

Interview with Mr. John G. Kester  
Part I, April 14, 1998

Department of Defense  
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

Trask: This is an oral history interview with Mr. John G. Kester, taking place in Washington, D. C. on April 14, 1998. Participating in this interview for the OSD Historical Office are Alfred Goldberg and Roger Trask.

Mr. Kester, we want to discuss with you your involvement in national security affairs, particularly your service as special assistant to the secretary of defense in 1977 and 1978. First, I would like to ask you briefly to summarize your educational background and your professional experience up to 1969 when you became deputy assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and reserve affairs.

Kester: I grew up and was educated in the schools of Oshkosh, Wisconsin and graduated from Oshkosh High School in 1955. Then I went to the University of Wisconsin and graduated in 1959. I had a Fulbright Grant in France the following year at the University of d' Aix-Marseille, France. I came back and entered Harvard Law School, from which I graduated in 1963. After two years as a law clerk for Justice Hugo Black, I went on active duty in the Army. I had been commissioned from the ROTC in college and earlier had waived my active duty. I went into the Army in June 1965 and was assigned to the office of the general counsel of the Army. That was my first contact at the Pentagon. I had almost three interesting years there working for the Army's general counsel--Alfred Fitt for most of the time, and subsequently Bob Jordan. I was released from active duty in the spring of 1968. When I left this position, I spent a little time temporarily with Steptoe & Johnson in Washington practicing law. I became an assistant professor of law at

the University of Michigan in the fall of 1968, and stayed there for one academic year. Then I came back to Washington to become deputy assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and reserve affairs.

Goldberg: That was in the Republican administration?

Kester: Yes.

Goldberg: Were you a registered Democrat?

Kester: I don't believe I was a registered anything, because my voting residence had been Wisconsin. I don't think you registered in Wisconsin by party. You voted in whatever election appealed to you in the primaries. Then I probably became a Virginia resident, but I don't think I had a party registration. The way I got the position was really not political. Stanley Resor, a Republican, had been secretary of the Army under Lyndon Johnson. When he came to the Army he was briefly under secretary; he became secretary of the Army within a month or two of the time I first came to the Pentagon. I became his speechwriter on the side while I was working in the general counsel's office. After I left, I think the main reason I got invited back was because Resor wanted somebody to write his speeches again. After I was gone for a year they had a vacancy. They were actually reorganizing the manpower office at that time. Bill Brehm was the assistant secretary for manpower in the Army. I don't know exactly what they were looking for, but I suspect that Stan was looking for a speechwriter again. On that basis, Bob Jordan called me. At that time he was still general counsel; he asked if I would like to come back. Essentially, the same regime in the Army continued from Johnson through Nixon, and because Stan Resor had Republican credentials they kept him on. They changed under secretaries.

Dave McGiffert had been under secretary during the Johnson years. Ted Beal came in as under secretary during the Nixon administration. He was a liberal Republican.

Goldberg: That would never have worked in the Reagan administration.

Kester: No, I don't think so. My position was not a Senate confirmation job, it was a Schedule C or some such designation. I remember somebody sent me up to the Hill to get some kind of a political clearance from Congressman Joel Broyhill. I was living in Broyhill's district in Virginia at that time. I was pretty darn young too. I didn't know much about what was going on. I recall being in the House Office Building, but I don't recall that I ever talked to Broyhill. Some political guys asked me a couple of questions. I guess I must have said the right answers. I think I told them I was an independent or some thing. Nothing blocked it. That appointment had to get through Melvin Laird's guy--the hatchet man--Wallace. Mel Laird had a lot of Hill staffers there.

Goldberg: He was pragmatic.`

Kester: He was. He was also from Wisconsin and that probably didn't hurt at all. Later Bob Froehlke became secretary of the Army. He was also from Wisconsin. He tolerated me for a while too. I wasn't really a terribly politically-controlled deputy assistant secretary. These were pretty liberal people actually. They were Rockefeller types.

Goldberg: The Eastern establishment people.

Trask: Laird kept quite a few people on from the previous administration in the deputy position level.

Kester: I think that's right . It was not a huge housecleaning as such.

Goldberg: That's usually been true in Defense. Defense has been less subject to outright political appointments than most of the other departments.

Trask: At the assistant secretary level, for example, and the deputy assistant secretary--normally those people do move out.

Goldberg: It is not as partisan in Defense as it is in most of the other departments.

Kester: There may be change but not necessarily partisan change. That certainly was the concept when I was later working for Harold Brown. When you get to the level of deputy assistant secretary in the services those sort of tend to be beyond radar detection from the secretary of defense's office.

Goldberg: Also you need people who know the job, because obviously some secretaries don't. They depend on the deputies, so you get a lot more people who have been around a while. They get carried over. They are not necessarily political appointees at all to begin with. Did you do something other than write speeches?

Kester: Oh yes, as it developed over time. I have forgotten what the exact structure of that office was when I arrived. There was a guy who remained there--Art Allen. I think his title was deputy assistant secretary. He was in a wheel chair because he had experienced some sort of horrible mistake in surgery. He retired as a colonel in the Army. He was kind of tied in with the uniformed Army establishment. Bill Brehm envisioned that office ultimately divided into two deputy assistant secretaries, one the numbers guy, the other the policy guy. I became the policy fellow pretty much. Another man named Don Schoul, whose background was math systems analysis, did all of the numbers work that was very important in those days, because we were

in Vietnam. We constantly had different plans for moving the people around, and eventually for bringing down the numbers. I got very much involved in the Volunteer Army. Initially I was also involved in the race and drug issues, particularly in Vietnam. A lot of the difficulties that were developing in Vietnam in those days were just beginning to be perceived in the Pentagon, because the chain-of-command had not exactly been telling everybody what was going on in this regard. I spent most of my time on those issues. You can see the beginnings of some current issues like women in the Army that was just a new thing, at that time, in the sense of there being women's issues in the Pentagon at all. I was supportive of expanding the WAC--the Women's Army Corps--in order to fill up some of the slots to get the Volunteer Army working. I found that over the couple years I was doing this I could use the Volunteer Army as an excuse for pushing whatever policies seemed otherwise right on the merits and say this is good for morale--this will increase volunteerism and so on. So the Volunteer Army really became a vehicle for lots of things like trying to get money for housing. We started the first paid advertising for the Army; that turned out to be quite controversial--much more so than I naively had thought at the time.

Goldberg: What was your position on the Volunteer Army--were you for it all the way?

Kester: My position on the Volunteer Army, I guess one would have to say, was complex. Before I got to the Pentagon, there was a body called the Gates Commission that either had reported or was in the process of deliberating at that time. It concluded that we should go to the Volunteer Army. That was kind of a fixed deal. They were clearly going to recommend that. President Nixon thought one way

to stop all of the resistance to the war at home and so on--to give himself more of a free hand--was to end or reduce the draft. The reasons for the draft protesters, I thought and think now, were far from totally unselfish and disinterested. These were people who didn't want to get drafted into the Army. One thought was to take away this draft pressure and you will get rid of that problem. Another was that you had people in the Nixon administration who were sort of committed to a free market. Milton Friedman was one of the big backers. He may have been on the Gates Commission, if I recall correctly. There was a decision taken early during the time I was there--that was where we were going. So this came to us essentially to implement. As for my own attitude, I think I was skeptical somewhat of it for a number of reasons. I wrote on that subject afterwards because there was always the problem that the Volunteer Army was going to start to look more poor and more black and not be representative. Plus, how do you get people to volunteer in wartime. It's one thing to volunteer for a job type position, it's another thing to volunteer to get bullets shot at you. But as it worked out, I think I was not opposed to the volunteer force itself. I think Bill Brehm and Stan Resor had some skepticism about the thing, but our attitude and what we said to each other was that there had never been a policy that we wanted to draft people as such. The policy was that if we can't fill the Army up with volunteers, we draft people. If we can arrange things so we have enough volunteers, we won't need to draft people. That's not really a policy change--that just shows that we have a successful recruitment program. So we said okay, we'll give it a try, especially if you give us some money to do it. We were always going around trying to get more money for things the Army wanted to

do. Sometimes you could sell it better by calling these things Volunteer Army, by building better housing for the troops, by mentioning lots of little things that tended to get short changed in the O&M Budget.

Goldberg: We always say Volunteer Army--what about the other services?

Kester: The other services from my point of view were kind of a pain. The Army had the recruitment problem. The Navy and the Air Force were not really worrying about this thing. I think that by and large the Army was the only service drafting at that time. I believe that's right. I don't think we drafted for the Navy.

Goldberg: What about the Air Force?

Kester: The Air Force had clean sheets and good food. They didn't have any trouble getting people.

Goldberg: The Navy had good food too.

Kester: Yes, but they had to go off on trips. They didn't have their girlfriends with them in those days. The recruitment problem was the Army's.

Goldberg: It was the biggest service.

Kester: They were engaged in ground combat. The assistant secretary of defense for manpower was Roger Kelley. Roger came from the Caterpillar company in Peoria. He was a consensus manager kind of guy. He used to like to have meetings where everybody put their chairs in a circle. There would be all of these meetings--4-service meetings with 15 people there from the uniformed and civilian side. The other services were always, of course, fat and happy. They didn't particularly want to do anything, but they just didn't want the Army to get any more money than they were getting. We wanted to put money into advertising. They

didn't want to do that. They didn't want to spend their money on advertising and didn't want us to spend money on advertising. Their attitude was like the tobacco companies--they're just competing for market share. They thought that we might be taking some of their market share, so their attitude was ho-hum--we'll drag our feet.

Goldberg: That's a typical service answer not only in manpower. They are always competing against each other for money. They don't trust each other.

Kester: Not at all. They didn't want the Army to do better on this. They liked the status quo pretty much as it was. If they thought money was involved they wanted to keep what they had. We had a certain amount of pushing and shoving that had to go on in the OSD arena. It was slow and difficult, but sometimes we got pots of money for this and that. Laird, I think, was more supportive than his people were.

Goldberg: You were doing what you were asked to do then. I presume you were not enthusiastic for the volunteer force?

Kester: I was never of the view that there was something wrong with the draft. I thought there was a lot that was good about the draft itself, but I didn't see anything wrong with trying to create an Army environment that met the manpower requirements by volunteers. That's fine. I would never have wound up in the Pentagon, I never would have been in the Army had it not been for the draft, because I was commissioned through ROTC. Actually, before I went to college, at that time by order of the legislature in Wisconsin we had to take ROTC for two years.

Trask: Really. Every male student?



Kester: Yes. That was a state law at that time. Actually, I found it somewhat interesting. I think the federal law at that time said that every land grant university had to offer ROTC. Then there was an act of the state legislature saying that all physically fit male students had to take it. By the time you had two years in, you could get commissioned simply by putting in two more years. You had to go five days a week, but by that time who cared. You avoided getting drafted into the Army as a private. Most people were getting drafted in the late 50s.

Goldberg: Then you could serve probably six months and go into the Reserves?

Kester: Yes, and then you had to go into the Reserves for six and a half or seven years or you could do two years active duty. You get the six months call back for training. Also you got what was called a convection allowance which was 90 cents a day; that amounted to \$27.00 a month. I liked that too. That put money in my pockets.

Goldberg: You got the six weeks training between your junior and senior years.

Kester: Yes. That was sort of a boot camp kind of experience that I thought was quite interesting. I thought the ROTC thing was, by and large, a great experience.

Goldberg: Let me get back to the Volunteer Army. Apparently, there was never any consideration given to dropping the selective service system. It has been kept on a standby basic ever since. That was intentional, wasn't it? They realized they might have to have it some day. They had to keep it reasonably current.

Kester: In that era. I can't remember when the last draft calls were.

Goldberg: The last draft calls were at the very end of 1972, and they officially ended the draft as of June 30, 1973,

Kester: I was there from 1969 to 1972. The draft was still going on. I have forgotten who was the director of Selective Service. He had just left. Hershey had been resisting the Volunteer Army. Hershey was totally wedded to the Selective Service system. I think that Nixon or somebody may have pushed Hershey out of there, at some point. He had been a big opponent, because he had his own empire to preserve. Things with Selective Service were working pretty well. I remember going to meetings at the Selective Service System which was, in those days, over at G Street near the White House--near the old YMCA. We were concerned in the Army that the Selective Service System not collapse and that it remain functioning and able to function. The Army's view also was that the only way that you are going to get a Volunteer Army successfully is to have a manpower requirement that is small enough that the supply and demand would meet. I think our view was that if there ever was an emergency we would need a surge of troops. In particular, an emergency usually would be associated with danger to the troops. We wouldn't be able to do that with a volunteer force; we would have to draft for that. Now that I think of it, our view always was that the draft would have to be available for any major unprogrammed problem.

Goldberg: That's why there wouldn't have been any consideration given to doing away with it.

Kester: No, our concern was exactly the opposite direction--to make sure that it didn't just suddenly crumble while this was going on.

Goldberg: Did you get involved in any Vietnam matters very much?

Kester: Oh, Yes. Vietnam was always the dominant concern. Vietnam permeated everything that was going on in those days.

Goldberg: Your organization was presumably supportive of Vietnamization.

Kester: Yes. That part of it actually was probably implemented more by Don Scrolly--the numbers people. My focus was on the American Army. I do recall we worked on some things such as the advisor's program. We made efforts to make sure that if a lieutenant colonel goes off to be a senior advisor to a Vietnamese battalion or regiment it wouldn't kill his career. We tried to get promotion boards instructed to give the same credit for that as for a battalion command. We were trying, among other things, to promote and encourage the advisor program. With respect to the rest of the program, I know I wrote some speeches, probably for Stan Resor, on that topic.

Goldberg: What was your attitude towards service on the Joint Staff.

Kester: That was remote from my perception. It was not talked about.

Goldberg: It was purely military.

Kester: My horizon didn't extend that far.

Goldberg: There was a problem of a career there also.

Kester: Yes. Service on the Joint Staff in those days was a dead-end job. The staff jobs that Army officers would want would be the MACV staff or the USARV staff. Probably the USARV staff would be better for their career. As for MACV, Westmoreland had replicated the Pentagon there--that was a huge bureaucracy. I wasn't thinking about that.

Trask: As the deputy assistant secretary how much contact did you have with people in OSD?

Kester: Quite a lot--pretty much in the manpower chain. Roger Kelley--quite a lot. His principal deputy was Admiral Mack. He had a deputy named Paul Wollstadt whom I worked with a lot. His portfolio was policy. It was similar in Roger Kelly's office to what I had with Bill Brehm. He was involved in a lot of this stuff. Then there were always endless meetings with counterparts in the other services--both the civilian and military. It was interesting. It seemed in the other services that the uniformed people, their deputy chiefs of staff for personnel, tended to be running things. The civilians often didn't show up. In the Army, I think the manpower civilians were very much involved. Dutch Kerwin was the DCSPER in those days. We got along with him reasonably well. Bill Brehm had a very good relationship with him. I was a kind of a young radical in those days. I was not that popular with those guys. Although I always got along with Dutch. I got along with the generals working there pretty well, although they probably thought I was a pain.

Goldberg: What was the general attitude towards OSD?

Kester: In our office, the attitude was that OSD was a roadblock. When we were trying to get things done they told us they wanted to have a Volunteer Army. We said, "okay, we will give you your Volunteer Army--give us some money and get out of our way." My recollection is that we felt that they were like a stone we had to keep dragging along behind us.

Goldberg: Typical service attitude?

Kester: I don't know.

Goldberg: What you are describing is what I think has been so for the past 50 years that the Department of Defense has been in existence. The services have always looked askance at OSD instruction.

Kester: I don't know. The services are sometimes awesome and very very hard to get motivated to get going.

Goldberg: You have the advantage of having seen it from both sides.

Kester: I have seen it from both sides. On the other hand, on both occasions when I was in service I was trying to get something done. When I was in OSD I was trying to get something done. The people who were dragging their feet got to be difficult people in some situations. But going back to your original question. There is no doubt that we thought we could have gotten this done a whole lot better and more easily if we had not had OSD there. And if Kelley, for example, had not imposed on us this sort of consensus decision-making where we had all of these kibitzers from the other services who really had nothing vital at stake the same way we did --who were in no particular hurry and had no interest in our succeeding in what we were doing.

Goldberg: There was somebody else that had the same experience you had-- Graham Claytor had two years as secretary of the Navy and two years as deputy secretary of defense. We interviewed him just before he left and he had not changed his position much. He did feel that OSD was involved in too many things-- that it should not have centralized to the extent that it did and that it should have left more things to the services. After two years as deputy secretary of defense he still had the service attitude.

Kester: I have much of that attitude too, in some sense, if you had any assurance that the services would do something. Over the years I have come around to the idea that the civilian staff in the services should be drastically shrunk. There really is a huge layering. The services can contribute something. It depends on who the people are.

Goldberg: What do you think about the service secretaries?

Kester: I think the service secretaries could be enormously useful on important jobs, and occasionally have been when you have people like Graham Claytor in there, because you can't run everything from OSD. I wrote an article probably about 1980/1982 about service secretaries that I still believe. I'll send you a copy.

Goldberg: I'm sure we have it but I'll be glad to get an update.

Kester: If I can find one. But I'm very disappointed in the way the service secretary jobs have been handled. They are kind of like show jobs and payoffs for political constituents. I remember in the transition to the Carter administration, I worked on a project interviewing senior defense officials. Not so historically as you are doing, but in getting their views on what the new administration in Defense should do and what the organization should be like. We talked to McNamara and Clifford and a lot of the service secretaries. I remember talking to Middendorf who was secretary of the Navy. In the interview Middendorf said, "in my time as secretary of the Navy I have visited 257 boiler rooms." Why is the secretary of the Navy spending his time visiting boiler rooms all of the time. You have to appear before the troops, but there really are some useful policies and things that can be done. There is a lot of horse power lost in the Pentagon, because those have become figurehead jobs.

Goldberg: Depends on who is in the job sometimes. Lehman threw his weight around very heavily. Middendorf told me once that we were in such a bad state by 1976 that the Soviets could sail up the Potomac and take Washington.

Kester: I totally agree with you--if you have good people in those jobs. There are some levers of power there. We talk about who have been strong service secretaries. I mentioned Claytor and you mentioned John Lehman, but then we start to grope around. Stan Resor did a good job for the Army. He was there six years. He had to deal with the Vietnam War. There wasn't much he could initiate.

Goldberg: He may have been too nice a man.

Kester: He may have been. He is a very nice man.

Goldberg: So much depends on the secretary of defense relationship. The problem with the service secretary is that he is caught between the military and the secretary of defense, and it's pretty hard to walk a tight rope between those two.

Kester: You should be the secretary of defense's man. Lehman's problem was that he was freelancing.

Goldberg: He was his own man.

Kester: But he got a lot done. The thing that impresses me is when these people come into these senior jobs they talk about how they have to preserve their political capital. They worry about preserving their capital. They get done and the capital is still there. And they haven't spent any of it, but by the way the capital will now disappear. It seems to me that you should leave one of those jobs somewhat used up. Sort of the way Lehman did.

Goldberg: He was used up.

Kester: They got a lot of his ships. I'm not saying he did everything the right way, but, at least, he was trying to do something.

Trask: He had ideas and he certainly was assertive. That made a difference. You don't find that in a lot of service secretaries.

Kester: I'm not saying Lehman is necessarily the model. Probably Claytor is better as a model. You could do things in those jobs and they are not getting done now. I think that some of the secretaries of defense had not realized that if they had strong service secretaries they would get more done. I saw something in the paper the other day about some general officer who was allowed to retire before an investigation, and Cohen was talking about that. That's the kind of thing you push your secretary of the Army out there to talk about. It's not for the secretary of defense to talk about that. That was my attitude when I was in OSD. I certainly tried to keep Harold from public pronouncements.

Goldberg: That suited him all right.

Kester: Yes, indeed. To some extent you can ask about something at a press conference. It seems to me Cohen is out talking about what should be matters for the services.

Goldberg: Well, its a carry-over from his congressional career.

Kester: It's also the service secretaries ducking things. They aren't telling the secretary of defense, "I'll bear the burden for you."

Trask: Is there anything else about your service in the Army that we have not asked you about that is important?



Kester: Westmoreland was the chief of staff in those days. He had been commander of MACV and now he was in the Pentagon. I gather he was there because Johnson did not want to fire him and had to do something with him. Abrams had gone over to Vietnam. Westmoreland was very resistant to most of the things I was interested in working on. He had Bill Nolton as his secretary of the general staff--sort of chief of staff to Westmoreland. They really didn't like civilians, especially youngsters with long hair and wild ideas. Kerwin was easier to get along with and Bruce Palmer was vice chief of staff. Basically, when people wanted to get things done they went to Palmer. Westmoreland did not have the intellectual fire power that Palmer did. The race relations thing was very very sensitive in the Army at that time. The Army was taking the position--I don't see white, I don't see black, I just see green, everybody looks the same--we treat everybody alike. That was not totally working in Vietnam. I spent a month in Vietnam. I went all over the place. I saw a lot of stuff. I think, in the three years I was with the Army I made a couple of trips to Germany where the situation was very bad. Germany was being drained for Vietnam. There was no money being spent on anything. There was a lot of restlessness and difficulty. I was involved in trying to attract more black officers and give some recognition to different cultural backgrounds. All kinds of stuff that I think I wouldn't call affirmative action but it's some of that . Hair cuts were a huge issue. We got in a big fight with Westmoreland about hair cuts. We got into fights about advertising. We got the Army advertising program underway. The Army wanted to do it, but nobody would sign off. Paul Wollstadt said something to me that I took as authorization to sign something authorizing Kerwin to spend 10.6 million dollars on

Army advertising. Resor got a call from Laird, asking what's going on in OSD. I told him Wollstadt authorized it and actually, I was right. Wollstadt got in trouble with Kelley because advertising touches nerves on the Hill like nothing else. I testified at some hearing about it. We tried to get the advertising more like something that would work. The Army advertising before this paid program only consisted of fill-in spots at 12:30 A.M. The advertising that had been done by the Sierra Company in Philadelphia was all designed to satisfy the general getting the recruiting command. There was a succession of generals, all of whom thought the most inspiring ad you can have for the Army is somebody charging up the hill with machine gun bullets flying around him waving a flag. This actually was not terribly inspiring for the current generation. We tried to find something and pushed on the recruiting command. Then they came up with "Today's Army wants to join you," which I think, in retrospect, was a dumb slogan. The person I worked with a lot was George Forsythe. We created this job--we got Stan Resor to do it--a three star level position called the SAMVA (Special Assistant for the Modern Volunteer Army). George Forsythe was a real gung ho guy and an officer whose credentials as a soldier couldn't be challenged. I think he had had the First Air Cavalry. He was an inside guy--something of an individualist. He set up this SAMVA office down the hall somewhere. He had Bob Montague who died last year working for him. Bob Montague was a brilliant guy. I think he been first in his class at West Point. He had been in Vietnam. Bob was a colonel at that time and later became a major general. A few years later, he became head of the recruiting command. They had some good officers working for him. He had a small office. Pete Dawkins was there. I

think he was a lieutenant colonel. SAMVA turned out to be a shadow DCSPER operation. We had a three star general, Kerwin, who was the DCSPER and another three star, Forsythe, who was messing around pretty much in personnel matters with this Volunteer Army program. These guys were really gung-hoe. They were kind of young turks in the Army types of fellows. Forsythe and Montague were my buddies. We worked things back and forth. Forsythe had a lot of personal credibility with Westmoreland; he served under him in Vietnam, so Westmoreland couldn't quite dump on Forsythe the way he could on us. He was sort of dragged in a stunned way into some of these things. I remember reviewing advertisements in a conference room with Westmoreland and all of his staff to see if they were suitable. The whole SAMVA thing was a big part of what we were doing and probably too much inside Army baseball for what you are interested in.

I was also involved in ROTC things, because that was the time when all of the Ivy League schools and everybody else were in turmoil--you could look at it as the earliest stage of the breakdown of American academia. There it was, the early 70s. They were kicking out ROTC from all of those schools. I was involved in trying to figure out deals to keep ROTC there, and to get ROTC established in some of the all black colleges. We tried to put out more black officers--that was another ROTC thing. I remember going up to Princeton to talk to the president. Stephen Ailes didn't want Princeton to drop ROTC. He had been secretary of the Army before Resor--a good guy. We worked up some kind of a deal. I was on a committee with some college presidents from here and there. We would meet semiannually. Practically everything that was controversial fell into my lap. My job there, in a

sense, was carved out from what Herb Allen had had and didn't do anything with. I kind of had to create the job by just sort of pulling in stuff all the time. There was a lot of bureaucratic turf fighting that went on. In the end I pretty much had all the strings there.

Trask: You left there in 1972 and came to this law firm (Williams and Connally)?

Kester: Yes.

Goldberg: What were the circumstances of your departure?

Kester: I thought I had been there long enough.

Goldberg: On your own initiative?

Kester: Yes. I didn't get fired.

Trask: The election was coming up, of course; was that a factor?

Kester: No, I don't think so. I had been in that job for almost three years. That seems to be about the right length of time for that kind of a job. I just didn't want to keep doing it forever. I didn't see any likelihood of moving up to anything higher. I could stay there just as long as I wanted to.

Goldberg: Did you get a lot of satisfaction there?

Kester: Oh, yes.

Goldberg: That's why you stayed that long.

Kester: Oh, very much so. It was exciting. Really, I think we did accomplish a lot-- good public service was being performed. My career concept was that I came to Washington mainly because I wanted to work in some responsible position in the government. Being a lawyer, I could always practice law on the side when there was nothing more interesting to do. I wound up at this firm for twenty years; that is not as

I had intended it particularly at all. I was grateful. I was very young for that job and I enjoyed it. I saw myself as a potential in and out and it was time to do some out time for a while. Actually, I came to this firm because Al Fitt put me in touch with Joe Califano.

Goldberg: He was here at the time?

Kester: It was Williams, Connally and Califano. We were located then at Farragut Square. That was how I came in.

Trask: Could you discuss the circumstances of your appointment as special assistant to Secretary of Defense Harold Brown?

Kester: A friend I'd worked with when I was in the Army general counsel's office, who was practicing law in Washington, called me up and said he had gotten involved in the Carter transition effort. He had been assigned or had concocted a program to go around and interview senior defense officials of past administrations to put together a book for the new secretary of defense with summaries of what all of these people said--what the new secretary of defense should think about in terms of, in particular the Pentagon organization and what qualities one should look for in appointments to different jobs. He asked me if I would I like to help. I said sure--sounded interesting. So we went around and interviewed all sorts of luminaries--former secretaries of defense, former service secretaries, and some former assistant secretaries of defense. Somewhere, I think I still have the notebook we put together. It was very interesting--might be interesting to you.

Goldberg: We'll be glad to have it.

Kester: It was not done on tape. It wasn't an oral history kind of thing.

Trask: You took notes?

Kester: We took notes and worked the notes up into three or four-page profiles-- their comments on what they thought of this and that. I really should give that to you. I bet you will find it interesting.

Goldberg: I did something like that for Aspin when he came in 1993. I took the interviews we had with the secretaries up to that point and extracted from them the things that I thought would be useful to an incoming secretary.

Kester: I think that kind of thing is quite useful.

Goldberg: You get some good ideas from it.

Kester: I certainly was educating myself in the process and meeting all kinds of people that I enjoyed meeting. I remember Clark Clifford--we went to see Clark Clifford in his great office up at 815 Connecticut Avenue, overlooking the White House.

Goldberg: That was his building too.

Kester: That is right. He had on his desk little squares with things written on them-- little stacks of paper. He said, "a young man comes to Washington and he goes to work in the government. The first time he goes into the government, he's basically learning and being educated at public expense. Then he goes away for a while and comes back. The second time, he's grown a bit and can really start to contribute something as well and then he goes away again. The third time he comes back-- now the public is really getting something for it. The fourth time--it's marvelous."

I let it be known that I would like to go into the government at that point because I was identified as a Democrat. I don't know if I could identify myself that

way any more. I then met Dick Steadman. I think Dick was the overall head of the Defense transition for Carter. He was an investment banker and his brother, John, had been general counsel for the Air Force and then became a judge. Dick Steadman liked the work we had done on the interviews. I can't remember whether I ever named any particular job I was interested in but he called me one day. He had been working with Harold to try to do a little bit of staffing of some of the jobs. Dick himself was not looking for a job and bowed out. He suggested that I should think about the special assistant job. I was familiar with the job because it was the same job that Califano had had for McNamara--sort of his hatchet man. That wasn't really the job I had thought of. I remember I talked to Joe Califano at that time--I was in the law firm with him. I said I was thinking about going into the government. He said, "that's fine, but you shouldn't take anything less than a presidential appointment." This wasn't a presidential appointment, but it was a job that had enormous potential. I went over to the Pentagon and interviewed with Harold. It seemed to me that Jim Woolsey was there. I think Harold interviewed both of us at once. I don't know if he was considering Jim for that job also, but Jim wound up as under secretary of the Navy. I don't recall too much about what was said. I had not met Harold Brown before this time. I barely knew who he was and he sure didn't know me. It seemed when we were talking that it was kind of a done deal anyway--sort of like now that I've hired you, I'd like to meet you.

Goldberg: That's unusual.

Kester: You'd have to ask him what he had in mind. My sense was that not too much transpired at the interview. The interview was probably to make sure I didn't

have two heads or something. He may have been thinking of what he wanted to do with Woolsey--whether he wanted him in that job. Woolsey would certainly have fit that job also at that time. I met Brown once. It may have been Steadman that called me up all of a sudden--I don't think it was Harold--and told me I had the job if I wanted it. That was some time in January of 1977, because I quickly bailed out of the law firm. I was over there in the Pentagon, it seems to me, on the 21st of January. Harold was in place on the 20th. I think I was there by the next day. I know that he must have spoken to Joe Califano, and he probably spoke to some other people who mutually knew us. The interesting thing about Harold that pertained to all of his staffing at the Pentagon was that he did not follow the pattern of some high officials, which is to have the same bunch of people trail along after them--trusted retainers who move from job to job as they move from job to job. Harold certainly had some people he knew, but he did not try to staff up the place with his friends. He was willing to hire total strangers basically on their record and reputation.

Goldberg: And other people's say so.

Kester: Yes--their reputation.

Goldberg: Didn't Califano offer you a job?

Kester: No.

Goldberg: He took HEW at the time.

Kester: He did. He took HEW around the same time, but I was already going down this line. He did not offer me a job. I would not have wanted to work at HEW. There were several bright young people around our law firm who anticipated that if Joe got a job, we would all going into the government. Several of them were somewhat



disappointed, because he didn't make offers to anybody except one--Ben Heiniman Jr., who is now general counsel of General Electric. Ben was enormously bright and capable. He was an associate in the firm. I wound up with Harold. We were like a skeleton crew trying to operate a big ship with a crew of four. There were not very many of our team in the building at that time. It was pretty exciting--long hours.

Goldberg: Of course, Brown knew the building pretty well.

Kester: Yes. He knew the building inside out.

Trask: Who had been doing the special assistant job for Rumsfeld, the previous secretary of defense? Was there somebody doing a similar kind of job in those days?

Kester: Yes. There was a guy named Stephen Herbits. He had actually been someone I came across back in the Volunteer Army thing. I think he was a student at Georgetown. He may have been on the Gates Commission. He was a big Volunteer Army enthusiast. There was another fellow.

Goldberg: A young man whom I knew also. He died young.

Kester: I think we're thinking about the same guy.

Goldberg: He died in this thirties.

Kester: There was a very nice guy. He went from there into...

Goldberg: Public Affairs.

Kester: Exactly. He was in Public Affairs lobbying type stuff. I remember he represented Air Bus Industries and lived in Alexandria. I used to see him on the bus sometimes.

Goldberg: He was very pleasant--good guy.

Kester: What's his name? (Alan Woods)

Trask: Did you talk to these people at all?

Kester: Oh sure. The way Rumsfeld had that place operating--Califano had had the special assistant job, and it may have been a U.S. code position. They really made it into a very powerful job.

Kester: Al Haig worked for Joe Califano. Colin Powell worked for me.

Goldberg: So he told us.

Kester: Oh--you talked to Colin?

Goldberg: Oh yes--interesting man to talk to.

Kester: Your job is nothing but fun.

Goldberg: Well, we certainly see an awful lot of people. What's interesting is that most of them are interested, most of them are friendly, pleasant, open, and candid. That helps a lot.

Trask: Most of them are reliable, too.

Goldberg: You get a composite that way that you couldn't get any other way. You get enough people giving you their viewpoint on something--their version of it, and you add it up to something that is a sum greater than the parts.

Kester: Sure. I think what you're doing is wonderful. What were we talking about?

Goldberg: The special assistant's job.

Kester: After Califano left, the job as assistant sort of had gone into a certain amount of eclipse. By the time Rumsfeld was there--I guess Herbits or this other guy had it or maybe they both were around. The duties had sort of floated around and had been split up.

Goldberg: They had both a special assistant and an assistant.

Kester: It might have been that.

Goldberg: Sometimes even more--two or three assistants plus the special assistant.

Kester: It was not a job that seemed to exercise a lot of control on important issues.

Goldberg: What happened, at least under Laird, was that the military assistant came to exercise a lot of power.

Kester: That's right.

Goldberg: That was important. That meant that the special assistant and the assistant just didn't have as much influence as they had had before.

Kester: I think that's right.

Goldberg: Pursley was very close to Laird--he was Laird's man.

Kester: The person who had the special assistant job was Wallace. He was basically doing the political things that were part of what I did, but only a part. I wanted the job to operate under the Califano model, so I had to pull a lot of things back in that had drifted away.

Goldberg: That was your conception of the job. You wanted it to be a significant job.

Kester: Absolutely. I didn't want to be somebody's glorified secretary. I remember, at some point, during that time talking to Russ Murray and he said, "if you're going to do that job, for God's sake don't be like Califano. He used to go down the hall and people used to run away, and everybody hated him--don't do that." That was pretty much what I did.

Goldberg: Did you discuss with Brown what your functions would be?

Kester: I'm sure I did, but I have no present recollection of what I said or what he said.

Goldberg: Presumably, he gave you pretty much free rein?

Kester: Yes, he gave me a lot of rein. I think we saw eye to eye. He was looking for help--help from somebody who had no institutional loyalty elsewhere. That's one important thing about that job.

Goldberg: Somebody to be out in front.

Kester: Sometimes. It's like the old thing about the Russian peasants saying if only we could talk to the czar the little father would understand us, but he has all of these bad people around him and we never can get to him.

Goldberg: He really wanted a good filter--somebody who could take a hand in almost everything that came up.

Kester: I think he probably would quarrel with the word filter.

Goldberg: I'll try it on him.

Kester: Try it out on him. Have you talked to him some and doing more?

Goldberg: We have seen him any number of times.

Kester: Harold had a great line about the service secretaries: "They are supposed to be filters and they all turned out to be amplifiers." I suppose not a filter in a sense of keeping them from knowing what was going on, but a sort of flak catcher to some extent might be another term for it. I don't think that either he or I had a total notion of what I would be doing until I got into it. I don't think I knew exactly myself, but I basically tried to keep an eye on things that were of greatest importance to him and

take some heat from him. Also, prod the staff to get some things done that you wanted done.

Goldberg: This is what I meant by the term filter--giving him a notion of what was of immediate importance, what was less important, what had to be done now, etc.

Kester: NSC matters he ran through the military system pretty much, and I never had the time or even that much of an inclination to get involved in those. But I had everything else and relationships with the White House outside the NSC area.

Goldberg: Usually, they had a separate person for that before. I remember the person who had that job under Schlesinger (Tom Latimer). His explanation of his job was, "I'm here to cover Jim Schlesinger's ass with the White House."

Kester: I was there to try to work around the White House to make sure we got what we wanted from them, and that we didn't get in trouble with them while still managing not to do things they told us to do that were silly.

Goldberg: You learned that during the Laird period.

Kester: Yes.

Goldberg: Laird was exceptionally good about getting around the White House.

Kester: You know there was a memorandum that was put out on the first day, which had been put out first by McNamara, that said nobody in the building was supposed to have any contacts with the White House except through the special assistant, signed the secretary of defense. That was a fairly good rule in effect for a while. Of course, I learned at some point that all the women there had the women's network with women in the White House and they didn't pay any attention to any of the rules. You can't totally enforce something like that but you can do some. I had the

advantage also that it sort of took the Carter Administration a better part of the year to figure out where the bathroom was. We managed to do a lot of our staffing without the kinds of interferences--a loaded word--without that much second guessing by the White House. Certainly, it must have been quite different in that respect under Reagan and Clinton. That was the part of what I did.

Trask: You were special assistant to both the secretary and the deputy secretary?

Kester: Yes.

Trask: How much did that mean you worked with the deputy secretary?

Kester: A fair amount, although, it was the concept that Harold and Charles Duncan both had. They wanted to stay tight together, particularly Harold wanted to stay tight with Charles. Charles also thought this. They didn't want to have two staffs. I saw the deputy every day. But over the course of time, because of the limited number of hours in the day, I could only focus on so many things. I was devoting most of my attention to Harold. There also developed a certain number of OSD staffers who managed to try to run around me and get things through the deputy. They found that was a more congenial venue to bring their ideas and stuff to, so a couple of them were doing that. I could only control that to a limited extent, because Charles permitted some of that. But, by and large, I think everybody stayed together. The horror in peoples' minds was, I think, that when Schlesinger was secretary of defense he and his deputy (who was the deputy them?) didn't talk.

Trask: We interviewed him.

Goldberg: Bill Clements.

Kester: Right. That vision was still fresh in peoples' minds and Harold wanted to be sure that didn't happen. Charles' background had been in Texas and with and with Coca Cola. He had his own political connection to Carter.

Goldberg: He was a nice man, wasn't he?

Kester: Yes, very nice.

Trask: We saw both Clements and Duncan on the same trip to Texas--one in Houston and one in Dallas. We enjoyed them both. Duncan was a little bit more to the point, I suppose, but Clements was a very gracious host. He said some interesting things.

Kester: What's Charles doing? I've lost track.

Trask: He has his own company--a company that was sold and he bought it back.

Kester: His family started out in something called the Duncan Coffee Company.

Trask: That's it.

Kester: I thought they sold the company to Coke.

Trask: They did--and he bought it back. That's one of the things he's doing now.

Kester: You run across a few of these people like Charles, who have a lot of money, but sometimes they lose it. The general notion is that if you want to go out and make a few million dollars--you just go out and make a few million. And they manage to do it. There is just a certain number of people whenever they feel like it can go out and make a few million dollars.

Goldberg: He had a running start though.

Kester: He had a start, but I think he lost a lot at one point.

Trask: Can you comment, in general, about your working relationships with Brown and Duncan, particularly Brown?

Kester: We started every morning with Harold pulling in there about 7 o'clock. I never did get there that early. We had our first meeting at 8:30, so I would tend to pull in about 8:25. We called it LA/PA (Legislative Affairs/Public Affairs). Harold and Charles, Jack Stempler, who was the legislative affairs guy, Tom Ross and I attended the LA/PA. That was about it. I guess each of their military assistants would show up. I'm not sure if Charles's military assistant came, but Harold's was a note-taker of sorts. Later, when Colin Powell came to work for me, he lobbied to get to attend the LA/PA meetings. I finally asked Harold if Colin could sit there if he'd be real quiet. Colin was a masterful bureaucratic operator at all times. Those meetings tended to be somewhat fun and uproarious, and thanks to Jack, occasionally, somewhat bloody.

Goldberg: Stempler?

Kester: Yes.

Goldberg: We never have gotten to interview him. I called him several times--talked to him--he'll say, "Oh, I don't have anything much to say." He's been sick too.

Kester: Jack had been in the Air Force when Harold was secretary of the Air Force. He had been assistant general counsel of the Air Force. A lot of people were pretty much in awe of Harold all the time because he was so smart. Jack would come in to these meetings, and Harold would start to get mad about something or was disgruntled about something, and Jack would come in and say, "what's the matter with you? You look like you just stepped on a turd or something." Harold would



laugh because nobody else talked to Harold like that. A lot of business got done. The stated purpose of these meetings was for Tom Ross to say what's in the Early Bird, what the press vultures were looking for today, and what public affairs disasters were looming. And Jack, more or less, did the same thing for the Hill. Jack always focused on the Armed Services Committees and some of the Defense appropriations committees, which one could do in those days. Now it's much worse. During that period it was just the beginning of all of these other Hill committees wanting to mess around in the Defense sand box. Whenever anything got outside the Armed Services or Defense Appropriations committees, Jack was really kind of flying blindly. He would give a run down of what's doing on on the Hill and everybody would say their say of whatever they thought we ought to be concerned about that day. These meetings would probably last anywhere from ten minutes to a half hour. That was kind of the tightest inner circle there. Harold didn't have big meetings with the assistant secretaries or anything like that. Harold didn't like meetings, but he liked that one. We all got along quite well. It was sort of fun. For the rest of it--Harold and I communicated a lot. Harold liked to send little notes. I liked to send little notes. Sometimes we would send little notes back and forth about things. I would see him fifteen times a day. I could go into his office any time I wanted without knocking. I never wasted his time when I did, it was usually when I needed something or he needed something. We would conduct some business orally. Some of the business we conducted only with notes that we never talked about at all when we saw each other. Sort of odd, but we had a purely written thing on some stuff. Then we'd send each other jokes.

Goldberg: This is the way he operated with many people there, wasn't it, on paper rather than orally? He presumably preferred to work this way.

Kester: Yes. He was an enormous speed reader--sort of 115 percent retention. People sent him memos; he put great little marginalia on them. He had meetings generally with one or two people on some particular subject from to time to time, but he liked to do business on paper. He was always worrying that his pile of paper was too big and he always felt like he had to get rid of it, but he really read everything. That was what really amazed people at first. You get these big thick action things--two page memo--Tabs A, C, B, D,Q to find out that he had read all of the attachments. Probably, the assistant secretary who sent it hadn't read all of the attachments. Harold was a phenomenal person.

Goldberg: Carlucci told us a couple of times that Harold Brown is an authentic genius.

Kester: He is. He is. He's one of the two smartest people I've ever met.

Goldberg: Who is the other one?

Kester: Dick Posner.

Goldberg: Who is that?

Kester: He is chief judge in the United States Court of Appeals in Chicago--he's very smart too. Those two stand out. I have known a lot of smart people, but I think these people are sort of operating on a higher, higher frame of activities somehow.

So I was in and out of Brown's office a lot. I could go to whatever meetings of his I wanted to, but that got to be a question of my time too, because I had a lot of

stuff of my own to handle. I tried to see pretty much all of the paper that went in and out of the office. That's how you control a lot of stuff--and I did. I worked very hard.

Goldberg: What time did you get home?

Kester: It varied, but I didn't usually work late into the night--probably around 6:30 or 7. I remember, I used to go home and somebody would ask, "what did you do today. What happened this morning?" I couldn't remember--trying to think about what happened in the morning was like trying to think about what happened yesterday. It was as if every day was two days long--it was totally intense. Every time I came back to my desk there were all of these pink telephone slips there. People were always calling up--mostly wanting something.

Goldberg: Saturdays too?

Kester: We always worked Saturdays but not usually past the middle of the afternoon, and Sundays--very seldom. Saturdays were relaxed--we could catch up on a lot of stuff. Harold liked to sit in his office on Saturday afternoons and watch reruns of "Mission Impossible." I always thought: I wonder what the citizens of the United States would think if they knew that the secretary of defense was sitting there watching "Mission Impossible."

Goldberg: He was thinking about Desert One.

Kester: I don't know--kind of scary.

Goldberg: He approved it.

Kester: That was past my time.

Goldberg: I know. I discussed that with him. He called it feasible--could have worked.

Trask: Did you have a role in controlling his appointments or have a role in whom he saw?

Kester: I had an enormous role. Do you mean appointments in the sense of appointments to positions or appointments to see him? I had a big role to play in staffing. I was very much involved in that, which went on in the early months. In terms of whom he saw? Not too much. I didn't want to be his appointment secretary as such. I did have a role in controlling somewhat what paper went to him. Most of the paper flowed through me. NSC related stuff didn't. Some assistant secretary would send a memorandum up to the secretary of defense--the thing was probably on its way in the hall to my office-- and somebody was on the phone to me saying, "He's got to see this thing right away. Why are you sitting on it?" What I could do in that regard was put a little note of my own on something. I would hand-write some short comment of what I thought about the thing after looking at it, which might be totally different from what anybody wanted him to be told. It was my job. I was always subject to the danger of people saying that the special assistant's office was a bottleneck. Basically, I moved the paper pretty much. People could not, with much credibility, make that claim. Occasionally, I'd hold up something for some reason or another, but for the most part I moved the paper very fast--but I moved it with my comments. I asserted myself in everything. In terms of whom he saw, he pretty much controlled that. I monitored, to some extent, his schedule on what he was doing. I would come in on something that I was interested in.

Goldberg: What was your relationship with the military assistant?

Kester: There were two military assistants--two successive principal military assistants--Staser Holcomb and Thor Hanson.

Goldberg: Both Navy?

Kester: Both Navy.

Goldberg: Both of them pretty strong men too.

Kester: Carl Smith was the assistant military assistant. He may have been there the whole time. He was a nice guy.

Goldberg: He later became the military assistant to the secretary--under Weinberger.

Kester: That's right--under Weinberger.

Trask: What did Powell do?

Kester: He was my special assistant.

Goldberg: That's when I met him--he was a colonel.

Kester: Then he became Charles Duncan's military assistant, and later Claytor's.

Goldberg: That's when we saw him crawling around on the floor. When we went in to interview Claytor, we brought in our tape recorders and were looking for a place to plug them in. Powell was already a brigadier general by this time--he was there and he took the cord and then crawled around on the floor to find the outlet.

Trask: I was amazed. I was looking for a plug and then I see this brigadier general crawling around behind the sofa. I could not believe it.

Kester: He picks his cards. We can talk about Colin later on. In terms of the military assistants, Staser Holcomb ultimately got four stars. My relationships were different with the two of them. When I came in there, Holcomb had been there under

Rumsfeld and was staying one. It was sort of like when I came in to be deputy assistant secretary of the Army: why should we do any different from what we did before, things worked fine without you. We got along all right but there was a little turf squabbling. I don't think Staser--you'd have to ask him--welcomed the idea of the special assistant playing a major role, when up to that point he had these guys sitting out there basically being just press agents or glorified Hill staffers. There was probably some difference of opinion as to what my job should be and what I should be doing, but not in a debilitating way.

Goldberg: Did he handle the NSC stuff?

Kester: Yes. I never tried to get much into that. I didn't consider myself particularly expert in the area and I didn't have time to become such. I just had too much to do. That was a fine, easy, and it seemed to me, a sensible breakout. Most of the interaction on the NSC stuff was with the Joint Staff and the JCS. It was an established chain that I didn't usually have to deal with. That's another thing I did--I went to all of the meetings that the SecDef goes to once a week--to sit in the tank with the chiefs. Those were interesting meetings. When it was time for Staser to leave the office, probably about the middle of the time Brown was there, we picked Thor. I interviewed him as did Harold. I wanted to pick somebody I could get along with--he was very easy to get along with. Thor Hanson and I had absolutely no friction that I can recall--we hit it off very well. Staser was probably a little more prickly. I was probably more prickly. The previous pattern, I think, had been what you said, that the military assistant was really filling that personal assistant role very totally, so that changed back when Califano came in under McNamara.

Goldberg: It varies--depending on the secretary.

Kester: I think the military assistant is key for some things.

Goldberg: Oh yes--in relations with the Joint Staff and with the services.

Kester: I have never had a very absolutist view of how the front office of the secretary ought to be organized. It ought to be organized in a way that works but that the secretary is comfortable with. There is no single right answer to it.

Goldberg: Just as there is no single right answer to where to draw the line between the civilian and the military-- it keeps shifting.

Kester: Depends a whole lot on the personalities.

Trask: Did you have much contact with other officials like the under secretaries-- Komer, the special assistant for NATO, and Stan Resor?

Kester: Komer use to send me weepy memos about how we were ignoring him. I was a big backer of Komer's. I think Harold had the idea of setting up that NATO job. A friend of mine that I had known from the Army, Ken Cooper, got to be his three star assistant. I had known Ken Cooper when he was military assistant to Stan Resor. He was getting ready to retire when I figured out a way to get him a third star because he wasn't going to become chief of engineers. I got his third star with Komer. They were in that NATO shop and did a lot of good work. I had constant contact pretty much with all of the assistant secretaries. I was involved in reorganizing the structure. I paid a lot of attention to the organization. With Bill Perry and Jerry Dinneen, I probably had less contact, because Harold handled the sort of scientific hardware stuff directly with them. There wasn't a whole lot I could

contribute to Harold's understanding of DDR&E kind of issues, so I didn't attempt to.

Goldberg: He had a high regard for Perry.

Kester: Rightfully, Perry was excellent. I didn't work with them on a daily basis. In the reorganization, we set up the policy job. Harold thought he needed some senior civilian person who could kind of snoop on what the JCS was doing in the Joint Staff, that that was not covered. That was one of the principal things we intended the under secretary for policy to do. We didn't advertise that, of course. I am the one who invented the name of the under secretary for policy. I said to Harold, we should find the most non-descript name we can possibly concoct for this job so it doesn't set off any alarm bells anywhere. The title under secretary of policy--nobody would know what that means--could mean anything. That's how that job got its name. Then we called the DDR&E the under secretary. That was before they set up all the under secretaries we have now.

Goldberg: Did you have anything to do with Resor getting the job?

Kester: Oh yes. My thought partly based on my own experience was that Stan Resor would be great for that job. Dave McGiffert was very antsy about the under secretary for policy job. When we hired Dave, we told him that the plan was to set up an under secretary to whom the ISA would report. I think Harold said he should not count on having that job himself, although that's not to say he wouldn't be considered, he might get it. I was looking for people to have that job. I think I interviewed Henry Aaron, the economist from Brookings. We didn't have a long list of people for it. It seems like there was somebody at Harvard we thought about. I



came up with the idea of Resor because I had known him and thought very well of him, and I thought that he could handle the McGiffert problem. Because McGiffert had, after all, been Stan's under secretary and should be in the habit of being subordinate to Resor; that ought to end that difficulty. I was quite wrong in that whole thing. Stan had liked being secretary of the Army but that was an established position--every body knew who it was. You had a flag with stars on it and a whole staff organization to serve you in a big office. You at least didn't have to worry about anybody in the Army challenging who you were. Policy was a new position imposed on the OSD organization--just bureaucratic turf battles going on all over in connection with it. Stan is a very nice man--he does not like to go around engaging in knife fights in the bureaucracy. He was not happy in the job. McGiffert put up all sorts of resistance in spite of the past history there. It just wasn't working-- so Stan left--I forget how long he stayed there--less than 6 months? I think Komer was appointed after I had gone although I was supportive of him. Komer always wanted to be secretary of the Army.

Goldberg: Komer was well aware of problem when he took over. I knew Bob very well for many years. He knew about McGiffert end-running all the time. He solved the problem by staying as late or later than McGiffert because at night McGiffert would not be able to get into Brown, while Komer was on the job. He would know-- that was his solution.

Kester: That's Bob. Dan Murphy was also going around Stan.

Goldberg: He was a real bureaucrat too. He'd been around the building a long time.

Kester: He used to go around me when he could and tried to run things through Charles. You can't control everything.

Goldberg: No. Even McNamara found that out.

Trask: What about contacts with the JCS, in particular the chairman--did you have much of that?

Kester: A fair amount. I went to those weekly meetings where they actually talked reasonably frankly--the secretary, the deputy, the chiefs, chairman, a couple of note-takers, Staser Holcomb. It was Harold's idea that I go to those meetings. I knew the chiefs. I probably had more contact with the chairman. I knew George Brown less well than Dave Jones. I interviewed Dave Jones for the job. I was involved to some extent with Harold in some of the senior general officer appointments--four star level appointments--and certainly the chairman. We talked a fair amount about who should be the chairman. I'm trying to think who else was being considered along with Dave Jones. Then there was a question about whether we should have two Air Force chief in a row because George Brown was Air Force. Harold and I took a sort of a delight in trying to depart from the idea of switching the job from service to service--to sort of send the message that this isn't just some sort of plum that gets passed around. The same thing about having two admirals as successive military assistants. I can't think who else was involved.

Goldberg: It wasn't Bernie Rogers, was it?

Kester: No. Bernie Rogers was never going to happen.

Goldberg: Jim Holloway?

Kester: Yes. Jim Holloway was the other contender. He had a good reputation as an “operator.” After I was long gone--I think there was some back-biting after Desert One saying, if Holloway had been the chairman, he would have handled it better than Dave Jones. I knew Jones better than George Brown. I knew Bernie Rogers from when I was deputy assistant secretary. He had been a two star in the Army personnel business.