefield. It would require a truck train of some 40 miles at ordinary spacing to support a squadron or battery or whatever you call it; it just wasn't mobile at all. But the Army was intent on getting another version of 100 to 150 miles. With the development of solid fuel and war heads of less weight it just looked like a waste. In consultation with experts, we found out that solid fuel would work. If it was going to be a battlefield weapon, it had to be smaller and solid fueled.

Next, at that time there were many discussions by the Chiefs on who had the authority to do what with what: Roles and Missions. Air Force, of course, was against anything that wasn't a logical battlefield weapon. Talking about a battlefield weapon, what was that? 20 miles? a hundred miles? Arbitrarily we decided on 350 miles, knowing that any weapon that you developed for 350 miles probably had 500 miles range in growth. So when I was assured, and I got it from Wilson, that solid fuel looked like it was here - having enough "push per pound" to make it economical - it was agreed that the Army should devote its attention to that kind of weapon and not to the huge liquid fueled monsters. Maxwell Taylor was Chief of Staff of the Army, and he was quite unhappy when we drew the red line through more money for Redstone. He didn't mind carrying on experimental work for production in quantity of Redstone missiles.

We used to go down to Augusta to see the President for a day or two on the budget. We would spend from 7:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M., or something like that with him. I told the President what we had done; he said, "Stop the damn thing." I said, "Well I have, subject to your approval." O.K. "What

do you want for the new one - solid fueled?" he asked. I said, "I don't know. But 10 or 20 million to start with." "I'll fix it. Go back and tell them," he said.

In the case of the Pershing Missile, we recognized that we ought to have some credibility in that field. It had to be mobile, or moveable at least. This was to be in the 10,000 pounds range and could be broken into three parts - the engine, the fuel, and the warhead - it could be handled with each major component at 3,000 to 4,000 pounds, truck hauled. At a 350-mile range with 450 to 500 growth. That was the birth of the Pershing, recognizing that it had some mobility. Now, take the case of the Polaris. As soon as the Navy found that it could get solid fuel to have enough push per pound, the Polaris submarine became feasible. They rode along as a partner with Army until we got "their ducks in a row." That may not be what they'll tell you, but that's the way it looked to me. Of course, as far as the need for the weapon was concerned, that was pretty obvious.

Goldberg: Of course, the Army would have had a need for the Pershing solid fueled missile also. -- for battlefield use. The Air Force ran behind on this, didn't it?

McNeil: They stuck to the big missiles, which were long range - liquid fueled - because they had more "push per pound" but they could get distance using liquid fuel with the bigger warheads. They started in the mid-range field with the Thor, along with their competitor, the Jupiter.

Goldberg: How much do you feel that the Soviet developments during this period -- our knowledge of the Soviet developments -- influenced our programs?

McNeil: I would say a great deal, particularly in the last 15 years.

Goldberg: No, I'm talking about your period primarily -- the 1950s.

McNeil: In the 1950-1954 period we had supremacy in big weapons and means of delivery. When it became evident - about 1954 - that they were making progress in the missile area and might match us, you had to choose between going for more or bigger bangs or a variety of weapons. I think it very naturally became a variety of weapons. There is no question that Russia's capability had an effect on the adoption of some weapons before they were ready. We went on with production of Hound Dog, for example, before it was ready. And Skybolt until it was cancelled.

Goldberg: There is a constant interplay among all these factors. What do you distinguish as the major decision points during this period in terms of the arms competition, on our side at any rate; there were some on the other side too. What were the points where we had to make really big decisions which had long-term effects? Do you distinguish any of those?

McNeil: Well, I get back to so many of these things. What was the high spot in World War II -- was it the Battle of Midway or Guadalcanal? Some of these things come and go so gradually over a period of time. I mentioned earlier the basic reason; I think the Chiefs came up with their roles and missions paper in 1954, emphasizing airpower, because of our predominance in big weapon strength and indications of a willingness to use it if necessary. The shiftover to what later became more emphasis on ground forces came because of what was accepted as a public decision that we wouldn't use the big weapon under any but the most extreme situation. Action after action in diplomatic circles showed that we'd do anything but that. Accordingly, the reaction of people in the Pentagon was that we had to prepare more for ground and sea warfare. The bomber won't do the whole job; the missile won't do the whole job. We've got to protect our ground forces and our sea lanes; such comes slowly. It really has taken years and years for this.

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You probably can't find a clear-cut statement or policy. Many of these things just happen as a result of assumptions over the years that we won't use the big bomb. Of course, specific actions can tell the story and reflect policy changes - whether or not clearly stated in policy papers. When Kennedy sent his Ambassadors to the various capitals at the time of the Cuban Affair in October 1962, such foreign countries were assured that we were not going to use the big weapon. Johnson did the same thing in Southeast Asia later. To illustrate, I was told that by the President of Chile and the Presidents of Peru and Ecuador, all in the same ten-day period, that they could not understand why we put so much money into big weapons and then send our representatives to them to tell us you're not going to use them. They can't understand it. All it said to me was to emphasize how slow we are sometimes to react to what really was a policy decision; that we won't use the big weapon. That's not a good answer to your question, but I don't know how you identify the issue historically.

Goldberg: It is extremely difficult, I think, to distinguish a pattern or process which is clear and logical. Things often happen simply because there are a lot of things going on at a particular time; and after a great deal of milling around, something does emerge. It may be good and sensible or it may be somewhat less than that. But to see long-term policy, to see long-term logic in the whole pattern, is rather difficult.

McNeil: When I received the Forrestal award, I mentioned exactly that point. On so many things, Forrestal found that things are neither black nor white, just varying shades of gray. Just what you were saying.

Goldberg: This is why the critics who are seeking consistent patterns of thought and behavior on the part of our leadership are not looking at it

historically. We all have a disposition to try to find some kind of sense and some kind of meaning or rationality in all that has happened. There is a kind there, but it is not the kind that permits a nice smooth, clear, even understanding and flow; it usually isn't there.

Yoshpe: We have a copy of your remarks at that meeting where you received the award. You said that although Forrestal was always intent on getting the job done, he recognized that there is, in his own words, "no finality to the stream of history, no black and white decisions. The stream of history is always flowing and problems between nations never end."

McNeil: After that paper was presented, Nimitz wrote me one of the nicest letters I ever received. He said it was the best suggestion for an approach to a solution of the Russian problem he had ever seen. Encourage economic growth, education, communication, stay reasonably strong and try to get along. That's the theme I tried to get across in that paper. It didn't disturb me to see Nixon go to China, as long as we kept our position clear. If you are in a dominant position and are generous and understanding, you go a long way. If you use your position to browbeat people, you're in trouble. That was the sense I was trying to impart.

Yoshpe: I would like to follow up on the comments that you made in response to Dr. Goldberg's query about weapons and the rivalry with regard to particular weapons. I was very much impressed, in reviewing the literature of the Forrestal period, that he seemed to have a very good grasp of that very problem. He resisted the Air Force concept of future warfare, and he constantly hammered away at the possibility that we may not be able to use this absolute weapon and therefore you ought to have a strong Army and a strong Navy as well as a strong Air Force. Would you like to comment on that?

In other words, he was pressing for the idea of a balanced force even back in '48 - '49.

McNeil: That is correct. In his terms, balance might be 40 percent to one service, 30 percent to the other two, not necessarily a one-third slice for each, but the result of an effort to achieve a balanced force. That was one point at issue during those first two or three years.

Goldberg: Yes, he wasn't talking about money balance; he was talking about an effectiveness balance, capabilities rather than money.

McNeil: Which might end up, as I said, 40-30-30 or 40-35-25. Of course, you have to remember in Forrestal's day, as Secretary of Defense, we had the big weapon. But the stockpile wasn't very great. As a matter of fact, when the subject came up in the White House at the outset of the Korean crisis, I remember the Joint Chiefs met with Truman; and as I recall it, Bradley and Vandenberg said we didn't have enough weapons to use in Korea on the 38th Parallel. We didn't have enough in case we had trouble with Russia. So in Forrestal's day, he didn't believe the Air Force could do all it said it could do. And he probably had one of the best understandings of what this country needs to function, how much from outside we have to bring in, and what control of the seas does mean to us.

Yoshpe: You don't think that it was his Navy background that prompted him to play down the Air Force concept, but rather a genuine understanding of the need for a balanced force to deal with limited-type wars rather than an atomic war?

McNeil: I do for this reason. Most people of that caliber -- Charles Wilson is one of them -- probably lean overboard to be fair and equitable. When Wilson became Secretary, General Motors was probably number 2 or 3 in

dollar volume of contracts. And when he left they weren't even in the first hundred. His successor at General Motors wasn't very happy about that. I would say that while Forrestal liked the Navy and had great admiration for a lot of Navy people, he certainly didn't show it even in the backroom discussions when we were alone with one or two people.

Yoshpe: Throughout this period this nation was being confronted by what looked like brush fires, rather than the basis for a major war, so that one could understand Forrestal's concern with our ability to respond to something less than total war.

McNeil: Correct, no question about that. As I say, he went a little further in that direction than was done five years later when there was a great preponderance of big weapons, plus two people -- the former Supreme Commander and a Secretary of State who was accused of brinkmanship. You were working in a different atmosphere.

Yoshpe: Would you say, then, that it would be a correct inference that the idea of giving more play to Army needs and more play to Navy needs was an idea that Forrestal saw long before the 50's when the idea of response to limited wars became rather popular.

McNeil: He understood that, yes. He also understood the importance of showing the flag. The administration did not want the US fleet to be in the Mediterranean, post-war. The President and the Secretary of State weren't anxious at all because they feared it would be provocative. Forrestal thought that because of the unsettled conditions in that whole area -- Greece, Middle East, Italy, etc., -- some stable force in there was necessary. The Navy's the only one that could really do it - that is show the flag.

He saw that very clearly.

Goldberg: Thank you very much, Mr. McNeil, for giving us so much of your time.