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Interview with David E. McGiffert
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Trask: This is an oral history interview with Mr. David E. McGiffert, taking place in Washington, D.C., on April 30, 1998. Participating as interviewers for the OSD Historical Office are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Roger Trask.

Mr. McGiffert, we want to discuss with you this morning your service in several positions in the Department of Defense, especially your term as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs between 1977 and 1981. First, would you summarize briefly your educational background and professional career before first joining OSD in 1962?

McGiffert: I went to Harvard; then I was the Lionel de Jersy Harvard fellow to Emmanuel College, Cambridge for a year. I went back to Harvard Law School and after that came down to Washington and joined the law firm of Covington and Burling, where this interview is taking place. I took time out to teach at the University of Wisconsin Law School, went back to Covington and Burling, and then went to the Defense Department. At that point I was an associate here at Covington and Burling.

Trask: Did any of your college level work relate to work that you did later in the Defense Department?

McGiffert: I was a history major.

Goldberg: That speaks well for you.

McGiffert: In a very general sense, that is relevant.

Trask: Your first position in the Defense Department was as assistant to the secretary of defense (McNamara) for legislative affairs. Can you comment on the circumstances of your appointment to that position?

McGiffert: Actually, my first appointment was as special assistant to the assistant to the secretary of defense for legislative affairs for a year. Norm Paul held that job.

Trask: When was that?

McGiffert: Starting in August of 1961.

Trask: Your entry in Who's Who didn't mention that.

McGiffert: After I had been there about a year, Norm moved to be assistant secretary for manpower and I took his place.

Trask: How did you happen to get the position as his assistant?

McGiffert: I don't really know. I had the Kennedy itch, I let it be known that I wanted some government service, and one day I got a phone call from Paul. I didn't know him personally.

Goldberg: Did someone recommend you to him?

McGiffert: I assume so, maybe at a Georgetown cocktail party, who knows?

Goldberg: He never mentioned it?

McGiffert: If he did, I've forgotten.

Trask: Can you comment briefly on the nature of your duties and activities during this short period as assistant to Paul?

McGiffert: I probably wrote some congressional testimony.

Goldberg: How did you come to be chosen as his successor?

McGiffert: McNamara called me and asked me.

Trask: Had you had contact with McNamara before that?

McGiffert: I'm sure I had, but I don't remember specifically. You will have to ask him that.

The deputy in the legislative affairs office was Air Force General Roderick, who had long experience with the Hill. I was helped by that, because I was quite young, with only a year's experience. But Roderick was there to keep me from falling through the cracks.

Trask: Can you describe your duties and activities in that position?

McGiffert: There were two or three kinds of activities. One was dealing with the Department of Defense legislative program. That meant, for example, preparing the briefing books for the secretary of defense's testimony; when necessary, taking trips to the Hill to talk to individual members; and sometimes helping to write testimony. Secondly, we dealt with congressional investigations. The two biggest ones during that period were, first, the so-called muzzling of the military, an investigation run by Strom Thurmond in the Senate, where Art Sylvester's public affairs office was accused of improperly censoring the speeches of generals. The hearing got into a lot of other things such as the policy of the Defense military schools with respect to how they talked about the Soviet Union.

Goldberg: Can you speak louder; it is sometimes hard for the transcriber to hear.

McGiffert: That reminds me of a speech I was making a long time ago when somebody in the back row told me to speak up, and somebody in the front row said, "Let's change places."

That hearing came along quite early in McNamara's tenure; I may have still been the special assistant at that point. McNamara saw it, quite correctly I think, as a challenge to civilian control of the military. So it became a major consumer of the time of people like me and Joe Califano, who was the assistant to Cy Vance at that point. He and I were sort

of the drudges on this whole thing. Later we had the TFX investigation. I spent a lot of time on that, and it was very hard going. We also had liaison with the service legislative affairs people and tried to coordinate as best we could.

Goldberg: Did you have personal views about the TFX?

McGiffert: It seemed to me that what the board found was perfectly sensible. It was a very close business, and if you mechanically add up the numbers you come out one place and if you try to put into the process a little qualitative judgment you might come out the other place. It could have gone either way.

Goldberg: Do you think McNamara handled it well?

McGiffert: I think that he made a mistake in deciding to wait to testify until other people had testified. He did it because he wanted to see what other people would say, but I think by doing that he allowed his opponents to frame the issues and set the stage. It would have been better if he had gone up first, and he could have done that if he had asked.

Goldberg: Did you find Roswell Gilpatric an embarrassment in this matter?

McGiffert: No, but I don't know to this day exactly what his role was. He had a line to the White House.

Goldberg: Gilpatric had been associated with some of the companies that were involved in the TFX before accusations against him of having conflict of interest.

McGiffert: I don't recall that. Gilpatric and I drafted the initial letter to the committee.

Trask: Did you spend a lot of time personally on the Hill?

McGiffert: I spent quite a lot of time on the Hill, but remember, it was a much easier job, in a way, than it is today. There were four committees, basically, to deal with, each run by a chairman who didn't allow much room for the rest of his committee to make decisions. As

a matter of courtesy, I also dealt with the ranking minority member. So there were only eight people with whom I had to spend a lot of time. Then there were the odds and ends like military assistance where I dealt with Senator Fulbright's committee. Another thing I did, knowing that the chairmen were all-powerful, was to go to see the members, because I figured they felt left out. I made a regular habit of going to see them and asking if they had any problems.

Trask: What was the general attitude of these committees towards the Defense Department at that time? Were they supportive, friendly?

McGiffert: Yes, generally.

Trask: These were the years when the United States was becoming more involved in Vietnam. Did that come up much?

McGiffert: In 1964-65 there were a lot of hearings. I went with McNamara to the hearings, but the only one I really remember is George Mahon's defense subcommittee, which met in a little room in the Capitol. There was nobody there but the committee, the witnesses and one extra person per witness. McNamara and Harold Johnson, chief of staff of the Army, were testifying, and one of the committee members asked how long the war would take to win. Johnson said, "10 years." This was in 1964.

Goldberg: He was never enthusiastic about it.

McGiffert: I guess not. Toward the latter part of my tenure we had quite a lot of hearings about Vietnam.

Trask: What was your impression of McNamara in this particular period, and the nature and extent of your relationships with him?

McGiffert: I am a friend and a great fan of McNamara, which doesn't mean that I wholly agree with the way he handled Vietnam. He was, in my view, responsible for my career in the Defense Department; he gave me my first two promotions. I think others close to him would agree that he had the ability to push you beyond where you thought you could go, and would back you up. If you really fouled up, I guess he would fire you, but you knew he was there for you, which was really important. I had a red phone on my desk connecting directly to him; it would ring quite often. He always dealt straight up with me, as far as I can tell. This was the period when he was revolutionizing the management of the Pentagon, and he was getting a lot of good press and a lot of criticism. His motto was, "You can't make progress without controversy," so in a sense, the more controversy he generated the more progress he thought he was making, I suppose. I was very high on my boss.

Trask: Is there anything else about this position on which you would like to comment? Did you enjoy the work?

McGiffert: It was a wonderful job, perhaps the best one I ever had. This was partly because of McNamara, but I found that the people on the Hill were by and large good people and a pleasure to deal with. "Uncle" Carl Vinson was particularly nice to me but left no doubt who he thought was in charge. When I introduced myself to him he looked at me and said, "Young man, we will get along just fine if you remember one thing. There is an Army, Navy, and Air Force, and don't you forget it." In other words, OSD was not the most important thing. Neither Carl Vinson nor Dick Russell ever went overseas and this made some issues more difficult. For example, we were trying to get congressional approval for fast deployment ships. It was hard to get a sponsor in the Pentagon. The

Navy wanted the money for other kinds of ships. The Army didn't want to give money because the ships would not be theirs. Also Russell was against them because, in his view, they would make it easier for us to intervene abroad. I had a lot of dealings with Mendel Rivers.

Goldberg: He shifted things to South Carolina.

McGiffert: He certainly did. McNamara got concerned early on about whether he would be criticized for DoD participation in congressional travel.

Goldberg: That's a chronic question.

McGiffert: He said he was going to send me on an interparliamentary union trip to Brussels disguised as someone's assistant, and I was to come back and report about the operation. So I went. The interparliamentary union has a mock parliament, and each delegation debates current issues. There are State Department and Defense Department representatives whom the congressmen can consult about policy. Half the members of Congress who attended were absolutely terrific and worked like dogs, Jerry Ford principal among them, and the other half never showed up at all. I told McNamara it was a mixed bag. Three years later, he came back to the subject and wanted to find out who was traveling on our aircraft. I did a survey, very closely held, and Mendel Rivers won by a very substantial margin. He had an Air Force plane that flew him into Charleston nearly every weekend.

Goldberg: There were others that did that; Ed Hebert of Louisiana got a lot of flights.

McGiffert: I always liked Hebert. I didn't like Rivers especially.

Trask: In 1965 you became under secretary of the Army. What were the circumstances of that appointment?

McGiffert: I asked McNamara if I could do something else, otherwise I would go back to law practice. He said he would make me under secretary of the Army but that I had to stay in my present job until I found a successor. For about six months I was doing the under secretary job informally and the legislative job formally.

Trask: Who did you find as your successor?

McGiffert: I didn't personally find Jack Stempler, who was an assistant general counsel, but I think he was a fine choice.

Goldberg: He did the job several times. We've been trying to get to talk with him.

Trask: Stanley Resor was secretary of the Army at that time. Can you comment on your relationship with him and your duties in the job?

McGiffert: We had a great relationship, we are still friends. We split up the work, always recognizing that in the end he was the final authority. He gave me the Army's "colonies," Okinawa and the Panama Canal. The under secretary by reason of his position at that time became chairman of the board of the Panama Canal Company.

Goldberg: That was one of the civil functions.

McGiffert: I also had the National Guard and Reserves, intelligence, various personnel matters, and later on, management of the military response to civil disturbance.

Goldberg: The Panama Canal background must have played a part later on, when the treaties came up.

McGiffert: It was very interesting. Traditionally the Army sent two-star generals from the Corps of Engineers to be governor of the Zone and to be the head of the civil administration in Okinawa. I had a major role in picking those people and communicating with them. The Canal was an amazing piece of economic engineering. In 1965 the Canal

had been going for 50 years and they had never had to change the toll formula. It kept producing incremental revenues sufficient to handle the increases in operating costs and also to fund the widening of the Canal and other capital improvements. I don't think the toll formula changed until some time in the mid-70s.

Trask: Were there any major problems with the Canal? Of course, the Panamanians wanted it, but other than that?

McGiffert: We didn't have any significant financial or operational problems, but we had political problems. In 1969 Arnulfo Arias was elected president and soon proposed that the Panamanian National Guard be abolished. General Torrijos ousted him, and he fled to the Zone with his cabinet. The question was what were we to do. The U.S. government decided not to try reinstall Arias, but we didn't want him stirring up trouble from the Zone. So we began to cut off their logistical support. Arias and his supporters were staying with friends in the Zone, so we progressively cut off their telephone and water, and he finally flew to the United States.

In Okinawa, most of our problems from an Army point of view involved how much autonomy to give to the Okinawans and how quickly. Reversion took place in 1973, not too long afterward. The Okinawans, in my view, were passive people living in the midst of an enormous American military establishment. They protested, but not in a very difficult way, and Japan, the home country, wasn't giving them much backing. The business community was in favor of the U.S. occupation because they were afraid they would lose out to the homeland businesses in Japan if there was reversion. So our problems there were mostly political. There were no crises, as I recall.

Goldberg: Earlier, McNamara had great plans for making changes in the Reserves and National Guard. But he ran into a lot of opposition, as always. By the time you came into the Army, presumably, with Vietnam coming on, there wasn't anything of that sort.

McGiffert: I dealt with that issue in my previous job. We were trying to get the National Guard down to 550,000 or something like that, and it was a terrible problem. Indeed, my view is that it is still a problem and one can only hope to chip away at it; there will be no major change in a hurry. By the time I got down to the Army the question was whether the Reserves and Guard could perform if they were ordered to go to Vietnam. General Hollingsworth did a study of the officer corps of the Army National Guard and concluded that, through no fault of their own, we could not send the Guard officers into battle unless they got a lot more training. We were trying to find ways to improve the officer corps before call-up, a very uphill kind of problem.

Trask: Did you have to deal with the Army budget?

McGiffert: In part. When the issue came up about how much money to request the Guard and Reserves, a lot of people would come into my office for a major briefing and we would try to sort out pieces of it.

Trask: Did you have to deal with personnel issues such as the overall size of the Army and the call for troops in Vietnam?

McGiffert: I know that I had to deal with the question of why the Pentagon statistics, the Army's statistics, showed a different number of people in country in Vietnam than MAVC's statistics. That was a very important issue because of the presidential cap on how many people could be there.

Goldberg: How many people could be there?

McGiffert: The ceiling changed from time to time. The discrepancy in numbers had something to do with people in transit and in the pipeline. I went to Vietnam twice and on one trip I spent time with Abrams trying to track this problem, which neither of us really wanted to spend time on.

Goldberg: Just imagine what it was like during World War II, trying to keep track of the millions all over the world; they couldn't.

McGiffert: A few weeks ago there was an article in the paper about the Defense Department not being able to find \$20 billion worth of equipment. I didn't deal with financial things, and rarely with contractual things. I did participate with Resor in the effort to try to make sense out of the Army readiness system--the C-1, C-2, C-3, C4--because we were drawing down in Europe and being told we had a hollow army.

Goldberg: They used the term then, too?

McGiffert: I don't know if they used that exact term, but it was true in Europe, not so much in terms of numbers, but in terms of people doing jobs above their training. Second lieutenants doing captains' jobs, and so forth.

Goldberg: How much were you involved with Vietnam?

McGiffert: I went there twice. The first time I would call an educational trip. I had an exec who had been in the Special Forces in Vietnam in 1963-64. He had a game plan, which was to tell MACV we were coming, let them send an itinerary, then reject it and tell them what we wanted to do and to please provide a helicopter. My exec took me all over the country and he knew someone everywhere we went. If there was no American, he knew a Vietnamese. It was absolutely extraordinary. We ended up on a carrier in the Gulf. I thought this was finally someplace where John didn't know anyone. We jumped out of the

helicopter and a captain came over and welcomed him as a good friend. He was later promoted to general and died in a plane crash in Alaska. This trip was in 1967. I came back very confused. I thought one could find anything one wanted in that country--peace, war, pessimists, and optimists. Then I went again in 1968 after Tet and there was more of a bunker type of psychology. People were grinding it out and there was less optimism. That trip began to tip the balance of my thoughts in the direction of pessimism.

Goldberg: McNamara had already left.

McGiffert: Yes. As far as direct involvement, other than personnel matters, I didn't spend much time on Vietnam. But Vietnam was an all-absorbing problem for the Pentagon establishment, so that other things that needed attention often didn't get worked on.

Goldberg: McNamara says that the people at the top should have paid a lot more attention to Vietnam than they did.

McGiffert: In what way?

Goldberg: That they should have learned and tried to understand more of what they learned, that they were ignorant.

McGiffert: I used to have lunch with him from time to time later on, and he used to say, "Joe McCarthy did us a terrible disservice by running out of the foreign service the two or three young foreign service officers who really knew about China. So that when Vietnam came along there were no foreign service officers in senior influential positions who could weigh in on what China's likely reaction would be."

Goldberg: There was a difference of opinion about that, some people did not agree with him about that.

McGiffert: I was never in on any of the Vietnam policy work.

Trask: Did you have any opportunity to observe what effect Vietnam was having on McNamara, himself?

McGiffert: Not really, I was down in the Army by the time the crunch came.

Trask: When he announced in November 1967 that he was going to leave, and left in February 1968, what did you understand to be his reasons? He said he was leaving to take the position as president of the World Bank.

McGiffert: I don't recall any feeling that he was being kicked upstairs or anything like that. I don't know.

Goldberg: He doesn't recall exactly, either, whether it was his or Johnson's doing. But he was ready to go, no doubt about that.

Trask: Did you play any role in the selection of general officers, for example to major positions in Vietnam or elsewhere in the Army?

McGiffert: I played a role in the selection of the governors of the Panama Canal Zone and Okinawa. I played a minor role on the instructions for the promotion board in 1966. We were trying to get blacks promoted to general officer rank. We tried to design the instructions in a way that would encourage that. And, indeed, it happened.

Goldberg: What were your relations with the top general officers, the chiefs of staff--Johnson, Westmoreland, and Wheeler?

McGiffert: I knew Bus but I had no dealings with him. I saw Johnny and Westy a lot and had good relations with them, but was not close personally. I thought Johnny, more than Westy, was inclined to try to keep things out of civilian hands if he could. I can't document that, but it's my sense.

Goldberg: I always had the impression that he was uneasy in that job. He was skeptical about Vietnam, and he was a man of some moral stature.

McGiffert: He was terribly hurt by Carl Turner's troubles. Turner was the provost marshal and his friend. Turner got caught illegally dealing with guns in some way and Johnny was very hurt. I wouldn't disagree that he was uneasy in his job.

Goldberg: Westmoreland, on the other hand?

McGiffert: He was, not surprisingly, somewhat concerned with validating his performance in Vietnam. He commissioned a history and sent a draft to me to read.

Trask: Who did that, the Center of Military History?

McGiffert: No, he had an Army colonel do it. Westy didn't come along until 1968, so I had far less time with him. Incidentally, I heard that someone had written a biography of Johnson.

Goldberg: Yes, I heard something about it. What about Abrams?

McGiffert: He was a terrific guy. Not the easiest man in the world to deal with, unless you could get around his gruff exterior, but very nuanced and sensible. He was obviously very much admired within the Army. People thought he was brilliant.

Goldberg: You obviously got along well with Resor. How do you account for his being held over by the next administration for as long as he was?

McGiffert: He's a Republican; other than that, you will have to ask him.

Goldberg: How about Vance, did you have much to do with him?

McGiffert: Yes, lots, because he was general counsel when we were going through the "muzzling of the military" investigation; then he came back as deputy secretary, and I saw a lot of him. He's a wonderful guy. I dealt with him at a later time, when he was secretary

of state. McNamara right off the bat gave Vance, as general counsel, the job of studying the Pentagon reorganization, along with Doc Cooke, Solis Horwitz, Jack Cushman, and an Air Force general. They had a hotshot little group.

Goldberg: Are you thinking of Abbott Greenleaf?

McGiffert: Yes, I haven't seen him for years. I see Jack and Doc--he's "mayor" of the Pentagon.

Trask: Do you have anything to say about Clark Clifford, who came in as secretary in February 1968 and served 11 months? Did you have any contacts with him?

McGiffert: Some, but very limited. I consider Clark probably the most difficult person to interrupt I have ever met. There are no cracks when he talks. I dealt with him on the civil disturbance business, on which I spent most of my time during my last year as under secretary.

Goldberg: The Army bore the brunt of that, didn't it?

McGiffert: The Army was the executive agent for the military response to civil disturbance, and I was the senior civilian with day-to-day responsibility.

Trask: So that included the disturbances when Martin Luther King was killed and the Los Angeles problems?

Goldberg: And the Vietnam protestors' march on the Pentagon.

McGiffert: All of that. We did the country a service, I think. Our work started after the Detroit disturbances in the summer of 1967.

Goldberg: And Los Angeles in 1965.

McGiffert: That didn't trigger people's attention, unfortunately.

Goldberg: California set up a special commission out there under McCone to investigate it.

McGiffert: Yes, but that disturbance didn't tell people that there would be more of the same and to get prepared. It should have. But Detroit certainly did. Warren Christopher was the deputy attorney general, the chief civilian out there. Vance wrote an after-action report, which said we should get ready, so we got ready. In Washington, for example, we brought together police chiefs; the same with fire chiefs. We earmarked military units for various cities, developed doctrine, and promoted special training. The net result of all that in Washington, for example, was that the armored cavalry regiment was able to arrive in only an hour and three-quarters after the president ordered its deployment, when Martin Luther King was shot. Undoubtedly, the rapidity of response saved a lot of lives and property damage. I look back at that aspect of my job with the Army as a place where I think I really made a contribution.

Goldberg: Vance was gone by then and Nitze was deputy.

McGiffert: Vance's back went out on him.

Trask: Did you have much of a relationship with Congress at this time?

McGiffert: Not much.

Goldberg: We'll say farewell to the Army at this point, and move on to OSD.

Trask: In April 1977 you became assistant secretary of defense for ISA (international security affairs). What were the circumstances of your appointment? Harold Brown was secretary of defense.

Goldberg: Had you known Harold before, when you were under secretary of the Army?

McGiffert: No, when I was in OSD he was DDR&E.

Goldberg: But did you have dealings with him when he was secretary of the Air Force?

McGiffert: Probably. After Harold became secretary of defense he called me over and asked if I wanted to be considered for an assistant secretaryship. He didn't promise anything. I said yes, but only ISA. I went away and about two weeks later he called and offered it to me.

Goldberg: Why did you limit yourself to ISA?

McGiffert: I wasn't interested in manpower, and didn't think I had the background to do technical stuff. I was interested in foreign policy.

Goldberg: You weren't interested in being general counsel?

McGiffert: No. I've always thought that if I were going to be a lawyer, it would be in private practice. I didn't want to be a government lawyer.

Trask: What was your approach to ISA, did you make any changes of significance? Can you comment on the major assistants that you had--deputy assistant secretaries, etc?

McGiffert: My friend Peter Szanton, a private management consultant, did a study of the ISA organization. I think he suggested some major changes and I decided against them. We kept roughly the organization that was already there. We had a foreign service officer heading the European Bureau; we had a foreign service officer heading the Pacific group--Mort Abramowitz; I asked both of them to stay. I had a man in the Middle East/South Asia region who had been an appointee from the Nixon NSC, and I asked him to stay on until I found Bob Murray a replacement. I inherited the head of DSAA and later on put my own man, Ernie Graves, in. We didn't have a separate Latin American or African desk at that point. I created an African desk later and got a foreign service officer to do it. Later I got my special assistant, Frank Kramer, to double hat as the Latin American person.

Trask: Did you pick all these new people yourself?

McGiffert: The new ones I picked. Harold was very supportive, and he never told me I couldn't pick someone. I had to get his approval, but he always approved. A couple of times I had to get him to do the work to get the person I wanted. Mike Armacost had to be pried away from Brzezinski, and I got Harold to do it. Harold may have helped to get Bob Pelletreau for me as Bob Murray's successor. I had some really good people, who went on to distinguished careers--Armacost, Abramowitz, Murray, Pelletreau, Platt.

Trask: The line on ISA at that time was that in the McNamara period it had been built up to be very strong and then in the Nixon-Ford period it had somewhat declined, and that one of your charges was to build it up. Was that specifically mentioned to you?

McGiffert: No, I don't remember any specific charge like that. We were forced to take our share of a personnel cut.

Trask: Did you have a sense that ISA wasn't as strong in the earlier 70s as it had been?

McGiffert: I sensed that the fellow next but one, to me, who came out of the University of Virginia, was not particularly influential. The fellow who preceded me was a foreign service officer, and when I was talking to him about the job he described to me in great detail all the work he'd done with respect to Harold's first NATO trip, which was before I took office. It was all protocol work, and I said to myself, "This is not what I visualized this job to be." Whether that gentleman saw the job that way, I'm not sure, but if he did, then surely the influence of ISA was not very consequential.

Goldberg: The down period for ISA was eight years, during the Nixon-Ford administrations.

McGiffert: I don't want to be read as characterizing ISA in that period as weak, I just don't know.

Trask: I want to ask you about some other people--Walt Slocombe, for example, as principal deputy assistant, ISA, and director of strategic arms talks.

McGiffert: That leads me to add to what I just said. There were two people who Brown appointed before I got there, Walt Slocombe and Lynn Davis, and they were terrific.

Trask: Did Slocombe operate independently to a certain extent?

McGiffert: On arms control, with respect to strategic nuclear forces, I decided right off the bat that it was something that Walt knew a great deal about, far more than I ever did.

Goldberg: And you would be pleased to let him have it.

McGiffert: He already had a relationship with the secretary of defense and I would be delighted if he would just continue. So he did, he operated independently on this.

Trask: Another appointment, not in ISA, but probably impacting it, was Robert Komer as special assistant for NATO affairs. How did that play with ISA and its work?

McGiffert: Komer spent his first months in that job getting ready for the NATO summit in 1981, and that went very well. All this happened before I got there. Later on, Bob and I got into some controversy, but in that early period he was doing the NATO job. He had done a lot of that stuff at RAND, so he was considered a natural.

Goldberg: How about Harold Brown? You had a good bit to do with him, presumably.

McGiffert: A great deal; he was a wonderful man, increasingly interested in ISA issues, increasingly confident as time went on of his ability to handle that sort of issue in the hotbed of international diplomacy. He liked to deal more through paper than through

conversation, and therefore from my point of view he was somewhat more difficult to get quick guidance from.

Goldberg: He pondered things.

McGiffert: Compared with McNamara, who just decided--but I'm sure he pondered at other times. Harold gave me a lot of scope and I think he's a very wise man.

Goldberg: He had a good background.

McGiffert: He would get frustrated with our operation from time to time. When he had to go to a meeting in the situation room we'd give him a briefing book and he often wanted the book earlier than we, who had to depend on the State Department for part of it, could produce it in a way that we felt comfortable with. So there was sometimes tension in that area.

Goldberg: How about Duncan and Claytor?

McGiffert: I didn't have many dealings with Charlie Duncan. He was not given ISA oversight by Harold. The same with Claytor, but I knew him very well. I worked for him here when I was a young lawyer. He was a friend. I used to housesit for him.

Goldberg: Did you play with his trains?

McGiffert: I watched him play with his trains. He's one of the smartest people I've ever known.

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

McGiffert: First of all, his voice would go through three walls, and he expressed himself strongly. He was a remarkable man. I worked for him on a big civilian nuclear reactor case back in the 50s, so in the Pentagon I saw him much more often as a friend than in a bureaucratic relationship.

Goldberg: A big change came with the establishment of the under secretary for policy, which affected you directly. Resor had the job first, and then Komer. How did you react to all this? For one thing, were you a candidate for the position?

McGiffert: Yes, after Resor left. Harold told me he had three candidates, Bob, me, and a third person.

Goldberg: How did you feel about Resor's selection?

McGiffert: I thought it was a good selection.

Goldberg: You had a good relationship with him?

McGiffert: Yes. We had a good working relationship

Goldberg: But he left after less than eight months. To what do you attribute that? Did he discuss it with you?

McGiffert: No.

Goldberg: Was what had been your previous relationship affected by this new one?

McGiffert: No.

Goldberg: But it was different with Komer, I presume.

McGiffert: You bet. I found it hard to work with Komer. He either works for you or you work for him, but with little collegiality. That's been my experience.

Goldberg: And you were supposed to report to him, presumably.

McGiffert: Yes, and that would have been OK, if we could have worked collegially together. But he chose a different way of handling it, and I was not happy with that.

Goldberg: What was the outcome?

McGiffert: I tried to live with it as best I could and preserve as much autonomy as I could.

Goldberg: But you had been reporting directly to Brown, and now you were supposed to go through Komer. Did it work that way?

McGiffert: On some things, but not on others. Some things I took to Harold directly. I was deeply involved at that point in NATO's study of enhancing intermediate nuclear forces in Europe. That was the major reason I stayed, because otherwise it wasn't a very comfortable situation. I wanted to see that through.

Trask: How did the way that Komer operated affect ISA operations, other than the difficulty of working with him?

McGiffert: You ought to ask the deputies that, looking at it from their perspective. I can't really answer that question.

Goldberg: How about Slocombe, Abramowitz, Kramer?

McGiffert: Abramowitz was long gone by this time.

Trask: Did you have extensive relationships with other OSD officials?

McGiffert: I saw a good deal of Russ Murray and some of Paul Wolfowitz, because Paul had the international part of PA&E.

Goldberg: Did you find them capable?

McGiffert: Yes, our work meshed perfectly well.

Trask: Any relationships with the military services or the JCS?

McGiffert: Very little with the military services; quite a lot with whoever the chairman designated as his liaison to ISA. It was two different people over time. And I talked to the chairman occasionally.

Trask: Would those be on specific issues?

McGiffert: Yes. There was some degree of tension in one area because Harold, quite rightly, I think, wanted to get a handle on the policy assumptions that were going into contingency planning. He wasn't interested in having OSD do the planning itself, but he wanted to see the premises. The JCS was vigorously resisting any intrusion in the whole process.

Goldberg: That was a great surprise, wasn't it?

McGiffert: No. I think OSD may today have now accomplished that. Komer and Slocombe may have been able to lay the groundwork back in 1980. I'm not sure. When Komer came in he translated Walt into a principal deputy under secretary and changed his hat. Part of his portfolio was to try to deal with the contingency planning problem.

Goldberg: Wolfowitz was still trying to do that when he became under secretary.

McGiffert: I saw a little of Andy Marshall, not very much. His operations were not well known to us.

Goldberg: That's too bad.

McGiffert: I think so. He dealt with Harold.

Goldberg: Subsequently he did become responsible to the under secretary for policy.

McGiffert: He's still there, isn't he?

Goldberg: Yes, and still doing a good job.

Trask: Your relationships with the Department of State must have been extensive. Can you comment on that?

McGiffert: At the deputy level, our people were talking to their counterparts all the time. In addition, Walt and I would have a weekly or biweekly meeting with the politico-military director, Les Gelb, and his deputy. We didn't relate very much to Lucy Benson, the under

secretary, except on military assistance matters. She worried about the total foreign assistance universe. A large part of the agenda of these meetings with pol-mil often had to do with getting ready for the luncheon of the principals that took place every week or every other week. This would be Brown, Brzezinski, Vance, and later Muskie. We were trying to see if we could identify what issues we thought should be dealt with, an agenda. Sometimes we agreed on the position to be taken, and sometimes not, but we would discuss it. We could then tell our own principals a) what the issue would be, and b) what the likely attitude of the other guy would be. Unlike what I understand has been the situation in other periods, the relationship between ISA and State was very good, in my judgment. Harold Brown went out of his way to say that he wanted it to be good, and encouraged me to bring foreign service officers into ISA. He wanted us to get military officers into the State Department, which we were able to do to some extent. So, in the arena of foreign policy making, from my perspective, the principal friction was between Vance and Brzezinski and not between Brown and Vance or Brown and Brzezinski. Brown got along fine with both of them.

Goldberg: So he told us. Since you had a good relationship with the top people in State, this presumably had some influence on people down below.

McGiffert: I would hope so, in both directions.

Goldberg: How about your relationship with Brzezinski?

McGiffert: I had a personal and professional relationship with him, I play tennis with him now. I'm a good acquaintance. I don't know how much I dealt directly with him. In the context of the situation room at the White House, I certainly saw a lot of him. I also dealt with Dave Aaron a fair amount.

Trask: There are a number of major issue areas, events, and crises that came before ISA that we want to ask you about. First of all, NATO. Brown worked hard to strengthen that alliance and paid a lot of personal attention to it. Komer worked on it. What was ISA's activity in that area?

McGiffert: We had to do the staff work. After the first meeting in June 1977, where Komer did the principal staff work, we did most of the staff work for Brown's NATO appearances and that involved the usual NATO issues--infrastructure, force planning, and all the rest of it. We would get into special issues, like the neutron bomb. I had to go over and talk to NATO about that. It was not a pleasant experience. I spent a whole week running around Europe trying to sell the desirability of AWACS, particularly to the Germans, and to get contributions from all of NATO for funding it. The hostility between Greece and Turkey was a continuing problem; Al Haig, as CINCEUR, was a big help. We had the usual out-of-area debate; fortunately NATO has come around to a different view on that issue than they had then.

Goldberg: It's been a lot of trouble convincing them to do something in-area, let alone out-of-area.

McGiffert: We had the INF, which was a tremendous effort. The last of Komer's ten items for the June 1977 NATO Summit related to NATO's nuclear posture. The RNF issue came out of Chancellor Schmidt's speech in 1976 in which he said there was a hole in our deterrence, with no intermediate nuclear missile capability to counter or offset the Soviet's SS-20. At my suggestion the U.S. had NATO form a special group to decide what to do about item no. 10, which contemplated a review of our nuclear posture. The group was made up of defense people from all the NATO countries. We met several times over a

year and a half and came up with the recommendation that we should deploy the Pershing II and cruise missiles. This required a serious and difficult follow-on diplomatic effort by the State Department because after our recommendation had been made, Schmidt got cold feet politically. He worried about selling it to his people. Would they be a target if the missiles were deployed on their territory? Schmidt didn't want to do this unless other European countries did it, too. And so forth and so on. That was a major effort. And it came out all right. It was a lot of work. NATO made the decision to deploy in principle in the fall of 1979; the implementation came later and was also a difficult problem. The decision was basically made in December 1979 and, as often happens in these matters, we had to sit around for four or five hours waiting for--in this case--the Belgians to decide what they were going to do. What else were we engaged in?

Goldberg: Getting the MBFR underway?

McGiffert: The shoulder patch for MBFR is a snail riding on a glacier. MBFR did not loom large in terms of time spent in ISA in Washington. We had at least two ISA people in succession over there as DoD representatives helping the ambassadors. Nothing ever happened. We'd have to get into the issue of whether the Poles were telling the truth about their forces and occasionally a discussion about negotiating tactics.

Goldberg: The Soviets kept demanding more and more.

McGiffert: And they never could come up with reliable data to our satisfaction. We thought they were lying. One of the issues we did spend a lot of time on was the comprehensive test ban. For the most part we were negotiating among ourselves--among the various branches of government. The Joint Chiefs and DOE had serious doubts. We thought verifications would be feasible at quite low explosive levels.

Trask: One of the NATO issues during this period was the U.S. effort to get the individual NATO nations to increase their defense spending.

McGiffert: To 3 percent, that was in the first year. There was a big push for that.

Goldberg: After 25 years.

McGiffert: And Komer with ISA's help brought it off.

Trask: Brown was strong on that.

McGiffert: It may have happened in that March 1977 meeting of NATO. At every NATO meeting we had a report card. Most people did not realize that the push was successful. My recollection is that at least for a while people did put in some more money. Except maybe the Danes.

Trask: Let's talk about Asian relationships--Japan, Korea, and China. There was a good bit of activity there, and Brown was interested.

McGiffert: In Korea, we inherited a problem, because of the president's campaign commitment to significantly reduce our forces. Mort Abramowitz had to work on how we could reduce the forces, and he got into a buzz saw with some of the military. We worked through that problem and I think in the end made a reduction less than the president was looking for but a reduction nonetheless.

Trask: It was not very much, but there had been a reduction earlier. They had basically gone down from 60,000 to 40,000 earlier in the 70s. Carter had to back away from most of that.

Goldberg: They had the Singlaub business and the Vessey business at that time.

McGiffert: We went to Korea a couple of times. I don't recall those trips any more
[REDACTED].

That's one you ought to talk to Harold about. And then we had command and control issues, pressure from the Korean military to have more say.

When I first got to ISA Mort came to me and told me that some years previously ISA and the relevant people from the Japanese defense forces would meet quietly every year in Hawaii for talks. That process had been discontinued and he wanted to reinstate it. It sounded like a good idea, so we recreated the custom and had a meeting every year. The first meeting had very little substance because the Japanese were unwilling to get into substance. During this period the Japanese defense forces were still back in the weeds. They were very careful not to be conspicuous, as defense spending was not something that was very popular in Japan. It was only in 1978 that they first published a white paper with public information about what they were doing. The talks gradually became more substantive and we were able to get into important issues, such as encouraging them to break the 1 percent limit on their military budget and take more responsibility for their own defense, particularly at sea. We wanted them to help us influence the rest of their government to contribute more to the expenses of U.S. forces in Japan. We wanted to see eye to eye on the problems of nuclear powered ships in their ports. Those were the major Japanese issues. It was a good relationship.

Trask: Okinawa did not become an issue then, did it?

McGiffert: You mean the military forces in Okinawa? No, it wasn't a significant issue then.

The opening to China was in 1979. We took our trip to China in the winter of 1980, the first SecDef trip there. The issues were the same as they seem to be today, from the Defense Department's point of view, except that relations with the Soviet Union were on the front burner: to what extent are we going to sell them military equipment and

technology; what are our respective views of the geopolitical situation in Asia; the Japanese alliance; Taiwan.

Trask: What about Carter's establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1979? Was the Defense Department involved in that?

McGiffert: Mike Armacost was involved, because he had been over at the NSC working on it and came over to ISA. But I was not involved in it.

Trask: Another issue was the September 1977 Panama Canal treaties. Could you comment on ISA's role, if any?

McGiffert: I don't think we played much of a part.

Goldberg: But you supported it, all the way, of course. State handled it.

McGiffert: Yes.

Trask: Brown was active in trying to get Senate approval of those treaties. Was there any staff work related to that?

McGiffert: I don't recall.

Goldberg: Considering your previous Panama Canal experience it would be logical for you to be involved or consulted in some way or other.

McGiffert: You're right, I just don't remember anything about it.

Trask: There were problems in the Middle East--the Camp David Accords of September 1978, and the Egyptian-Israeli treaty of March 1979. Was this an area in which ISA had much concern?

McGiffert: We didn't get into Camp David. We got deeply into the opening up of a Defense Department relationship with the government of Egypt and working with the

Israelis on their military strategy. That was the premise on which they based their request for military assistance.

Goldberg: Airfields?

McGiffert: Yes. I think prior ISAs had the same experience, that the Israelis overestimated the threat, from our point of view and that of our intelligence agencies. If you followed the Israeli view of the threat, the requirements were much greater than we thought reasonable, so there was always that dialogue going on. The Camp David Accords produced a lot of work for us on the airfields in the Negev.

Goldberg: And the peacekeeping force?

McGiffert: I had to negotiate the Negev airfield arrangement with the Israelis, because we were committed by the Camp David accords to build them. We wanted to build them as cheaply as we could, and make sure of the quality, so we insisted that our Army Corps of Engineers do it. Not surprisingly, for political reasons the Israelis wanted Israeli firms to be guaranteed major pieces of the work. We were not willing to do that for fear that we would not be able to meet the schedule if the Corps of Engineers wasn't free to do whatever it needed to do. It was a very tough negotiation that finally came out all right in the end. This was when Ezer Weizmann, now president of Israel, was defense minister. Then towards the end of my tenure the Israelis began to push the idea of a strategic partnership. That was an idea that would imply not only a political arrangement but perhaps more military assistance or joint exercises or more American presence in the area. We had a lot of meetings with them and resisted the idea because of our desire to be even-handed.

After Camp David we began to establish a military-to-military relationship with Egypt. I went over there as the first policy level U.S. Department of Defense official to go officially to Egypt in something like 25 years or more. I got the royal treatment. A year later, everybody was going. I got to know Sadat fairly well and admired him. When the hostage rescue failed in Iran I received a cable telling me to go and explain to him what happened. I was in Jordan at the time. We had a lot to do with Jordan, with the military assistance program. We had a lot to do with Saudi Arabia and laid the groundwork in those days for the access and facilities, which proved so useful in the Gulf War.

Trask: What about Iraq, were there any dealings with them?

McGiffert: I don't remember any. Right at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, there was concern that it would spill over. The Saudis were very nervous, and we had to deal with that, which involved a good deal of discussion with the Joint Chiefs about whether to put a carrier into the Gulf to make it clear that we didn't want any spillover.

I went to Pakistan with Brzezinski on that famous Peanuts trip, when we offered them an amount of military assistance that President Zia said was "peanuts" and rejected out of hand. Brzezinski tried unsuccessfully for three days to talk him into it. Every time Zia got to a point where he needed to consult with his advisers, he would say he had to go pray. I never got to India. Komer was very interested in India; I was interested in Pakistan. We had a disagreement about that. And Iran--

Goldberg: That was a big one. Were you involved in Desert One planning at all?

McGiffert: No, I didn't know anything about it until it failed.

Goldberg: What did you think of the operation?

McGiffert: I thought that it was an example of how an operation like that can be more difficult if you indulge the idea that every service has to have a piece of it. Whether it would have succeeded had that idea not been followed, I don't know. What do you think of it?

Goldberg: I think the people who decided must have been impressed by some successful operations of that kind that had taken place before--Entebbe and that sort of thing. But this was another dimension beyond those previous ones. Brown says he was for it, approved it, and thought it had a good chance of success or he would not have approved it. All I have is hindsight, and that says it was probably not a good idea.

McGiffert: You could understand it if it failed after they got into Teheran and some of the intelligence wasn't that good, or they had bad luck, or something, but we deserved the criticism we got, I think.

Trask: After the hostages were taken, did that occupy any of ISA's attention? Did you have to work on that at all?

McGiffert: I'm sure we did. But what could we have done?

Trask: The State Department was probably more directly involved.

Goldberg: You skipped Afghanistan.

McGiffert: I went up there. I was right under the window when Brzezinski fired a rifle in the direction of Kandahar, up in the Khyber Pass. We had an argument about whether Stingers ought to be provided; we were concerned that they would fall into the wrong hands and be used, for example, against U.S. civilian aircraft.

Trask: Are there any other big questions that we should have asked you about particular concerns of ISA?

McGiffert: Africa south of the Sahara and Latin America are the traditional stepchildren of U.S. national security policy, so I don't think there is very much there.

Trask: Any questions relating to the Apartheid policy in South Africa? Was that an issue?

McGiffert: No, not that I recall. We had continuing debate about the real size of the Soviet defense budget, and that sort of thing. We were also deeply involved in the negotiation of a law-of-the sea treaty, in which the U.S. Navy had a strong, affirmative interest. Also, when I first got there, we had an issue not having much to do with ISA. The NSC had issued PD-59, on consolidating the intelligence functions. The White House asked Stan Turner at the CIA to do the study, and the study said everything ought to be turned over to him, and that was not a good thing from DoD's point of view. Harold said, "Please go stop it." I told him I didn't know anything about the subject, so he assigned Bob Inman to help me, and together we preserved DoD's role or at least gave the NSC the ammunition to do so.

Goldberg: Did you have anything to do with John Kester when you were there?

McGiffert: Yes, he was down in the Army general counsel's office when I was under secretary.

Goldberg: How about when he became special assistant?

McGiffert: I didn't have many dealings with him. There was another PD, PD-13, that we had to wrestle with a great deal. It was Carter's effort to enunciate policy on arms sales. That was a lot of work, and mostly Lynn Davis and DSAA did that. Lynn is very good. She is here at RAND, in the Washington office, if you want to talk to her. Eventually, in the first Clinton years, she became under secretary of state, Lucy Benson's old job.

Trask: It's clear why you left the Pentagon in early 1981, and you have been in this firm since then. You've maintained your interest in defense matters. Are there any related defense activities that you are involved in, boards, or anything like that?

McGiffert: I am chairman of the board of the Center for Naval Analyses, a very good organization. I was on a presidential commission last year and the year before dealing with military assistance matters. And I participate in the activities of other organizations such as the Atlantic Council and the Council on Foreign Relations.