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Interview

with

MARX LEVA  
Assistant Secretary of Defense,  
Legal and Legislative  
(1949-1951)

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by

Doris M. Condit

and

Steven L. Rearden

Washington, D. C.  
June 10, 14, 1977

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Interview With

MARK LEVA

June 10 and 14, 1977

CONDIT: This is an interesting conversation about racial integration in the armed forces. That was on the way by the time Forrestal became Secretary of Defense, wasn't it? James Evans was the man . . . .

LEVA: James Evans was the Special Assistant. But more than that, Lester Granger, who was the head of the National Urban League at the time, was Forrestal's close friend from his New York days. Between Forrestal and Lester Granger at Navy and Jim Evans at Defense I think great strides were made, considering the state of the situation at the time.

CONDIT: Did Forrestal have anything to do with Symington's willingness to start with integration in the new Air Force?

LEVA: I don't know. He and Symington were very close friends in spite of their philosophical differences.

CONDIT: Symington seems to have gone right in with integration, with no problems, but the Army appears to have given you a bad time.

LEVA: The Army gave us a very bad time. Kenneth Royall gave us a very bad time. Everybody gave us a bad time.

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CONDIT: Was this the generals or was this . . . .

LEVA: I don't know. I think it was just a general, ingrained attitude. Plus Kenneth Royall's North Carolina antecedents, I'm afraid, if I, being from Selma, Alabama, can be permitted to make that remark. This is an interesting matter.

REARDEN: Yes, this raises a question about Forrestal's relations with the Navy after he had become Secretary of Defense. What happened then to Forrestal's friendships in the Navy?

LEVA: They continued, I think. They were very close. But it was certainly news to me that Forrestal had originally objected to Nimitz as Chief of Naval Operations. Or to Sherman.

REARDEN: Yes, I thought he was quite close to Sherman.

LEVA: Sherman was the greatest figure of all, I thought, in terms of intellect. It was a great tragedy that he died so young. I've said it before, both on and off the record: If Sherman had become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as he would have, instead of Radford becoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I think it might well have changed the entire history of the postwar period. Sherman was so infinitely superior.

REARDEN: What I'd like to tentatively explore is the area that Mr. Ohly felt that we should talk to you about -- the relations between OSD and the White House and Congress. Ohly commented that

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he dealt with the NSC quite a bit, but he never dealt very much with the White House or the President and that these affairs were managed by the Secretary or by you. Particularly, what were the relations between Forrestal and Truman -- good, bad, indifferent?

LEVA: I think they were very good in the earlier period and they deteriorated in the later period. I always ascribe the deterioration in my own mind to the White House "palace guard," who were constantly dripping poison. Do you know what he's doing? Do you know what this man is doing? Untruths, half-truths, and so forth. This is largely a surmise on my part concerning various individuals around Mr. Truman. I suppose it was most dramatic in my mind when General Gruenther and I flew down with Forrestal in November 1948, November or December 1948 after the election, to Key West. Forrestal and Gruenther had just been on a trip to Europe, and Forrestal was reporting on the trip. I thought the palace guards served to keep him from having any private conversation with Mr. Truman whatsoever, in particular, Matt Connelly, who was the President's Appointments Secretary at that time and who regulated the access to the President both in Washington and even on an informal vacation.

REARDEN: Could we back up a little bit to the spring of 1948 at the time of the . . .

LEVA: You're asking questions I can't possibly answer. If you show me there was a spring in 1948, I will agree with you! It

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stands to reason there would have been a spring in 1948. I was working almost literally 24 hours a day around the clock, around the year. I didn't know spring from fall, and I really have no recollection of specific events. Jumping ahead, I see one of your typed questions on this list about the cancellation of McCone's appointment as Under Secretary of Defense in the summer of 1948. If John McCone was appointed Under Secretary of Defense or if it was withdrawn, it's news to me. I'm sure it happened. My recollection is zilch. I'm sorry but that's the case. You know, you run like hell, you get the day's work done and hopefully you live to do the next day's work. I don't have the sort of mind that Jack Ohly has. I can't tell you in any great detail about the case I handled in New York yesterday or the case I handled in New York the day before yesterday. I can tell you in great detail about the two I'm handling right now.

CONDIT: Yes, it's tone, feeling quality, that you can really say something about. For example, could you compare the feeling tone under Forrestal, the working relations among the staff, compared with what those relations were after Johnson came in?

LEVA: Sure. I think that under Forrestal there was a loyalty and an esprit de corps. Three musketeers. Something that I had never seen before anywhere in government. It was sort of a crusade, and I think there was rather a clear feeling about the crusade. If you have to put that into words, it was, "We're doing things

about the Defense Department; we're doing things about the National Security Council; the National Security Resources Board. There is now a National Security Council for the first time. We're doing all of this to prevent World War III, which is an imminent possibility."

CONDIT: You actually felt that?

LEVA: Yes, certainly I think there was that feeling among the staff around Forrestal. Apparently, as Forrestal got more and more worn out, this became a real case of mental illness with him. He thought it was not only imminent, it was tomorrow. I was not aware of that. That was after he left the office and after I last saw him. Those who did see him, both down in Florida and at the hospital, have told me that. I think those around Forrestal really thought they were doing something of great importance.

I'll give you one example. I asked a fellow who was a year behind me in law school to take my job in the Navy when I went to Defense, my job as personal handmaiden to the Secretary of the Navy, screening every paper that passed over his desk. I thought it was a very exciting job for my then age of 31 or 32, and it was. I had just come back from three years of sea duty. This fellow, who is a brilliant, brilliant lawyer, a great theoretician, and currently a professor at the Columbia Law School, would not take the job. He said it had no social significance. And I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, you know, you're just working on these military things." I said, "It has the social significance that we're going

to prevent World War III if it can be humanly done." Yes, I think that was the crusade and I think that was the esprit de corps. I don't think that esprit lasted under Louis Johnson. It was re-created to a degree under Bob Lovett and General Marshall, not to the same extent. The flame did not quite expire, but it was not quite the same. With Forrestal and with those around him . . . . I mean, this was the gentle, perfect knight. I still think that.

CONDIT: Did size have something to do with it?

LEVA: It was certainly a factor, though the increase in size didn't really come along until later when I was out. The real expansion came with Charlie Wilson. McNamara merely continued it. I haven't seen the statistics on size, but I will bet you the increase from Forrestal to Johnson, while substantial, was not all that great. And to Marshall-Lovett was not all that great. Tom Gates and the others I don't think had much of an effect, one way or the other. But the real quantum jump came with Wilson. It didn't really come with McNamara. That was the second quantum jump. But in terms of feeling and in terms of Forrestal's relationship with Truman, I thought that when he was Secretary of the Navy he had a tremendously good relationship with Truman. I thought as Secretary of Defense -- although he was not Truman's first choice for the job, as you know Patterson was -- (the relationship deteriorated over time).

CONDIT: I take it you had a real affection for Forrestal, a real affection.

LEVA: I had an enormous affection for Forrestal. I thought he was a tremendous person.

CONDIT: You were very fond of Jack Ohly?

LEVA: Yes. I had never met Jack Ohly, you see, before this.

CONDIT: Oh, you hadn't? But you brought him in.

LEVA: Because Forrestal had already asked Admiral McNeil to be his budget officer and asked me to be his legal officer. I said, "You're getting into real hot water." I had then only worked with Forrestal for six months at the Navy. "You don't have any Army people." He said, "What do you suggest?" I said, "I'll inquire." I was told that Patterson's special assistant, Jack Ohly, was extremely good; so I interviewed Jack and brought him in. No, I only met him in 1947 in connection with the job, but he's a marvelous person. One of the ablest public servants I've ever known.

CONDIT: What about McNeil? What were his relations with Forrestal and you?

LEVA: Very good and very narrow. I'll repeat, very good and very narrow. You have to know McNeil's background. I'm suffering from the fact that I don't know how much of this I've already said. McNeil was an apprentice seaman during World War I. He was from Iowa. He loved the Navy with a passion. This was a liability; it was also an asset. He got out and went into business

after World War I. He came to Washington as circulation manager of The Washington Post. First he was circulation manager in western Maryland; his home was in Gaithersburg or Germantown, you know, one of the towns. Then he was circulation manager here, and then he came into the Navy from The Washington Post at the beginning of World War II. I think he came in as a lieutenant commander and he rose as a reserve or he had been in the reserves. I met McNeil a year before I met Forrestal, when I was still serving out my time in uniform after I had come home from sea duty. I was assigned to the Bureau of Ships in a mixed legal/accounting capacity having to do with contract terminations. Frank Lincoln, later an Assistant Secretary, was counsel to McNeil, who was the comptroller or fiscal director of the Navy. Frank Lincoln asked if I could take his job as McNeil's counsel so that he could go back to his law firm in New York. To make a long story short, in that capacity I then became deputy fiscal director of the Navy as well as counsel to the fiscal director. Shortly thereafter, I got to know McNeil, the fiscal director, very well. I was very fond of McNeil. In fact, I was debating phoning McNeil when I was in New York yesterday and decided I couldn't listen to any more Republican politics; so I didn't.

McNeil and Forrestal went out to the atomic experiments at Eniwetok or Bikini atoll, whichever, and I was left as acting fiscal director of the Navy. Then they went around the world

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and came back, so that lasted longer than it should have. When they came back, McNeil asked me to attend Forrestal's meetings of Bureau chiefs, which were held once a week with him, since I had been acting during this period; so I got to know Forrestal through McNeil. Then Forrestal asked me, when his personal counsel left, to take that job. His personal counsel was Jack Connor, who is now chairman of Allied Chemical and was a year ahead of me at Harvard Law School. Actually Jack Connor asked me to take the job; and I said, "You know, Forrestal must know somebody he wants to take the job." He said, "Well, I'm asking you for Forrestal . . . ." So I went with Forrestal, limiting it to something like six months. By the time six months was out, he was Secretary of Defense, and he asked me to come with him there. I limited that to one year, which didn't really succeed in limiting it.

As to McNeil, he had great abilities in the fiscal field, self taught, and great abilities in the Congressional relations field. If McNeil told people like Senator Harry Byrd the elder something, they believed it. If Forrestal told them, they liked him but they were skeptical; they wanted to know what McNeil said. McNeil built up quite a personal following on the Hill, which was good for the Navy and which later was good for Defense. It was very good for the Defense budget. But he really was never able to get rid of his pro-Navy bias, and the Air Force was always suspicious of him, and the Army was reasonably suspicious. By virtue of that

and knowing that, I was most insistent on getting Ohly from the Army and I tried to get Forrestal to have an Army aide. In fact, he had a Navy aide. The Navy aura in the early period was too great. I didn't regard myself as Navy; I had never gotten above lieutenant. But the objection was that I was Navy. It wasn't the same as McNeil, who had spent a lifetime in the Reserves.

CONDIT: I understand McNeil's job became very "iffy" after Johnson came in. There was some little story there about how it was saved.

LEVA: I don't know about it's becoming "iffy," but Johnson was suspicious of everybody who had been with Forrestal. I didn't expect to stay. Forrestal, before he became so ill, asked me to stay 90 days to help Johnson with the transition. I said I would but I wanted out. I had never met Johnson before he came in. He asked me to stay and we were in . . . .

CONDIT: How soon did he ask you to stay?

LEVA: I think almost immediately, I don't know. I don't even remember, but apparently there was never any question about my leaving. The only time anything came up was when either Johnson or Steve Early sent for me and told me that in a meeting the Democratic National Committee had complained that I had hired two Republican lawyers. I said, "I don't really know the politics of the lawyers I hired.

I hired the best lawyers I could get, and I'm going to continue to do so. If you want somebody to hire Democratic lawyers, you've got to get another boy." "Oh no, you just do what you want and we'll protect your flanks." So I think I laid it on the line at that point that I wasn't running a political office. I happen to be a believing Democrat, but that's different.

CONDIT: Is there anything to the idea that Lincoln may have talked to Johnson about McNeil's value and usefulness?

LEVA: I never heard of it. If I had heard of it, I've forgotten it. Where was Lincoln at the time?

CONDIT: I guess he was out. He knew Johnson, didn't he?

LEVA: He had been from Steptoe and Johnson; he had been with Johnson's law firm at one time and his brother still was. Don Lincoln was at Steptoe and Johnson; Frank Lincoln was with a firm in New York he had established before the war, Lundgren, Bartells, and Lincoln. No longer in existence. He then went to work as an executive at some conglomerate, I think.

CONDIT: One thing that I see in the OSD files is a great paper mass on General McNarney's National Defense Management Committee. Was that a very serious undertaking?

LEVA: Well, General McNarney and Admiral Carney originally worked on the budget and then that broadened out into general management.

I really don't remember that. Has anyone talked to Admiral Carney?

CONDIT: I don't believe so.

LEVA: Admiral Carney should be a gold mine of information. He was in the Washington office of the Bath Shipbuilding Works and he also had a consultancy with the Washington office of Westinghouse. I think he lives in this area. He was a strong, able man, one of the ablest Chiefs of Naval Operations during the period that I had any familiarity with.

CONDIT: Would I be correct in surmising that Griffith and Early were both buddies of Johnson and brought in for . . . .

LEVA: Quite different, quite different. Louis Johnson, to my great astonishment, arrived at the Pentagon thinking he was going to be the next President of the United States. It was quite clear to me that the Pentagon is a graveyard for political ambitions. When Forrestal became Secretary of Defense, there was a lot of talk about his being the next Vice President; and I knew that wasn't going to happen either. Johnson arrived thinking he was going to be the next President. He had been the head of the American Legion, he was used to the kingmaking process. Steve Early had been the public relations fellow for Roosevelt. I don't believe he was all that close to Johnson. They were fairly close, but Steve Early was there to make Louis Johnson the next President. Paul

Griffith was there as an intimate buddy whom Johnson had made head of the American Legion after him, who was to do any dirty work that Johnson didn't want to do. I think he had done the same thing for Johnson in his law practice. He was sort of a personal servant whom, over everybody's objections, Johnson made Assistant Secretary of Defense when the 1949 amendments came along creating three Assistant Secretaries of Defense. Ohly didn't take it. It was given to Paul Griffith. He never really functioned as other than a personal troubleshooter: Go out and make a speech to the Legion, take care of this, somebody's constituent is crying. Griffith never functioned as an Assistant Secretary of Defense and knew that he didn't. A roly-poly, pleasant man. I didn't know much about him. He was like Lou Renfrow. General Renfrow was there on much the same basis. Lou Renfrow was more the court jester, I would say.

CONDIT: I guess Ohly was replaced by the triumvirate -- Burns, Lemnitzer and Halaby on his ISA side.

LEVA: Halaby had already been there.

CONDIT: Johnson didn't like him I gather.

LEVA: Johnson was terribly suspicious of him. He said, "Get that A-rab out of here." I can remember that.

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CONDIT: "A-rab":

LEVA: I can remember that! Halaby was Lebanese by descent. I saved Halaby's job on more than one occasion by telling Johnson he was a brilliant lawyer, which he was. He got in over his depth at Pan American later, but that's a separate subject. Halaby was a good and effective fellow at the Pentagon. Johnson didn't trust him. He didn't trust anybody from the Middle East much.

CONDIT: Halaby left and then he came back a little later.

LEVA: General Burns is a peculiar figure. He was certainly over the hill and too old to do anything effective, but Johnson listened to him and that was very important.

REARDEN: He used Burns quite a bit, didn't he?

LEVA: Yes, he was important in that he would not have listened to a Lemnitzer but, when a Lemnitzer briefed a Burns, it was fine.

CONDIT: Lemnitzer is very bitter, I think, about Johnson.

LEVA: Well, Lem has so many things to be bitter about. I assume he's bitter about Kennedy too. That comes later. I'm fond of Lem, always was. My good wife, who's a doctor, begged Lem not to take jump training. He was almost 50 when he took parachute training. Shirley said, "You know, you tall, slender guys," as

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he then was, "you're going to hurt your back and so forth."

Of course, he said, "In order to get ahead in the Army, this you've got to do." He was a good friend of ours. I don't see him that often, but I still regard him as a good friend.

CONDIT: He comes into the Pentagon every day.

LEVA: And I know he's bitter. I'm wandering, excuse me.

How was liaison established with the White House, to go to your first question. I didn't think that it was that organized, you know. If there was a speech to be written, Forrestal did not like to sit around that Cabinet table when speeches were being written. I would usually go over, ridiculous as that may now seem, and I would be the Defense Department representative. While we were certainly not on a comparable footing, Mr. Acheson would come representing himself, and he was the State Department representative. Charlie Ross, who was then handling public relations at the White House would be there; Clark Clifford, assisted by Charlie Murphy, later succeeded by Charlie Murphy; and there would be quite a team around the table. The White House didn't say to send Marx Leva, God knows; you know, Forrestal sent Marx Leva on that. On National Security Council matters or what not, he sent Jack Ohly, accompanied on some occasions by military, not accompanied on others. Any first-hand relationship or liaison was between Forrestal and Truman or Forrestal and Clifford.

In the early days, Forrestal and Clifford were extremely close. I never did know, Mr. Clifford being one floor above me at my law office and also one of my friends, whether Clark was one of the cabal that finally got Forrestal or whether he merely got into it at the last minute, on the grounds that Forrestal's health had deteriorated and he couldn't be permitted to stay in office. There were two quite different groups. I would have agreed with the second, I would not have agreed with the first. Just to go back to specifics, the first, I'm sure was constantly dripping poison; "Forrestal really wanted Dewey elected in 1948; he's briefing Dewey"; and so forth.

My own understanding of that was that -- I got it second-hand from Forrestal -- Mr. Truman told Forrestal and Marshall, who was then Secretary of State, "I don't expect you to get into the political campaign, it's going to get nasty. I do expect you to defend the conduct of the administration if the Republicans or the Republican candidates attack foreign policy or attack defense policy." That didn't really happen; so Forrestal and Marshall did not get into the campaign. I think that Forrestal asked Truman's permission to have Dewey briefed on foreign policy and had that permission. I think on one occasion Forrestal briefed Dewey. It would be surprising if he hadn't. They knew each other in New York, and so forth. This gave ammunition for those who wanted to say, "You know, he's really on the other side."

Forrestal was a pretty strong Democrat. He wouldn't have been down here if he hadn't been; he left Wall Street in 1939

or 1940 to come down here. He was the son of Irish immigrants; he was a strong Democrat in his personal views; he was very liberal for the times, certainly for someone who had been in the financial community; he had worked his way through Dartmouth and Princeton. I thought this (gossip) was a lot of malarkey and I sort of laughed at it. I undervalued the seriousness of it when dropped into a Presidential candidate's ear day by day throughout a hotly contested political campaign which almost nobody felt the President would win. I certainly didn't think he'd win it, and I don't think many people did. But I think that people around Truman, I can't say which people -- Matt Connelly I think was one, John Steelman was probably another -- were part of a cabal. I'd like to believe that Clifford and Murphy, who were my points of contact, were not part of it, but who knows. There was obviously a cabal, as White House cabals get set up, which was out to get rid of Forrestal. Now were they out to get rid of Forrestal in order to get in Johnson, who was raising money for the campaign? I don't know. Johnson always denied that, and he wrote me a long letter, which I'll fish out somewhere if you want it, afterwards denying he had anything to do with the departure of Forrestal.

REARDEN: I sense in reading some of the documents that the feeling in the White House was that Forrestal had lost control of the military. Was there any indication to you that this was the line

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of thinking in the White House?

LEVA: No. I would think that would be an excuse, but I never saw that. You see, I was never aware that Forrestal was ill until the very end. I was aware that he was tired, he was exhausted. When he left office, he broke. That I could see. If we had a piece of paper like this -- I've used this illustration before -- and we were going up before a Congressional committee, which was a very big part of my role with him, and he was going over the questions to revise, he might do it in five minutes; but in the last three months, he might do it in thirty minutes or an hour and would torture himself on whether a word should be "view" or "attitude." I felt that was a reflection of exhaustion. I had no experience with problems of mental health; I did not realize the thin line between exhaustion and depression.

CONDIT: What did your wife say?

LEVA: I didn't tell her about it. I didn't mention it.

CONDIT: She didn't notice it when she saw him?

LEVA: We didn't see him that often. We had dinner at the Forrestal house occasionally, but I don't think in the last days we had dinner much. He came by our little house in Cleveland Park on one occasion I remember. We asked him for a dinner we were having, which was just a small dinner party, and he wrote a little note saying,

"Can I come for cocktails but not for dinner?" He really didn't like social engagements and he ran in and he ran out. The whole neighborhood was buzzing about those limousines out front; I don't know where else he and his aides were going, and what not. My wife was very fond of Forrestal. Of course, the family situation was a tragedy; that's no item of news. I guess the last time we had dinner at the house, Mrs. Forrestal was extremely drunk, which was not unique. It was just a mess.

CONDIT: That's really too bad. One of the questions on this page intrigues me: Was Forrestal actually asked by Truman to retire? Do you know the answer to that?

LEVA: I think at the end, yes. I think, on the grounds of Truman's rationale in his own book, that Forrestal's health had deteriorated, and so forth. This is purely speculative, but my own idea about it was not that, but something else which came out a little, I suppose, in discussions with Louis Johnson about fund raising. Louis Johnson desperately wanted to rehabilitate himself in **his own** eyes. When I say rehabilitate, it should be remembered that he had been a very successful lawyer in Clarksburg, West Virginia, which is where he first practiced. When he found that most things in the state were done in the state capital at Charleston, he opened an office in Charleston and was immensely successful there. Then when he could operate in a broader sphere, he opened an office

in Washington. His firm now has offices in Clarksburg, Charleston, and Washington, very good offices. My son-in-law is a partner in the Washington office. Johnson was talking about fund raising. Nobody would give money to the Democrats in 1948 and I was dubious about some of his tactics in getting money for the Democrats, but it was a desperate campaign and there was no way to get money. Truman had apparently asked everybody under the sun to raise money and nobody would, and Louis said that he would. I think, he said he would provided he was given his choice of any cabinet job. Now nobody told me that in haec verba.

CONDIT: Wouldn't that go unsaid?

LEVA: You have to remember, not with Louis Johnson it wouldn't, because he'd call a spade a damn shovel. You have to remember that Louis Johnson had been Assistant Secretary of War when Woodring was Secretary of War. You have to remember that they got into a terrible fight and that Roosevelt fired them both. Johnson was looking for what we regard as rehabilitation. Having been fired as Assistant Secretary of War, rehabilitation consisted of the top job in that complex. Whereas he could have been Secretary of the Treasury or Attorney General or what not, he had to be Secretary of Defense, so as to have rehabilitation in his own mind. I think that after the election, Truman asked him, "What job do you want?" And I think that had something to do with our cool reception down in

Key West before we knew any of this, say, two weeks after the election. Louis had said, "I want the Defense job," and Truman had said, "Well, that takes a little doing, let me work on it." He couldn't "work on it" by the time of the inauguration, and it came a couple of months later. That's my own interpretation, and I have nothing to go on except gut reaction to things I saw.

CONDIT: How did you react to Johnson's firing, which was sort of tragic in a way?

LEVA: It had been coming for a long time, you know.

CONDIT: But I believe that he had lived with it for so long that he was no longer expecting it.

LEVA: I don't know how I reacted to it. I can't tell you how I felt at the time. We were in the midst of a war and everything was addressed to that. With his firing, Marshall became Secretary and Bob Lovett, whom I knew well because of Forrestal, became Deputy Secretary. My great contact then was Lovett rather than Marshall, who really left the running of the Department to Lovett. I don't know how I reacted, I may have felt that it was a personal tragedy but one that was really overdue by that time.

CONDIT: You've expressed your admiration for Lovett. Do you feel that he moved the Department of Defense back into the same "groove" that Forrestal would have liked?

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LEVA: I think he tried very hard.

CONDIT: Could you expand on that?

LEVA: See my book review! See my book review of The Forrestal Diaries in The New York Times in 1951 in which I said that Lovett carried on Forrestal's policies, and so forth. I only know that because I was rereading it just last week for a purpose. If I can find a copy, I'll get you a copy. I think that Lovett's thinking was essentially parallel to Forrestal's. Lovett had been Assistant Secretary of War for Air, so that he didn't have the Navy viewpoint, but he did have the viewpoint of a relatively small central organization with delegation of operations to Army, Navy, and Air Force. I don't know if that was ever really obtainable, but that was what they were trying to do. Forrestal's problem was that he had no under secretary, no assistant secretary, and he was trying to carry that out. He was hoist by his own petard, the compromise that emerged. Lovett was not that restricted; he had some people.

You ask what were the relationships among the special assistants. If Jack Ohly didn't dig out a piece of paper for you, he should have, because I don't have it. I drafted it and we redrafted it, and it defined the work of the three special assistants: Leva for legal and legislative, McNeil for budgetary and fiscal control, Ohly for National Security Council and National Security Resources Board and everything else. But there was a fourth

paragraph that said that all three special assistants were supposed to be utility infielders in effect, and everybody was supposed to know what was going on so that they could back each other up. And we did. We had a much broader charter, I think, than anybody since. We covered the totality.

CONDIT: I gather that you worked well together; you were not only friendly but you were . . . .

LEVA: Very. We were always together, at the office and away. If McNeil had a budgetary matter he wanted to discuss, he could come to me or to Jack and we would be sounding boards. If I wanted to know whether or not I should go to Congressman Zilch, I could go to McNeil, who knew the Congress, and talk to him. We worked terribly closely, which was a great privilege, really. It worked, it worked at that point.

CONDIT: Tell me a little bit about Marshall's personality. Did you have much to do with him?

LEVA: Not much. I was Assistant Secretary of Defense. I suppose the closest I ever worked with Marshall was when he told me he wanted Anna Rosenberg to be Assistant Secretary of Defense. I had never met her. He anticipated some problems in the Congress and would I handle the confirmation? I worked very closely with Marshall on that. I worked closely enough to tell him, when we did run into

problems, that it really didn't help very much for one Jewish Assistant Secretary to be up there trying to get the nomination of another Jewish Assistant Secretary through; so I was going to have my then Deputy General Counsel Felix Larkin, a good Catholic who is now chairman of W.R. Grace, handle Anna Rosenberg's confirmation. Which he did very brilliantly, and which he was better equipped to do than I was. You know, there were problems. You've got to have a reasonable sensitivity to this sort of problem, that's all. I wouldn't expect General Marshall to understand that, really, but he accepted my view that this was not something that I should be in the front row on. General Marshall, I am sure, was a great and magnificent figure. I think he was a bit over-the-hill by the time I knew him. I did not think he was a forceful Secretary of Defense. He certainly was forceful when it came to firing MacArthur.

CONDIT: He was forceful?

LEVA: Yes, I think so. Had he been on the other side, Truman would have listened. Of course, he had Bradley by then and he had the Chiefs. The Chiefs were scared to death. Truman was strong as horseradish, so all that Marshall had to be was strong in support of Truman. I'm not saying that Marshall took the lead. On most things he didn't take much of a stand, he left it to Lovett.

CONDIT: Would you say that being the front man for Truman in the Far East hearings afterwards was one of Marshall's major contributions?

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LEVA: I resigned in March 1951, effective May 1. General Marshall asked me to stay on to handle those hearings. Lovett asked me. I said, "I came here for one year, I have been here for nearly five, and I give you Felix Larkin, who is fully capable. I'm getting out." I also had commitments to this law firm. I got out. I don't know as much about those hearings as I should.

CONDIT: What about Marshall ("Pat") Carter and his operation? Apparently that was very controversial.

LEVA: I don't know. Pat Carter came in as General Marshall's aide and much more than that, and I think he stepped on a lot of toes, including mine, I guess.

CONDIT: Yours too! I've heard that he stepped on McNeil's.

LEVA: He stepped on McNeil's and stepped on Halaby's and whoever else was there. Halaby may have been gone by then, I don't know. Pat is a person who acquires authority unto himself. Once I visited him out at NSA when he was the head of NSA. I gather that Pat had taken over most of the authority of the deputies. Whereas the Admiral who had preceded him had had operating deputies, now there was only Pat. While that tendency was good for General Marshall because that's what he wanted, a fellow at his right hand who could tell him everything, I'm not at all sure that it was good for Pat Carter because he made enemies. How much of

that was his own doing and how much because he was carrying out Marshall's bidding, I'm really very vague on that.

CONDIT: Are you at all aware of his visit to Bernard Baruch?

LEVA: I imagine that everybody visited Baruch. I'm not aware of that. Baruch was a great friend of Eberstadt's. There was an awful lot of visiting over the years back and forth. Where did he go, up to New York? You want to know how did he really get rid of all these people? I'm not aware.

CONDIT: No, Carter went up on an entirely different matter for General Marshall. I was just wondering if he discussed this with you at all. It was concerning Marshall's future testimony at Congress.

LEVA: No. I once wanted to go to see Mr. Baruch for Mr. Forrestal when the Washington Times Herald came on the market, and I thought Mr. Forrestal should buy it with a few financial friends. He wouldn't let me do that. Would have saved his life, by the way.

CONDIT: How do you feel about Harry S. Truman and working for him?

LEVA: I liked him very much. The only misgiving I have is that he believed the people who were telling him lies about Forrestal. I just don't know how commendable that was, but the job of a President is a very difficult job. I guess he was getting the same sort of things about people who didn't like the Secretary of the Interior and . . . .

CONDIT: He got some things about the Secretary of State too.

LEVA: He believed in Acheson though. That was a strange one.

CONDIT: Tell me a little bit more about him. That's interesting.

LEVA: Oh, what I mean by "That was a strange one"? All that I mean is that the patrician son of an Episcopal bishop and Harry S. Truman were a very unlikely Mutt and Jeff combination. But it worked. In part, it worked because I think Acheson felt very deeply that the President was Commander in Chief and the President was in charge of foreign policy, and he never tried to bypass, and Truman knew that. So I think that worked very well.

CONDIT: Well, Acheson's only strength was Harry S. Truman; he didn't have much chance to bypass him, I don't think.

LEVA: Well, he never tried, he never tried.

CONDIT: Did Forrestal ever try?

LEVA: No, but he was up to bypassing the State Department.

CONDIT: I see. So in a way . . . . Do you think it made Truman nervous that Forrestal had such a big vision of the roles of NSC-NSRB-DoD?

LEVA: I don't think so. I never saw any indications. He didn't regard him as a man on horseback. I don't think.

I think I incorporated in one or another of these interviews a memorandum that Forrestal had me send to Clifford while he was still Secretary of the Navy. You talk about preventing World War III. Isn't that in one of the interviews?

REARDEN: Yes.

LEVA: I think that was Forrestal's and not mine -- when we say bypassing. Forrestal said, "You'd better send it to Clifford; the Secretary of the Navy doesn't write to the President about foreign policy." The first draft had been prepared for sending to Truman; so I sent it to Clifford, but it was clearly Forrestal's. That was sort of a blueprint. Not a bad blueprint certainly for the time, but it anticipated the Marshall Plan and its object was the prevention of World War III. I think that was the overriding thing. Forrestal had been a naval aviator during World War I; he had built the Navy as Under Secretary in World War II; then he had been Secretary of the Navy. Then he was Secretary of Defense and the overriding thing was: How do we keep this from happening again?

CONDIT: That's a rather noble concept.

LEVA: Others would say the overriding concept was: How do we keep the Russians from marching to the Channel? That was the same thing.

REARDEN: That memo you're talking about emphasized the economic aspects.

LEVA: Much more than anything else; that was all economic. That was a forerunner of the Marshall Plan. The sad truth, which I shouldn't say, is that General Marshall was dragged, kicking and screaming, to espouse the Marshall Plan. We better end on that.

- June 14, 1977 -

CONDIT: Can you tell me anything about your successor, Daniel Edwards?

LEVA: I had two successors. Felix Larkin succeeded me as General Counsel and Dan Edwards succeeded me as Assistant Secretary of Defense. General Marshall had met Dan Edwards in the course of his work with the Red Cross and my recollection is that General Marshall asked Anna Rosenberg one day, "Who was that nice young fellow from North Carolina we met when we were down there?" He proceeded, I think, to make a very serious mistake, because he should have made Felix Larkin the Assistant Secretary. He didn't, which resulted rather shortly in Felix's departure. Felix had been there from the beginning, in 1947, almost from the beginning, and would have been a very good person, both for the legislative and the legal job. Serious as was the mistake of naming Dan Edwards from all I later heard, even more serious was the mistake of letting Felix Larkin go. I do not know anything about Dan Edwards; I probably met him once.

CONDIT: How about Charles A. Coolidge. Did you know Coolidge?

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LEVA: I had not known Charlie Coolidge, but I met him and liked him very much and thought he was terribly effective. He was as effective as Dan Edwards was ineffective. They had very soon to send Dan Edwards off to a job in Paris, I believe. He did not last very long.

CONDIT: In fact, it worries me that they sent him to NATO. I think that's where they send a lot of people who . . . .

LEVA: They might well have done so. I didn't see him when I was over there. I was at NATO a year or so later visiting General Persons and General Gruenther, but I never saw Dan Edwards. He was sent and was lost without a trace.

CONDIT: He left. He didn't stay because he collided with Harriman and it was a graveyard.

LEVA: That I did not know. Lots of people have collided with Averell Harriman, to their sorrow, I think. I was not one of them. I've always got along very well with him. Averell asked me to be his General Counsel when he became head of the foreign aid program and I told him I couldn't do that. I had with difficulty managed to get out of the government and I couldn't go back in.

CONDIT: I think you were lucky. You know, concerning personal relationships with key people, I was wondering how key Ralph Stohl was. He was an old timer, wasn't he?

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LEVA: Ralph was, I would say, a fonctionnaire. He was an exceedingly fine personnel man and an administrative man, but I don't think he affected policy in any way. He was, what do the Russians say, an apparatchik.

CONDIT: Yes, and you said something about General McNarney and the National Defense Management Committee.

LEVA: You asked me about it! I didn't remember the National Defense Management Committee. I remembered his role in connection with the budget.

CONDIT: I have hints that McNeil sort of scooped up that committee by lending his personnel to it. There was some talk that it would come back into the Comptroller's office.

LEVA: Might well have been so. McNeil visualized the 1949 amendments to the Unification Act as a means of aggrandizing the Comptroller's functions, and all of the rest of it could be sloughed off. It didn't wind up that way, but he did work very actively on the Hill, as did Ferd Eberstadt on the 1949 amendments -- to the effect that improvement in defense management was the important thing to be done in the 1949 amendments; the basis had already been laid in 1947. Therefore, they contributed a bit to the foot dragging, especially in the House, on things like a Chairman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other provisions of the 1949 amendments.

REARDEN: Do you recall the Eberstadt Task Force? I understand they had their offices in the Pentagon, and they were part of the Hoover Commission.

LEVA: I think you're talking about the first Hoover Commission and the National Security Task Force chaired by Ferdinand Eberstadt. They were extremely active. Eberstadt had done a study, of course, for Forrestal before the 1947 Act. He did the 1949 study, which I guess may have been submitted in 1948, and it certainly laid a foundation for the 1949 Act. It was an interesting group, and there were lots of dissents within their report. I don't know if you've read their report; one of the things I meant to suggest was that you read (a) the first Hoover Commission's report on national security and (b) the Task Force report on national security.

REARDEN: The Task Force report is voluminous; I think there are four volumes to it. And their recommendations are a little bit different than what came out.

LEVA: Not terribly different.

REARDEN: It seemed to me that McNeil had more influence.

LEVA: I think he had more influence with the majority of that committee than he did with even, let us say, Forrestal's own recommendations, which are in the first Report of the Secretary of Defense.

REARDEN: Last time we touched, very briefly at the end, upon the Marshall Plan, the origins of the Marshall Plan, and Forrestal's involvement. I'd like to go into that a little more. Forrestal was very much in favor of economic assistance to Europe.

LEVA: Well, Forrestal's background in the business community differed very materially from General Marshall's background, and there was therefore a difference in emphasis. But Marshall became interested in the same things that Forrestal had been interested in earlier. Forrestal saw all of Europe from an economic standpoint, flat on its back. He felt we could not afford to leave it so.

REARDEN: After the Marshall Plan was proposed and the legislation was being drafted and the funding of it was being studied, was there any sense then within the Pentagon that the Marshall Plan would be in competition for money?

LEVA: You mentioned that last time. I have no recollection that there was such a feeling, but then I have no recollection that there was not. I do not believe that Forrestal would have felt that it was competitive, because he felt that we had to have economic viability or no one was going to have a defense department worthy of the name. There might well have been some feeling among the military, I just don't recall.

REARDEN: The record is pretty well clear about Forrestal's stand in favor of the Marshall Plan.

LEVA: Forrestal's testimony, I guess his earliest testimony on the Marshall Plan, was some of the most powerful testimony he ever gave. It was extremely fine.

REARDEN: Yes, I read that. You were very much involved with the legislation for Universal Military Training (UMT).

LEVA: Jack Ohly more than I. Jack Ohly was involved in the formulation; I was involved in trying to get it through the Congress.

CONDIT: What year was this when you were involved?

LEVA: 1948-1949, I don't know.

REARDEN: 1948, I guess.

LEVA: The Selective Service and Training Act of 1948 was one of the earliest legislative things we did. We tried for Universal Military Training. Actually, we got more in that legislation than I had expected that we would get. We got provisions on "universal training" which, if properly implemented . . . . There you had the military not wanting to spend money on Universal Military Training if they could spend it on the regular establishment. Now, that was competition.

REARDEN: Would you say that the Army was lukewarm toward the idea?

LEVA: They gave it lip service.

CONDIT: But not Marshall.

LEVA: No, he was not in the Army.

REARDEN: That's right, he was gone by then.

LEVA: He was Secretary of State by the time we're talking about.

CONDIT: When he came back as Secretary of Defense, he worked hard for UMF.

LEVA: He did and Anna Rosenberg did. But I would say the Army and the various Chiefs of Staff did not. Eisenhower didn't give it that much consideration, I believe, one way or the other. The regular establishment was closer to their hearts, let's put it that way. Bear in mind my recollection of this is fuzzy to nonexistent; so I'm thinking what I would think their position would have been if I had remembered what their position was.

CONDIT: Let's go on from that. Can you assess how Marshall may have looked at his time as Secretary of Defense? He was an old man when he came in, you said he was past the prime, the President was pushing him.

LEVA: To Marshall, it was another duty, another obligation. Truman asked him, the Commander in Chief asked him, and the answer was yes.

CONDIT: What do you think he wanted to accomplish while he was there?

LEVA: I don't think he had any objectives.

CONDIT: No objectives?

LEVA: Perhaps he had the objective of getting the Korean war over with as quickly as he could, I don't know. He left the management of the Department to Lovett. I mean 99 percent of the management was Lovett's.

CONDIT: What were Lovett's objectives? Did he ever formulate them in any way? Tell anyone?

LEVA: Not to me.

CONDIT: He always seems so pragmatic -- let's get the job done -- you know.

LEVA: He was always pragmatic. I think that's the best word for him.  
?

CONDIT: But then in 1952 after you had left, there's a lot of internal correspondence between him and Charlie Coolidge, your successor.

LEVA: I haven't seen that.

CONDIT: In one letter Coolidge says, "Marx Leva and I think . . . ."  
This is late 1952.

LEVA: Well Charlie Coolidge was very close to Lovett, and I saw a lot of Charlie Coolidge. I did not see a lot of Dan Edwards, as I say. Charlie Coolidge was a good bit older than I was, which makes him a few years older than God. He was, should we say, much more mature when he was in that position than some of the rest of us. I don't really know about Lovett's objectives. On one occasion, I know, he asked me to work with Charlie Coolidge on a speech Lovett was giving. I don't remember any concretes. It may have been a speech dedicating the Forrestal campus at Princeton, the RCA-Forrestal campus.

CONDIT: Did you get any hint in 1952, toward the end of the Truman administration, that Lovett did a lot of looking around at organization, and that he was addressing the question, Where have we gone in unification? Where are we standing now?

LEVA: Not in my contacts. I started law practice in 1951 and I wasn't paying too much attention. Two things: I started law practice in 1951, and I did not handle any cases at the Pentagon in 1951-1952 and until the Republicans came in in 1953. I was largely staying away from the building, deliberately.

CONDIT: I see and I can appreciate that; but on the other hand I have to see what you remember, what you did.

LEVA: Bob asked me to help on various things, and his wife Adele would say, "Give Bob a hand," and what not; so I helped when I was asked.

CONDIT: Well, you know, Lovett's very reticent even now about talking and he will not say what he thinks he did well. He'll only say, "Well, that's for the historians to decide."

LEVA: Yes, but he had a great sense of humor, which was one of his greatest qualities. Forrestal didn't have a sense of humor and couldn't roll with the punches. When Kennedy came in, I wrote to Bob and urged him to accept the entreaties, Kennedy having offered him State, Defense, or Treasury, anything that he wanted. A nice offer. I told him he ought to take Treasury. Having served at State, having served at Defense, that would be a nice thing to wind up. He wrote back that Adele said that he should tell me that I was a nice young fellow -- I was not so young then -- but that he'd given one kidney to his country and should save the other one for his family. He turned down the offers, in other words. A remarkable man, really remarkable.

I quoted him this morning in a meeting. I was in a very difficult negotiation and there was no earthly way the thing was going to end. I said, "I'll just have to tell you what Mr. Lovett

would say under these conditions, 'To hell with the cheese; let's get out of the trap.'" He had so many expressions that were so good. He went on a trip in World War II; I wasn't with him, I heard this later from others. He flew from Oran to Algiers in a converted bomber, and he sat in one of the blisters where the gunners sat. - A sergeant sat in the other one. They were playing Armed Forces radio and some jazz musician came on, I don't remember which one; jazz is one of Lovett's many hobbies. He said, "That's X, he plays the best saxophone in the country." The sergeant sitting across from Lovett tore off his earphones and ran up to the pilot and said, "Jeez, he's the first guy from Washington who has known anything about anything."

CONDIT: Did you have any feeling that Johnson was for or against NATO and the Military Defense Assistance Program?

LEVA: I think, given his druthers, he was going to be a "fortress America" type; but he knew there were certain givens and one of the givens was NATO; so he begrudgingly did his best by it, I think. He was terribly constricted, I think, or felt he was terribly constricted within the limits of the defense budget that Truman allowed.

CONDIT: But he had some natural feeling toward the Far East?

LEVA: Well, he had spent time there as Roosevelt's emissary in

India. We saw a very strange relationship when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru came to this country in 1949. Nehru thought his closest friend was Johnson! More antithetical characters I could hardly have imagined, but apparently they hit it off well. Apparently Johnson had helped him get out of jail when the British put him in jail. Johnson had been in India as Roosevelt's special emissary, which I gather was the booby prize they gave him after firing him as Assistant Secretary of War somewhere along the line. That was his "feel" for the Far East; now, what other experience he had in the Far East I don't know.

CONDIT: One of the ironies of Johnson's life is that he is the man who precipitated Marshall's getting his first star.

LEVA: Really?

CONDIT: Yes, and then of course, he was replaced by Marshall. There was a little irony of life.

LEVA: It was just a question of whom Johnson would be replaced by; it was inevitable that he was going to be replaced. After I'd gotten to know him well -- I've told this story before and, again, I don't know if it's been reported -- Johnson sent me up to New York, let's say in July or August of 1950, when things were going very badly in Korea and we were being forced back into the Pusan perimeter. He wanted me to go see Ben Sonnenberg, who had

apparently done some public relations work for him when Louis was in various businesses and so on. I'd never met him, but Ben Sonnenberg at the time had the reputation of being one of the most effective public relations practitioners in the country. He did Pepperidge Farms bread and Lever Brothers soap; you name it, he did it. He was a very successful practitioner of an art I don't think too highly of. Anyway, it was summer and I was told to go to see him and that his family was away and his town house was closed so that I should go to the St. Regis Hotel to see him. I appeared at the St. Regis and was announced from downstairs, I guess, and went up to his apartment and knocked. He opened the door and made some courtly remark telling me to sit -- he had a walrus mustache -- and said, "What can I do for you?" I said, "Secretary Johnson asked me to come to see you to see what he can do from a public relations standpoint." This had to be on a secret basis because Johnson didn't want Steve Early to know that he was consulting another public relations expert. Sonnenberg said, "Louis Johnson is a dead duck. You look like an interesting young fellow; let's talk about you." He gave me a very quick appraisal of Louis Johnson and he was right, you know. I kept trying to get back to what Louis could do and he said, "Absolutely nothing; he's had it."

CONDIT: There's one interesting thing here. Truman said later that he should have fired Johnson earlier and he had in fact been

thinking about it since May. That's before the Korean war.

LEVA: The attack was in June; that I do know, because I was away on my first vacation.

CONDIT: I just don't see what the basis would have been for firing Johnson in May, before the Korean war.

LEVA: Johnson was considerable of a boor, you know. I became quite fond of him on a personal level, not for the job he was doing. I became quite fond of him on a personal level and used to have lunch with him after I was out and he was out, and he would reminisce, but he was really a boor in his relations with people. I think the one thing that almost killed me occurred after Forrestal's death when we were still trying to get the Unification Act amendments through the Congress. Somebody asked Louis Johnson something, and I was accompanying him. I don't know what particular it was: Why do you say we have to have Assistant Secretaries? Or why do you say we have to have a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs? Or why do you need "direction, authority and control" instead of "general direction"? Whatever it was they asked him, he said, "That's not me that's telling you, that's the voice from the grave!" It was so typical and it was so crude and it was so gross and it killed me to such an extent. You know Forrestal had been dead a month maybe, under terrible circumstances, and -- "That's the voice from the grave!"

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One of your questions here really bears on that, you know -- changes in space assignments in the Pentagon. Immediately upon becoming Secretary, Johnson had to move down to the main office where the Secretary now is, the main office. Forrestal had gone in so as not to upset the given order any more than he had to. He had gone in what I always regarded as the side entrance, but Louis had to show who was boss. He was constantly engaged in showing who was boss. It took the form in his early speeches of saying that he was cutting out the fat and not the muscle and that, if we were attacked at 2:30, we would respond at 3:00. Unfortunately, we were attacked at 2:30, and we didn't respond at 3:00. I could see where early on Mr. Truman might have had those feelings, but I think Mr. Truman must have felt terribly limited by virtue of his promises to Johnson and Johnson's role in his election and so on.

CONDIT: I see. Even Mrs. Roosevelt wrote the President to tell him he had to fire Louis Johnson.

LEVA: Well, Roosevelt had, why not? Roosevelt had fired him as Assistant Secretary of War; why shouldn't Truman?

CONDIT: I'd like to go into his Congressional relations a little bit because they puzzle me. In some ways he seems to have fairly good relations, and in other ways, no.

LEVA: Well, let's put it this way. There were then and there are now a considerable number of Neanderthal men in Congress. Louis was essentially a Neanderthal man. He would appeal to those who are ultraconservative. He did appeal to them. Moreover, there was a great concentration of those on the Armed Services Committees. Mr. Rayburn planned it that way, Mr. Vinson planned it that way. Therefore he had a built-in constituency out of all proportion to what his constituency might have been in the country at large or in the Pentagon. He had a constituency on the House Armed Services Committee in particular, to a lesser extent in the Senate. I think that may account for the inconsistency.

CONDIT: I'm very ignorant on this subject of how congressional legislation goes through. Would you be willing to discuss how you would take an appropriations bill and push it through the Congress?

LEVA: You mean the mechanics?

CONDIT: Yes, well, who coordinates McNeil and Lovett and Leva?

LEVA: Well that has changed so.

CONDIT: Well, who did then?

LEVA: That has changed so over the years. I think when you're talking about what goes through the Bureau of the Budget -- let's

put it that way -- you have to talk about two mainstreams. You must remember that the Bureau of the Budget is the Office of Management and Budget now. Beginning in late 1947, the system was that under my general control a legislative package was put together and under McNeil's general control a fiscal package was put together. The fiscal package was basically addressed to the House Appropriations Committee. The legislative package was basically addressed to the House Armed Services Committee and the equivalent committees in the Senate, but let's say the House because they would usually start in the House.

McNeil would get together and later General McNarney and Admiral Carney would get together. The three services would try to formulate a budget. Later we had to call down General Eisenhower from Columbia as a special advisor on the dollar figures. My operation on legislation was essentially with the Judge Advocate Generals of the services, their offices, and with the General Counsels of those services that had General Counsels. The Navy had a functioning General Counsel's office; Army had a very small General Counsel's office which was really just an advisor to the Secretary; Air Force built up from a standing start a very formidable General Counsel's office.

The reason I make that distinction, that dichotomy, is that the Bureau of the Budget had to approve both legislation and fiscal programs and in terms that the President signed off on them. The

Bureau of the Budget -- certainly when Frank Pace was the head, certainly when Jim Webb was the head -- approved all of these items. Then they could be transmitted to the Hill as the program of the Administration or the Defense Department.

If there was a new program, and this may be over-simplistic, it had to go to the Armed Services Committee for authorization before it could go to the Appropriations Committee for appropriations. You therefore had four stumbling blocks to get through, aside from the House itself and the Senate itself, namely: the House authorization committee, usually the House Armed Services Committee; the House Appropriations Committee; the Senate authorizing committee, the Armed Services Committee; and the Senate Appropriations Committee and its defense subcommittees. Then the bill went to the floors of the two houses. We had other things that had to go to the Judiciary Committee, for example, if you were creating legal positions; but generally the authorizing committees were the Armed Services Committees. We frequently found in the earlier days that various components of the Armed Forces were lobbying against a program which the President and Bureau of the Budget had authorized us to go forward with. Or they were lobbying for programs that were not on the approved program. It was a lengthy and difficult process.

CONDIT: Now for the hearings, who prepares the Secretary's testimony?

LEVA: This varies from Secretary to Secretary. In the normal course of events, I prepared a great deal of Forrestal's testimony, but I never prepared any that he did not thoroughly rewrite. Johnson had his own little coterie writing and usually, but not always, I would see it and have a chance to review it.

CONDIT: Who was in his "own little coterie"? Do you mean Griffith and Early?

LEVA: No, Griffith didn't write. Whomever he brought in at the moment. It was General Burns, or somebody else, or Lou Renfrow on Universal Military Training since he thought he was a great expert because he had worked for General Hershey for many years. Everybody got into the act, but I would say the Secretary always edited and signed off on his own testimony.

CONDIT: And then if there were quarrels inside the office, inside of OSD, suppose you and McNeil had a quarrel, how was that settled?

LEVA: Who could yell the loudest; I don't know.

CONDIT: Who could yell the loudest? Maybe you never had a quarrel?

LEVA: I don't recall any episodes on that. I would assume the Secretary would have to review that and intervene, but I don't recall. In later years when they had nine, ten and twelve Assistant Secretaries, they had to set up a committee to resolve

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jurisdictional quarrels among them, but that was later than my time. That was Charlie Wilson's day.

CONDIT: I wanted to check on just that point. I did listen to the first tape this morning, and you said the great growth was under Charlie Wilson. Well, numerically that's not so; but you were referring, weren't you, to the increase of secretaries?

LEVA: That's when the services complained. I was talking about the number of Assistant Secretaries. The services complained they couldn't get anything done. They had this terrible echelon of up to twelve Assistant Secretaries to plow through before they could get anything before Charlie Wilson. Now whether he designed it that way to protect himself, I don't know.

CONDIT: Well, he didn't always like to make decisions.

LEVA: Well, that's a device for not making decisions.

CONDIT: But I'm talking out of my period, I shouldn't be saying that.

LEVA: Don't worry about it.

REARDEN: You had two packages that were supposedly going, one legislation and one the fiscal which McNeil had drawn up. In theory these two were supposed to mesh, is that right?

LEVA: That's right.

REARDEN: At what point did the meshing process take place in the Pentagon?

LEVA: Let's use an example, because that's always a lot better. Symington, who is Secretary of the Air Force, says we've got to have a long range missile proving ground. I assume at some point the Joint Chiefs considered that; but by the time I get into it, it is to draft legislation to make Cape Canaveral, now Cape Kennedy, a long range missile proving ground. First, you have to have the legislation, then you have to have enough dollars to start building buildings. That's the specific.

Basically, in the best of all possible worlds, the legislation precedes the budget by about a year. Frequently, they go simultaneously because you get a crash program. After Sputnik what do you do? If you're Charlie Wilson, you say that you're not going to play global basketball. If you're somebody else, you do something. We had long since started the long range missile proving grounds and I guess the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville and then later added the George Marshall Test Center at Huntsville after my time. But you have to authorize each of those. You can't just say, "Gee, wouldn't it be great to have \$2 billion for so and so." Under our budgetary system and legislative system, you have to have a legislative authorization; the big fight up there this year has been on whether they will authorize or cancel, as Carter has recommended, another big carrier. First, you have to have the authorization.

Now once they authorize another carrier, which they seem to be in the process of doing, which I think is a foolish way of spending \$3 billion but nobody has asked me, then they have to get an appropriation for the \$3 billion and then someone will say, "Gee, you know, \$3 billion for a carrier! We can't have something like that floating around without ten more destroyers." Then they've got an authorization for ten more destroyers. This is a rolling proposition; it isn't neat and orderly. Somebody else is up there saying, "You know, you ought to put in a proviso that at least half of those destroyers have to be built in Navy yards, not private." And still somebody else is up there from the private sector saying, "They ought to be built on the south coast in private yards." The real politics of it is different from the theory, but I've been trying to give you the theory.

REARDEN: The politics of it often escape the record, don't get down on the record. The civics course description of how it goes through is pretty clear.

LEVA: I can give you an example; I hope I didn't use it with you last week. I came back from the Hill with Mr. Forrestal once; and Mr. Symington told me to come up right away, something terrible had happened. Did I tell you that? That's the reality of it. That is much more often. That's got nothing to do with anything. I didn't know what bill was involved, I didn't know what appropriation was involved or anything else.

CONDIT: You're referring to Forrestal's remark that two-thirds of the globe is water?

LEVA: Yes, I thought I'd given you that. My point is that much of the lobbying is just emotional, not having to do with anything. Then there are the hardheaded individuals who are looking for business in their districts, etc., and that's a different form of lobbying. The Congressmen in whose district Cape Canaveral is located is not being emotional.

CONDIT: How about the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy?

LEVA: That came along in 1946.

CONDIT: It was pretty active.

REARDEN: Pretty active after 1949.

LEVA: I'm just trying to remember the Joint Committee. My own first contact with the atomic picture was in 1946. I was loaned for three months by Forrestal to Lillienthal. Lillienthal was made the first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. By virtue of a series of accidents and whom he bumped into, Lillienthal heard I was working on fiscal matters (I told you I was working on fiscal matters at the Navy), and he asked if I could be borrowed to effect the legal and fiscal transfer of the Army's Manhattan District to the civilian Atomic Energy Commission. I did that for three

months, which was interesting. Then I was asked to stay on, but I didn't want to stay on. That was while Forrestal was still Secretary of the Navy. I don't know too much about the Joint Committee. Forrestal had a special assistant for that who was at one time Robert LeBaron, at one time Donald Carpenter, and then I'm sure others. But that was sort of a world unto itself.

CONRIT: Did LeBaron precede Carpenter or come after him?

REARDEN: No, Lt. General (Louis H.) Brereton was the first, then (Donald F.) Carpenter then (William) Webster, then (Robert) LeBaron.

LEVA: LeBaron taught chemistry to Forrestal at Princeton; Forrestal selected him; so he was early.

REARDEN: You say the atomic energy business was pretty specialized. Was this in the sense that the information was so tightly held or that there were just so few people who understood it?

LEVA: I think, tightly held. I did not get into it at the Defense Department to the best of my recollection. If there were amendments to the act or what not, somebody might have asked me about something, but I didn't get into it. I became very friendly with Lewis Strauss, whom my wife had met through friends during the war when I was away, and whom I met through Forrestal. Much, much later Lewis Strauss, as a dissenting member of the Commission,

asked me to set him up an appointment with Johnson. I didn't know what that was for until I read Lewie Strauss's book. That was apparently to get Johnson's assistance for the building of the thermonuclear weapon after Lilienthal and the others voted against it. I'm given great credit for making the appointment that changed history! Somebody phoned and said they'd like an appointment with the Secretary! All I did was arrange the appointment. That's why I don't know about nuclear energy.

CONDIT: Did Johnson have any real conception of nuclear warfare?

LEVA: I don't know.

CONDIT: He never talked about it?

LEVA: Not to my knowledge.

CONDIT: Did he have a fear of General MacArthur or just an overweening respect for him or what? Strange.

LEVA: These were two ultraconservatives having mutual respect probably. MacArthur probably had respect for him, I don't know.

CONDIT: It was a wonderful story, that he was afraid to send the telegram to MacArthur telling him to cancel the VFW message.

LEVA: Then Frank Pace was asked to deliver the message that MacArthur was fired. I don't think Frank wanted any part of it either, did he?

CONDIT: Well, you're suspicious the way I am, but I can't find any verification that Frank Pace actually refused. There's always been this talk about a communications breakdown. Now I saw in your talk with the Truman Library that you indicated that you had your own private doubts about that. But you're the first person who . . . .

LEVA: I don't know. I was not out in the Far East at the time. I was getting out of the Pentagon at the time.

CONDIT: I firmly believe that Mr. Pace must have been very glad that the communications equipment broke down, if it did.

LEVA: I have also commented on occasion that Frank Pace was really as strong as horseradish, just as firm as anybody could be, when he was Director of the Budget and he was speaking for Mr. Truman, and the President was right there. When he got to be Secretary of the Army, he fell completely under the domination of the generals. Really not the same person.

CONDIT: He drove Mr. Lovett slightly crazy, I think.

LEVA: Well Frank Pace, to whom I'm quite devoted on a personal level, is sort of the Chamber of Commerce type. You really can't be very effective in the Pentagon as a Chamber of Commerce type; you can be popular but not effective.

CONDIT: It's very hard for me to tell whether he was simply being a true Army man and reflecting his service in many of these quarrels or whether there were other elements that come into it, maybe hope for a future Secretary of Defense position or something.

LEVA: I don't really think so. He wanted everybody to love him. I know lots of people who want everybody to love them, and it's very tough to be effective when you want everybody to love you.

CONDIT: I see, he wanted popularity rather than power.

LEVA: I think so. Remember the standard Navy phrase about someone who keeps his finger on his number. I didn't have the feeling that Pace was keeping his finger on his number, he just wanted "his" generals to love him. That's what happened to Lyndon Johnson when he became President. After all, he had been real tough with the generals and admirals when he was on the Hill. Then they became "his" generals and admirals. It makes a big difference.

REARDEN: The whole question of the service secretaries and their institutional positions is something that is not really clear to me. I know the National Security Act of 1947 took them out of the cabinet and put the Secretary of Defense there instead. Were the service secretaries weakened to the extent that they had to pander to the services themselves in order to keep the support of their generals?

LEVA: I don't think the change in status made any difference. I think the service secretaries generally, except during wartime, have had to pander to the services. I think the 1949 amendments made much more of a difference than the 1947 Act. There was a very strong move to eliminate the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force in the 1949 Amendments. In the first Hoover Commission report there's a great number of recommendations to make them become Under Secretary of Defense for the Army and Under Secretary of Defense for the Navy. I always resisted that because I felt the chances of getting good people became much less when you downgraded the currency. I think at one time Forrestal might have been inclined, after going through the mill and all this, to go for eliminating the positions, but he finally did not.

At a much later stage, when Mr. Kennedy appointed a committee on the reorganization of the Defense Department in the 1960 campaign, all the members of that committee except me wanted to make the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force "Under Secretaries for." <sup>I dissented from that recommendation.</sup> They still are Secretaries because obviously people on the Hill feel strongly. People who look at it philosophically reach the conclusion that it's a peculiar organization when you have a Secretary reporting to a Secretary. I don't think it's a matter of pandering; it's a matter of management. Each of these departments is enormous, the administrative detail is tremendous. How do you get a (William) Graham Claytor

to be Secretary of the Navy. Well, it's hard enough at best.

If it's "Under Secretary of Defense for the Navy," it's that much more difficult.

CONDIT: Well, Bob Lovett was Assistant Secretary of War for Air.

LEVA: In the war! In the war you do things. In World War II you accept anything from janitor on up. That's a different proposition.

CONDIT: One of the big issues from the Korean war time is the decision of President Truman not to seek Congressional approval for sending troops to Korea. I was wondering whether the OSD played any role in this at all. I know there was tremendous diversity of opinion in the White House.

LEVA: You mean ratification. The time element. I think that the decision was that the United Nations' resolution made that undesirable, but I don't remember.

CONDIT: Truman said that he didn't do it because he wasn't going to diminish the powers of the Presidency.

LEVA: But I was away as I say; I was out of town. I came back, I guess one or two days later, but the entire formulation of the United Nations action implementation took place during the period when I was away. So I don't know the back and forth that may have taken place, though I gather that Acheson took the lead. They may

very well have felt that, given the nature of the United Nations' mandate and the good fortune that the Russians decided to stay absent, they shouldn't rock the boat.

CONDIT: I believe they felt they could have gotten an unanimous, or almost unanimous vote, in the first few days. Then later Acheson feared that a lesser vote of approval would be more harmful than helpful.

LEVA: It's interesting how the Congress works and how the various members operate. Some of those men know exactly how to get others to do what they want. I remember when Lyndon Johnson was a member of the Senate and he could play on them like playing on a pipe organ. I remember my first encounter with him when he was on the House Armed Services Committee. I had never met him and Mr. Forrestal sent me to see him. Mr. Johnson told me just how everybody was going to vote and why and what was possible and what was not possible. His great strength was as a student of human nature, and a great student of human nature. If it had not been for the Vietnamese war, a small "but," he would have accomplished great things. In the Senate he did accomplish great things and in the House<sup>?</sup> he accomplished great things as Carl Vinson's protegee, because he knew how to play on every string or every pipe, and did. Now once he got to the White House, as I said, and they became "his" generals and "his" admirals -- then a Westmoreland could

take him over. Westmoreland had perhaps one-tenth the intellect of a Johnson, but he could really subvert Johnson totally.

CONDIT: It's terrible to think about.

LEVA: I'm trying to talk about the realities as I see them.

REARDEN: As I recall the Forrestal diary, Johnson was among those who were pro-air power.

LEVA: He was pro-armed forces, and there were a lot of plants in Texas. There were more plants in Texas that would benefit from air power than from sea power, but Johnson was always for sea power too, although I would say it came in second.

REARDEN: In the air power-UMF debate of 1947-1948, the advocates of air power had a decided edge in that they had a politically more persuasive argument: By using air power, one was relying on air power and machinery in effect rather than on people. Is this something that you noticed when you went up to the Hill?

LEVA: I didn't notice it in that context. I thought they had a much more skillful public relations apparatus, led by a fellow within Stuart Symington's office named Steve Leo. They had great support on the Hill and among the public and in industry. It was orchestrated much more effectively than the Navy or the Army efforts, I thought. Now, maybe it could be orchestrated much more

effectively because of what you mentioned -- it's "cleaner."

REARDEN: They had a built-in constituency whereas UMI would not.

LEVA: That's right. This is just like foreign aid, which had no constituency; UMI has no constituency.

CONDIT: Foreign aid should have a constituency. After all, it suggests that the battle will be "over there."

LEVA: The Italians do not vote. Even many in this country do not vote.

CONDIT: No, but we don't want to fight on our own soil.

LEVA: No, it does not have a constituency. It's a hard one to sell. I gave a speech at the University of Alabama shortly before I left office, or maybe a few months after I left office, in which I was advancing just the argument that you did. In addition to all of the other reasons why our presence in Korea was right, I said that it was a lot better to be fighting on the banks of whatever river we were then fighting on, I hope it wasn't the Yalu, than on the banks of the Black Warrior that runs through Tuscaloosa. But that's very hard to convey. It really is. Also, that sounds a little more selfish than our altruistic foreign policy.

CONDIT: Possibly.

LEVA: It is the truth.

CONDIT: Possibly, but the idea that air is the perfect carrier of the atomic weapon, which I think was the argument in the late 1940's, is not an especially unselfish argument.

LEVA: All the arguments are selfish. I don't know just what the history you worked on will show but my impression is that in 1946-1947 the Navy, either formally or informally, was working terribly hard in terms of countering the Air Force arguments. They were asking: What is our best way to counter it? The final conclusion, I think, was -- not the role of Naval air, though that was emphasized; not the role of cruisers and destroyers or whatever; but the necessity for keeping the sea lanes open. That's a much more sellable as well as much more real item, that we must keep the sea lanes open. That was in 1946-1947 terms. Now in 1977 terms, do you need to keep the sea lanes open for a war that may be three days in duration? Are you faced with problems such as the problems Israel faces in the Middle East: How do you get through the first two days of war until you can call up the reserves? Is your time foreshortened? At least in 1946-1947, and I don't know how formal the Navy study was, I do know that the ultimate conclusion was that the thing to stress was the Navy's role

in keeping the sea lanes open. That tied in directly with the national stockpile argument: We need a national stockpile. We need a stockpile so that we can fight a war of X days until we can bring in materials to fight a war of Y days. None of these arguments is unselfish, and all of them have an element of truth in them. The Air Force argument has an element of truth relative to delivery. Their arguments about what the B-36 could and could not deliver at that period I think certainly had an element of truth. What the B-1 can deliver, that may be a separate problem.

CONDIT: Meanwhile we keep having to fight smaller wars, of which Korea was perhaps the first.

LEVA: They're not so small.

CONDIT: The casualties were fairly heavy and the amount of time and effort were considerable. What do you think was the legacy of Korea?

LEVA: The sort of unrest in the country that came to the surface in the Vietnamese war. I don't know. I think we bought a period of time. How wisely we used it, I don't know. It also made it clear to the Chinese and to the Russians that there were circumstances beyond which we could not be pushed, and that was very important. I don't think they had been that sure before.

CONDIT: I see, and they also realized that they could miscalculate.

LEVA: Can I jump to something? In one of your earlier notes which we've long since passed, you said that Truman wanted his cabinet members, except Marshall, to work on the campaign. My understanding was that Truman wanted his cabinet members to campaign, except the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, whoever they might be. I think he was very outspoken. I haven't been out to Independence; I haven't read any papers on the fact that under our system of government the Secretaries of State and Defense should not be drawn into political campaigns unless military or foreign policy was attacked by the other party, in which event they should be available to defend. I don't know why Marshall was singled out. Did it mean Marshall at State, but not mean Lovett his Under Secretary?

REARDEN: That comes from a memo written by Royall in the spring of 1948 summarizing the cabinet meeting that Royall attended in Forrestal's place. Royall was briefing Forrestal on what had gone on during the cabinet meeting and said that the President expected all of his cabinet members to campaign except General Marshall. Not "except the Secretary of State," but "except General Marshall."

LEVA: Then you would have to know whether Marshall was at the meeting. Was he saying, "Not you, George," and, since Forrestal was not there, he wasn't saying, "Not you, Jim"? You have to

know also that Royall's nickname in the building (I shouldn't tell you this) was "Dumbo." Everyone said, "What does Dumbo think?" The usual answer was that Dumbo doesn't think. So I would certainly not put that much weight on it. I wouldn't put that much weight on it.

REARDEN: The thing that struck me was whether Marshall or the Secretary of State was singled out as not having to campaign.

LEVA: My only point is that this may have been said because the Secretary of Defense was not there.

REARDEN: The Secretary of Defense was not mentioned in the memo. I don't know whether that was an omission or misleading.

LEVA: It was very clear to me that that was what was expected during the campaign. But then you get these people at the White House that I spoke of before who might well have been saying, "You know, you haven't got any money. You can't raise any money. Forrestal was president of Dillon, Read; he could speak to his rich friends; he could get you money at the drop of a hat. What sort of business is he doing?" It's the constant poison dripping, whereas Marshall couldn't have spoken to his class at VMI and raised very much. This may well have been said. I would not accept it as gospel, is all that I am saying. Based on what I heard at the time, maybe I have an equally biased view, because

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Forrestal, I think, told me the President didn't expect the Secretaries of State and Defense to get into this unless our policy was attacked. I'm a good and believing Democrat. I wasn't believing enough to think Mr. Truman would be elected, though I devoutly hoped that he would.

CONDIT: It was a lovely election, a nice surprise.

LEVA: Have you talked to George Elsey about this? George has total recall too, like Ohly. He's very good, and George was one of my points of contact.

CONDIT: May I tell him you think we should talk to him?

LEVA: Tell him I think you ought to talk to him. George was Clark Clifford's alter ego. He was not a lawyer, but he was sort of Clark's deputy and handmaiden and what not, especially during the 1948 campaign. George could tell you an awful lot of things. Tell him I think he ought to talk to you.

CONDIT: I will, because he left some very fine records which are at the Truman Library. I have used those; I have seen those. They're excellent. I think that he was poorly used by Margaret Truman Daniel in her book.

LEVA: Margaret, I don't know her that well. I've talked to her a few times, and I've talked to her husband. She has a slightly misguided conception as to who it was that the American people elected President.

CONDIT: Would you say something about General Wilton B. Persons and General James McIntyre and Captain Harold Houser, later Admiral, who were your deputies for legislative, successively?

LEVA: When we were first setting up the office in the fall of 1947 it was very clear that we needed specific individuals for legislative liaison. I do not remember who first called my attention to the name of General Persons, whom I had not previously met, but he had been General Marshall's chief of legislative liaison and Secretary Stimson's and Secretary Patterson's chief of legislative liaison. He also had the added advantage of being from Montgomery, Alabama, which after all is only about 45 miles from Selma. Somewhere along the line I met him and with help from Forrestal was able to persuade him to become the first director of legislative liaison. It was also clear that we needed service input, with General Persons to be the Army representative as well as director of legislative liaison. That was a little dubious to have him in both capacities, but we needed Air Force and Navy representation. We asked the Air Force and the Navy to make their own nominations, I believe. Thereby we got General McIntyre, strange to relate also from Montgomery, Alabama, so that we were pretty Alabama-heavy. The Navy designated Harold Houser from Georgia. We had a real southern wing there handling legislative liaison!

I think the operation worked extremely well in the early period, and it probably worked extremely well because we also decided we would not try to take over the legislative functions of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. We would try to coordinate and therefore -- I am now skipping way ahead -- when we formulated a legislative program of 110 items, we would delegate to the Army those things in which the Army had the predominant interest; to the Air Force, the long-range missile proving grounds, which I spoke of earlier; to the Navy, the authorization for ten more destroyers or whatever. We would monitor it or coordinate it from our office but would not try to conduct it from our office. Therefore, we never had a large legislative liaison office. The Air Force had a very large one; the Navy had a very large one; I don't know how large the Army's was. But the operation of legislative liaison was in the service. This also had its drawbacks since we frequently found our legs cut off around the knees when the service would interpret its mandate a little differently than we would interpret it.

Coming back to the three individuals, however, General Persons was phenomenal. He knew everybody on the Hill. He had worked with them all. I'm not saying that he could get anything he asked for, but he knew whom to go to and ask when it was necessary. He also kept the Secretary of Defense extremely well advised, on an intelligence basis, of what was going on on the Hill. General

McIntyre, who succeeded General Persons when General Persons later retired, was more hail-fellow-well-met than Persons. Persons could completely subordinate his Army background and represent all of the services and did, to the best of my knowledge, as he later did for Eisenhower as chief of staff for the President at the White House. McIntyre could never do that. His lines to the Air Force were too strong and I thought that there was always a tilt toward the Air Force. Harold Houser in turn succeeded McIntyre and probably had a tilt toward the Navy of the same kind, except that in the case of Harold Houser his was more naivete or belief that, if the Navy says so, it's got to be so. It was stars in his eyes about the Navy. McIntyre was more with malice aforethought, I thought. I enjoyed working with all three of them and with the service representatives. We did get into deep interservice difficulty by the time of the B-36 hearings. But basically, our routine legislative function went along pretty well and we did have excellent people. All three of those men were very good.

REARDEN: Was that purely coincidence or was that semi-planned, that the legislative liaison representatives were southerners and coincidentally many of the members of the Congressional committees were southern.

LEVA: They were nominated by the services, and the services may

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have nominated them for that reason. General Persons was selected by me after I had checked around. General Persons at his present age of about 80 is living in Florida now; I guess the last time I saw him was a few months ago. Admiral Houser, the last time I saw him last year, was still living here. I don't know about General McIntyre; he returned to Montgomery, I believe. I don't know if he's still living or not.

CONDIT: Would Houser be a good person to see?

LEVA: I don't know how much he would remember. He would be a good person to see if he would have any recall. I don't know. You don't know how difficult it is over so many years . . . .

CONDIT: I'm sure it is. I was thinking about that when trying to recall something that happened just two years ago. How about Charles Coolidge? He's in Boston, isn't he?

LEVA: Was the last that I heard.

CONDIT: Is he still active?

LEVA: Still active yes. He's with the firm of Ropes, Gray, Best, Coolidge, and Rugg. It later shortened itself to its original name of Ropes and Gray. I think he is still there, whether active or counsel, I don't know.

CONDIT: Is it true his daughter was killed in late 1952 in an automobile accident?

LEVA: I think I heard that, but I don't know.

CONDIT: Something I saw this morning in the file has confused me. Do you remember a man named John Gange?

LEVA: No, never heard the name to the best of my knowledge.

CONDIT: Apparently he wrote a report on the EXOS, the Executive Office of the Secretary, in mid-1952.

LEVA: That was after my time.

CONDIT: I thought maybe he might have been around.

LEVA: Not to my knowledge. Have you talked to Ralph Stohl? You asked about Ralph Stohl.

CONDIT: No, I haven't.

LEVA: Ralph, while he was not dealing with policy as I say, dealt with everybody. And I think he's here. He moved to Texas, then he moved <sup>?</sup>back here. I believe he's in the Washington community.

CONDIT: So he knows people.

LEVA: He may be able to help. I don't know.

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REARDEN: His files are very good, they are very interesting to read.

LEVA: He frequently felt that every man's hand was raised against him in later years, I know. It's a tough job.

CONDIT: Well he outlasted the Executive Office, didn't he?

LEVA: He and McNeil outlasted almost everybody, then they started fighting among themselves. Did you say you had or had not tried to talk to McNeil? I just don't know how well he is.

CONDIT: I have talked to him. I guess I saw him from 12:30 in the afternoon until about a quarter of seven at night. He was indefatigable. He just talked on and on, and he was physically in very good shape.

LEVA: Was this in New York?

CONDIT: This was in New York. I had seen Lovett that morning and went up to see McNeil that afternoon at his office. He was very kind and took us to the Metropolitan Club for lunch and told us the most fascinating things -- where it was impossible to put up a tape recorder and the noise level was so terrible we wouldn't have gotten anything anyway.

LEVA: You weren't sure you heard him but you could imagine! Now when you spoke of the office, was that while he was still

at Grace or his own office?

CONDIT: No, it was in his own office.

LEVA: The Grace episode is an unnecessary tragedy. He had lots of fights with Peter Grace and should not have had, and he had fights with Peter and others that he should not have had. But McNeil becomes very possessive about everything, and he sort of came to regard the Grace line as his own possession. Perhaps 15 years ago Peter Grace decided to sell the Grace line because over the years he had made no money on the South American trade. It may have taken five years to dispose of it. Now in its broad outlines, nobody told me why they did it. I was doing the legal work to sell it and to structure it in its broad outlines. I would say that Peter Grace's feeling was that, if you sell the Grace line for \$40 million, that's \$40 million you don't have to borrow from the bank, that you don't have to pay interest on, that you can invest in a fertilizer plant in the United States. Instead of losing money on Latin American shipping and paying interest to a bank, you can make money. It was a sound business decision. But Mac's attitude was, "This is the pearl in the Grace empire, and this is what the grandfather founded, and they can't take my ships away from me, and so forth, and you and Felix Larkin are dirty bastards for helping Peter." That's the essence. Now this was not articulated; the only reason I tell you is that it's

typical of Mac's reaction to almost anything. You're either with him or against him. Most of my life I have been with him on almost everything because he's a very sound fellow, I think. But on those occasions when you're against him, he really thinks you're a pariah.

CONDIT: I can believe that.

LEVA: I wrote him a letter last week. I mean I'm on speaking terms. He thinks I was a traitor to my class when I let him sell his ships.

CONDIT: Well that's a shame. I think he must have gotten over that a little bit. He's more worried about taxes right now.

LEVA: His son is a rising executive in the Grace empire; so he may be behaving himself better now.

CONDIT: He was very charming.

LEVA: He does worry about his taxes, he worries about his investments. I told him he can't live long enough to spend all his money, and I don't know what he's worrying about. He's a real far right-wing Republican, you know. On political issues we simply can't discuss anything.

CONDIT: Well, he told me MacArthur was right, MacArthur's solution.

LEVA: I have no doubt. As I told you, McNeil shoveled coal in World War I and he hasn't gotten over that.

CONDIT: I admire him in many ways. I thought he was a person who was self-made and who had . . . .

LEVA: Actually it was Olga, his wife. I don't know whether you were at his apartment or what.

CONDIT: No, I didn't meet his wife.

LEVA: She's a very nice person.

CONDIT: I went up alone to see Lovett and went down to Brown Brothers Harriman on Wall Street. The thing that upset me was that Mr. Lovett, with a pacemaker in his body and general poor health, decided he had to walk this heavy machine all the way through the building and down all the thirty stairs, curving stairs, into the street and hail a taxicab. I could not get that machine away from him. I was terrified that he was going to fall down.

LEVA: Family's originally Texan; you can't get away from those southerners. Lovett's father was from Texas. They said he was a phenomenal lawyer. He was the Harrimans' lawyer. He came up to New York after doing their work on railroads and what not down in Texas.

CONDIT: So the Harriman family and the Lovett family had been connected.

LEVA: That's an old, old affiliation.

CONDIT: I'm hoping that Mr. Harriman will see me again now that he's back or coming back this week. I saw him also about two years ago.

LEVA: He has a beautiful young wife now. You should see her.

CONDIT: I met her.

LEVA: She's very charming, very mad right now because this young lady has written a book. She's not very happy about that at all. Pamela is irate is the word.

CONDIT: Apparently, but you know to get a book published now everything has to be . . . .

LEVA: The book that I thought was a tragedy was the Kay Summersby book, which should never had been written, certainly not while Mamie Eisenhower was living. Wholly aside from what's in it, it's just a horrible thing.

CONDIT: Summersby was dying. I guess she didn't plan it well. She didn't know just when she'd die.

REARDEN: She did write that for money though, wasn't it?

LEVA: Apparently. I don't know; I forget the timing. Well, I haven't written my book yet, fortunately. Since I can't

remember anything, I can't write a book. What have we omitted?

CONDIT: That's what I was going to ask you. What have we omitted?

LEVA: Here's a question under Johnson's period, Johnson's defense philisophy. Is there some contradiction between his previous attitude when Assistant Secretary of War under Woodring and his budget consciousness in 1949 and 1950? I try to rationalize things in my own mind and my rationalization there is along these lines: Johnson came into office as Secretary of Defense immediately after Forrestal's battles for a larger budget. I think we have to remember what a larger budget was then. Mr. Truman had placed a ceiling of \$13 billion on Defense. Going back to what I was saying about authorizations and appropriations, my recollection, bad as it is, is that Mr. Truman had placed a ceiling of \$13 billion on authorizations; you can't have authorizations for more than \$13 billion in new programs. And he had also placed a ceiling of \$11 billion, or \$11 billion plus, on actual expenditures. Compared to the present budget of \$100 billion plus, we're really talking about a budget in the nature of \$11 billion to \$13 billion, say \$12 billion. Forrestal fought, bled, and died for \$2 billion more in the last analysis. He did not get it. Truman made it quite clear that inflation was a terrible problem, etc., etc. I'm not now saying who was right.

I have no way to say who was right.

I am saying that when Johnson came in, he could have been a gallant figure with the military, as we were just talking about. He could have fought for \$5 billion more, but he knew damn well that Truman wasn't going to give an inch. I think he was just making the best of the situation. He might as well get any political kudos along the line that he could because it would just be a Don Quixote gesture to fight for a larger budget since he wasn't going to get it. I guess my answer to that question is that he really wasn't, in my judgment, doing this for political reasons. He was more than glad to get any political fallout, but he was advocating the only budget he thought he had any reasonable chance of getting. That's why there was all the talk about cutting out fat instead of muscle, and so on. There just wasn't going to be any more money.

CONDIE: Was there any correctness at all in Johnson's statement? He held to that even after he had left the Secretary's chair. In testifying (June 1951), he said then once again that he thought that the Department of Defense was in better shape to move ahead in directions it should take than it would have been had he not cut what was cut.

LEVA: I doubt that, but I do think that the effort was to make the cuts in areas which were not all that painful in terms of military strength. You know, I am not now criticizing however many golf

courses the military may have; but let's just say -- and I may be completely off base with this because I don't have any current figures -- that there are 30 golf courses overseas and 120 in this country maintained by the military for the benefit of the people at this or that post. Certainly, providing recreational facilities for military personnel and their dependents is important. But perhaps if you take a real look at this, and you find that there's a public course out on Falls Road which the people at the Nike Battery half a mile away could use without having their own golf course, you'll find that there is a great deal of money that can be saved in the fat instead of muscle. I think that the trouble is that, once you set yourself a goal of \$1 billion out of a \$12 billion budget or \$10 billion out of a \$140 billion budget, then you have to go beyond the fat and into the muscle. It's sort of a self-propelling proposition. Nonetheless, I think that there are large areas of fat from my observation of PX's, commissaries, and what not. Now I think morale in Europe being what it is, you have to have a PX and a place for people who are at an isolated post. But why should the people at Walter Reed need a commissary? I'm just using this as an example. I don't believe any of this has ever really been studied adequately; maybe it would cost more to study it than you would save. I am personally convinced that there are large areas where you could save even if you (and you'll never get this through the Congress) had to supplement everybody's pay at Walter Reed

by 10 percent so that they could buy in the supermarkets which charge exorbitant prices. It would be cheaper than hiring all the people to run the store. And the liquor store -- they've got one of the largest liquor stores in town! Is this something which you know?

CONDIT: Yes, I knew that.

LEVA: All right. I said, "Why in God's name do they have to have that?" I was told, "Well, every embassy in town buys at that liquor store." I doubt very much that our embassies overseas are treated equally well, and I doubt that the Army's budget for Walter Reed needs to include taking care of every embassy in town.

CONDIT: Is that tax-free liquor or something?

LEVA: Probably. But you know, let them bring in their own. That would basically be my view. I don't know. All that I'm saying in terms of Louis Johnson is, he really was seeking for areas where he could cut fat, not muscle. In some instances he may have been right, and in some instances he may have been wrong. But I doubt very much that by virtue of his cuts the military were stronger. I don't really think it was strong.

REARDEN: You were very close to the process of developing the legislation, and it's not quite clear how Truman arrived at the idea of putting a ceiling on the Defense budget. Do you have

any inkling how this came about?

LEVA: No. Probably figured that was the only way he could possibly do it.

REARDEN: And how he arrived at the figures that he did?

LEVA: How did Lyndon Johnson arrive at the fact that he was going to hold the federal budget to \$100 billion his first year in office? It was a politically salable figure. Read any of the books about that period. My loving partner Mr. Fowler, who became Secretary of the Treasury, who had been Under Secretary of the Treasury under Kennedy, flew down to Texas immediately after Johnson's first trip back home and they put their heads together and they decided that, if you could make it \$99.999 billion, that was a better political figure than \$100.111 billion. I assume Mr. Truman came out the same way. That does remind me, if I didn't show you, of Mr. Truman's letter to me, largely written by Mr. Elsey.

CONDIT: Mr. Elsey once worked under Admiral of the Ocean Seas -- Samuel Eliot Morison. This letter is very nice. Brilliant climax to nine years. It's very nice.

LEVA: It only seemed like 90!

CONDIT: Did they call you over to the White House to receive this?

LEVA: No, not to receive the letter. Mr. Truman called me over to the White House before he would accept my resignation. Did I mention that to you?

CONDIT: No.

LEVA: You know, we had a much smaller government then. Also, I was the Defense Department representative (to the White House) as a speech writer, as I told you last time; so he knew me, and Mrs. Truman was very lovely to my wife. She was then a young bride. Remember, I became General Counsel of Defense when I was 32 and Assistant Secretary of Defense when I was 34. They treated me like a young upstart. They were very sweet to us.

My recollection of that time, and this could be just through the mist of the years, was along these lines: I kept saying to Lovett, "I've got to get out of here." I told him my arrangement with Mr. Forrestal had been for one year and it had already been five years plus those other periods. Lovett kept saying, when the war in Korea was going on, "You can't leave, there's a war going on. You can't leave during a war; you wouldn't feel right," and so on. I said, "As soon as there is a stop or anything"; so when there was a cease fire in effect and they were negotiating the exchange of wounded, I said to Lovett, "Now you've got to get me out of here. You took the responsibility for keeping me." He said he'd speak to General Marshall, and he said that it was all right and would

tell the President. We had a small government, as I say. There were three Assistant Secretaries of Defense. So apparently General Marshall told the President that I wanted to leave, and the next thing I got was a message to come over and see the President. I went over and he said, "Why do you want to leave? Is there something going on in the building that I should know about? Are you mad with somebody?" I said, "No, I have two young children, as you know," which he did know. Since it was 1951 I had two children, one was five, one was four. I said that I had to get out, practice law, and make a living. And he said, "You're sure there's no undercurrent, something I should know about?" "No, Mr. President, I'm very happy with the people, get along fine with the people. I've had this understanding ever since Forrestal's day that I could get out, and now's the time to go." "Well, that's fine. That's fine. I just wanted to be sure." That's the sort of fellow he was. We don't have many like that.

CONDIT: Well, that's not only sensitive to you but he was keeping a sharp eye on the department.

LEVA: Oh sure. He was quite a boy. You saw this, I'm a picture collector. Kate Foley brought that (picture of Forrestal) out to me. I did not ask for a picture. Kate Foley brought out the picture and said, "He asked me to bring you this. He's never

signed one like that before." And he hadn't.

CONDIT: Yes, that is nice. I read your account of Forrestal's last two days in the Truman Library transcripts, and I must say it is most poignant. I didn't realize how bad it was. That was really pretty terrible. Do you feel that Symington may have had anything to do with that sudden change?

LEVA: No. Symington has no recollection. He has said to me, "Are you sure I rode with him, are you sure I rode with Jim?" I said, "Yes, I'm sure you rode with Jim because you kicked me out of the car." I don't think so. You see, they had been terribly close friends in their business and personal careers. It really hurt Forrestal that Symington undercut him at the Pentagon. It hurt him, but it didn't make him bitter about Symington. So I don't think that would have had anything to do with it.

CONDIT: It was just the end of the road.

LEVA: It was just -- I don't know. I know a little bit more about such things now, not much more, but a little bit more than I did then. I don't know how much is actual exhaustion and how much is a chemical process in the human body. He just held on so long and then he snapped.

CONDIT: We were talking about that the other day and Al Goldberg

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was saying that he didn't really know how much psychiatrists could do for any one. I said I had read that their rate of cure was exactly the same as spontaneous cures that occur. But you do have to be kept from committing suicide if you want either kind of cure, spontaneous or otherwise.

LEVA: I think I may have said to you, I've certainly said it in the Truman Library compilation, that Eberstadt flew down to Florida taking Dr. Menninger with him and wanted to take Forrestal to the Menninger Clinic.

CONDIT: He flew down to Florida to do that? That is when a decision was made?

LEVA: Yes. Mrs. Forrestal either called Truman, or Truman called her. This was true then and is probably equally true now -- they felt there was too much stigma attached to being in a mental hospital. They put him in a naval hospital which is not a mental hospital, because only an idiot would put somebody on the 17th floor. That's not said with hindsight! I asked later about the Menninger's, and they said they would never put anyone who was deeply depressed above the second floor, probably not above the first. This is sort of standard procedure. You say you've got to be protected from suicide until you can get well. I think now they have so many more medicines which seem to be specific. NIH has done some wonderful things.

CONDIT: For depression?

LEVA: Yes. NIH and other places.

CONDIT: Whom was he visiting down in Florida, when he went down there? You put him on the plane.

LEVA: Eberstadt and I put him on the plane. Jo Forrestal was at Hobe Sound, at whose home I forget. I phoned Bob Lovett, who was at Hobe Sound at his own home, and I said, "For God's sake, meet the plane when he gets there. Don't let Jo meet him alone." And Lovett has said since, in something that he wrote, that the man who got off the plane was not at all the man he had left when he left here. He saw this slit-lip, grim little Irishman, he said. The transformation was immediate. He left office on March the 28th really and he held himself together reasonably well through the Armed Services Committee meeting the next day in which Carl Vinson presented him with a bowl and made all sort of polite remarks. Then he went to pieces immediately after that.

CONDIT: Incredible. We've been lucky that no other Secretaries of Defense . . . .

LEVA: Well the strain is tremendous, but who knows if it's the strain or something else. His family was pretty God-awful to him, you know. He married a divorced Protestant and they treated

him as though he were dead and she were dead. The whole thing was a mess.

CONDIT: Did that marriage have children?

LEVA: Two boys, whom I haven't seen in some years. I used to see Michael, the older one, a great deal; he's at Shearman and Sterling. Peter I used to see upon occasion. My wife used to try to get them dates with this girl or that girl or the other. I said, "You know, they saw that marriage, which was on the rocks from the word one, and I don't think they want any." Neither of them has ever gotten married. I think we should wind up.

CONDIT: This has been extremely helpful. We are very grateful for your time.

LEVA, HAWES, SYMINGTON, MARTIN & OPPENHEIMER

815 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, N. W., WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006  
TELECOPIER (202) 223-0829/865-0408 CABLE FOLEX TELEX 89 2720  
TELEPHONE (202) 828-7800 DIRECT LINE (202) 828- 7821

January 28, 1982

MARK LEVA  
LLOYD SYMINGTON  
JOSEPH C. SWIDLER  
FRANZ M. OPPENHEIMER  
JOHN G. KELLER  
ROBERT MARTIN  
CRAIG MATHEWS  
LESTER S. HYMAN  
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IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5  
Date: MAY 01 2013

Dr. Alfred Goldberg  
OSD Historian, Room 5C328  
The Pentagon  
Washington, D. C. 20301

Dear Dr. Goldberg:

In reply to the question posed in your letter of January 26, 1982, I can see no reason for the interviews with me (referred to in your letter) to be restricted in any way. In other words, I have no restrictions or conditions to impose on the material which I provided in the course of the interviews on March 8, 1974 and June 10th and 14th, 1977.

With best personal regards,

Sincerely,

  
Marx Leva

ML:vmh