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Interview with General Robert E. Pursley, Part I
September 6, 1995

Trask: This is Part I of an oral history interview with General Robert E. Pursley, being held in the Pentagon on September 6, 1995. Participating as interviewers for the OSD Historical Office are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Roger Trask.

General Pursley, we would like to concentrate this morning on your experiences as military assistant to three secretaries of defense--Robert McNamara, Clark Clifford, and Melvin Laird. Before we begin with this topic, it would be helpful if you would tell us briefly about your educational background and military career prior to your appointment in 1966 as military assistant to Secretary McNamara.

Pursley: I can do that very quickly. I grew up in Indiana, in a small town, Farmland, Indiana, near Muncie. You might recognize the name Middletown? Muncie carried the label of "Middletown, USA" for many years. I went one year to Ball State Teachers College, now Ball State University, in 1944-45. Ball State is located in Muncie, Indiana. I selected that school because it was a known entity and because I was awarded a state scholarship. I was still just 16. Then I entered the U.S. Military Academy in 1945, graduated with the class of 1949, and selected the Air Force, as many did in those days. With the Air Force being a new service, some 40 percent of our class at the Military Academy and some 40 percent at the Naval Academy opted to go into the Air Force. I was not physically disqualified for flying training after graduation, but that was a matter of visual acuity. The vision acuity came back pretty quickly after graduation from West Point. I then entered Air Force flying class, 51-A. It turned out to be an exciting year. I was fortunate to graduate at

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the top of my flying class. I spent a year after flying school with a tow target squadron in El Paso, Texas. After that year I went to Korea and flew a tour with a B-26 Night Intruder outfit. The specific assignment was with the 8th Bomb Squadron of the 3rd Bomb Wing. I then returned to the United States with an operational flying unit at James Connally Air Force Base. Subsequently, I was selected by the incoming dean, Robert McDermott, to join the faculty of the Air Force Academy. In preparation for that I was sent to the Harvard Business School for two years in the MBA program. I was then asked to stay a third year at Harvard in the doctoral program. I didn't complete the doctorate because it is impossible to do that in one extra year and that's all the Air Force afforded.

Trask: Was this in the business field?

Pursley: Yes, this was in the business school. My thesis supervisor while I was in the doctoral program, J. Sterling Livingston, dabbled in the defense world a fair amount. After Harvard I went to the Air Force Academy to serve with the economics faculty. I stayed for five years. That was pretty much a standard Academy tour at that time. Those were the very early days for the Academy and it was important to have some continuity on the faculty and to provide some stability while the Academy was still trying to staff up and grow. This is, as I mentioned, while Bob McDermott was dean. He had some impact, as you might imagine, on those kinds of tours.

Goldberg: You should have joined him at USAA after you retired.

Pursley: I did that. I was vice chairman at USAA for a while. When Bob McDermott had his second heart bypass operation, I sat in for him and ran USAA for a while, starting in 1985.

Goldberg: How long were you at USAA?

Pursley: About five years. I was on the board. But traveling from Connecticut to San Antonio was a fairly long commute.

Goldberg: And you never moved down there.

Pursley: He asked me to, but family circumstances dictated staying in the Northeast.

Goldberg: Mr. McDermott has been enormously successful.

Pursley: I agree.

Pursley: When I left the Air Force Academy in 1963 I came to the Pentagon in what was then known as Systems Analysis, now Program Analysis and Evaluation. In 1963 it was a very small shop run by Alain Enthoven. There were only thirteen or fourteen of us at that time. Some of the names that you remember are Charlie DiBona, who runs the American Petroleum Institute. He and I shared an office. Russ Murray, who was later an assistant secretary, was the number two fellow. Stan Turner, later to head the CIA, came in just after I joined the office. John Deutch was there at the time. And Bill Niskanen. It was not only a small, but a very collegial group. We could all go to lunch and everybody knew what everybody else was doing.

Goldberg: Les Aspin came after you left.

Pursley: He came two to three years later. The shop had grown a lot by that time.

Goldberg: Enthoven had stepped up to assistant secretary level by 1965.

Pursley: And the nature of the whole organization had shifted somewhat from this very small analysis group that to a large degree was charged with writing the draft presidential memoranda in a variety of program areas and with working on program change proposals.

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It became a larger office with a broader charter. I stayed with Systems Analysis for over two years, working primarily on the supersonic transport. As you may remember, Robert McNamara had been asked by President Johnson to chair an Executive Panel of about twelve people--the head of the World Bank, head of FAA, a variety of folks--with the mission of recommending to the president whether the U.S. should pursue some type of supersonic transport. Bob McNamara, in his inimitable style, decided that one needed to conduct not just the inner governmental study, but an intra-defense study with analysts whom he thought he could trust a little bit more and who perhaps didn't have as much political baggage to carry. I became saddled somewhat with providing the Defense analysis for the SST project. I was then selected to go to the Air War College in 1965. It was a curious tenure. I was assigned as a student, but I served also on the faculty. That little tenure at the Air War College was interrupted. Bob McNamara was looking for a second military assistant when the sitting second military assistant asked to be relieved. I think probably Alain Enthoven had more to do with my selection as military assistant to the secretary of defense than anyone else. He suggested my name to Robert McNamara. I came for an interview with Secretary McNamara, was selected, and joined the secretary of defense's office. It was, as I recall, in April 1966, before the Air War College year had finished.

Goldberg: Had you had anything to do with McNamara before that?

Pursley: Vicariously in Systems Analysis, but not directly. I had not met him until I walked into his office for the interview.

Goldberg: How much did you know about the job before you took it?

Pursley: Very little. Alain Enthoven and I had some discussions about the role of military assistants. Alain had talked to me enough for me to know that military people who had been directed or selected to join Secretary McNamara were expected by their parent departments to serve the bidding of whatever the parent military service was. There are large risks that way, obviously not only for the individual and the parent military department, but for the whole situation. I think that element we had discussed somewhat. In fact, Bob McNamara himself raised that issue in a roundabout way while we were talking in the interview. He asked if I thought I could be objective and serve the department and Bob McNamara as opposed to serving primarily my parent service, the Air Force, while I was there.

Trask: You said the second military assistant, was somebody else there, too?

Pursley: There always have been two, sort of a senior and junior military assistant. Al Moody, an Army colonel at the time, later an Army brigadier general, who later died of a heart attack in Vietnam, was the senior military assistant.

Trask: What rank were you at this point?

Pursley: I was a lieutenant colonel, but I was on the colonel's select list, so I was going to pin on colonel's rank fairly soon.

Goldberg: Did you get any instructions from the Air Force when you took the job? Did anybody talk with you about it and what was expected of you?

Pursley: They did not at that time. The Air Force had done quite a bit of that when I joined Systems Analysis in 1963. As a matter of fact, I got about two weeks of that so-called "indoctrination" prior to joining Systems Analysis.

Goldberg: Who talked with you in particular?

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Pursley: A fellow by the name of Bob Dixon spent quite a bit of time on that. The man who later ran Air Training Command, Bill McBride, also spent quite a bit of time with me. I was sent to a variety of offices and people, ostensibly to receive briefings on Air Force programs. The one I remember most vividly was Spike Momyer's. He was pretty active in doctrine at the time. That was a very thinly veiled push to make sure that I remembered that I was an Air Force officer, first, foremost, last, and in between, and that I shouldn't have any other kinds of aspirations than that. I was a major at the time and I was so pleased to be joining Alain Enthoven's small shop with the background that most in Systems Analysis had at that time, that the Air Force briefing didn't mean a lot to me. I was disappointed in the lack of objectivity among senior Air Force people. I felt the same way when I joined the secretary of defense's immediate office. The opportunity to do something meaningful and worthwhile, just from a substance standpoint, was in itself the focal point of my career; the rank and all the rest really didn't mean a heck of a lot. I suppose all of us like to think we'd be recognized if we do something worthwhile, but just the chance and the opportunity to participate objectively on major substantive issues was the big appeal as far as I was concerned. It was then, and upon reflection still would be.

Goldberg: Most people serving outside of their service, in OSD or elsewhere, always have to keep one foot in the door with the service and one eye cast over that way in order to make certain that if and when they return they will not be persona non grata.

Pursley: That's very true. I suppose every individual approaches that in his or her distinctive way. I felt less concern about that than I would imagine the great majority of people do. While I was proud to wear an Air Force uniform, still I felt that the chance to

serve the entire Department of Defense was more important. When you reflect on it, you take a pledge to defend the Constitution and not your own uniform.

Trask: Did you discuss with Enthoven the briefings that you had with the Air Force?

Pursley: He knew about those. That was all preparatory to joining his shop, and the Air Force had asked if it would be all right. Enthoven said by all means. He was not naive, nor is he now. Alain was not a favorite with the Air Force.

Goldberg: He wasn't a favorite with any of the services.

Pursley: That's probably true. But Alain in his style was one of the few who would approach General White and later General LeMay in a very direct and what they would think was a somewhat brusque, arrogant way.

Trask: Did you feel any qualms about becoming military assistant? Did you feel well prepared for the position?

Pursley: You feel qualms. It's a pretty big job. Frankly, the way I viewed it and the construct that I put on it from the very beginning was to approach it not as an aide but truly as a military assistant, working on substantive issues, and not to just take on roles that were door openers and flag holders and that sort of job. I remember one of the first things I did, on my own initiative, was to send the job of handling the secretary of defense's mess down to Sol Horwitz, who was then assistant secretary for administration. The administration of that had always been with the junior military assistant. I decided it was a waste of time that took away from substantive issues. That kind of confused them a little bit. I just told them we were no longer doing it. I just got rid of it and didn't hear anything more about it. But that was illustrative. I wanted to work on substantive things. Very early on, you may remember

the difficulties we had with ordnance and the problems of finding sufficient ordnance in the right kind of quantities in Southeast Asia.

Goldberg: That's the way it was in Korea, too, you remember.

Pursley: Yes, and Bob McNamara couldn't understand how, with all the ordnance that had been purchased in the past four or five years, there could be any shortages.

Goldberg: It even happened in World War II, as late as 1945.

Pursley: Each of these is probably different in some way, but it turns out that as far as the unit needing the ordnance was concerned, there was a shortage, they were not getting the right amounts. But McNamara was right, too; all the pieces of ordnance were around somewhere; it was a distribution problem. People just weren't keeping track of where casings and fuses and other things were. There was a lot of ordnance out there but it was not being handled in an effective way, there was not an effective distribution system. I had only been in the secretary's office for a week or two, when I was told by McNamara that I was going to become the ordnance expert in the office. What ultimately transpired was a very large ad hoc organization under Paul Ignatius, the Assistant Secretary for Logistics. They worked the system backwards to find out where all the stuff was, did a quick fix to make sure that the shortages in Vietnam were rectified, and then put a fix on the whole distribution system. That appealed to me. I didn't know anything about ordnance, and still don't, but it was just the opportunity to work on a problem of some substance, and it was a great introduction. Bob McNamara and I worked on together a large "horse blanket" that had all the kinds of ordnance arrayed in one way, and where they might possibly be, laid the other way. It was an array about as big as this table we're sitting at now. We worked one whole Friday night

and Saturday on that, and then Alain Enthoven was dispatched with that to Hawaii to sit down with Pacific Command, CINCPAC, to figure out what to do next. That was instructive in a lot of ways. One, the dedication in McNamara's insistence that we get right into the middle of a problem to try to understand it well, and not just wait for the system to percolate back up; two, the endless hours, the ability to work intensely over such a long period of time.

Goldberg: What was the reaction of the military services to this?

Pursley: They reacted positively, because there was a lot in it for them. Just getting the shortages rectified meant a lot. They had a significant interest in it. Implicit in your question is why wouldn't OSD have turned it over to the military departments and let them fix it themselves; I think by that time there was some impatience with the ability of the military departments to react quickly enough.

Goldberg: Impatience on the part of whom?

Pursley: Impatience on the part of the secretary of defense--that they perhaps over some period of time might come up with a fix but it would be, one: long; and, two: the initial response would probably be unsatisfactory. The second iteration might be a little better but also unsatisfactory. He wanted it fixed now.

Goldberg: There was frequently resentment on the part of the military services at what they considered intrusion by McNamara and Enthoven into what they thought were their affairs.

Pursley: There were varying versions. That is one general version, and unfortunately that one gained a lot of popularity. If you talk to some people today who worked in the Pentagon during that period, they would probably still voice that same opinion. On the other hand, one can find a variety of episodes that would show the opposite, and would show justification

for the secretary of defense perhaps expressing a bit of impatience. I will cite two. One started very near the beginning of McNamara's tenure. I became involved in it only after I became military assistant. The old TFX or F-111 program was very far along at that point, and as you probably know better than I, the specification for that particular aircraft was written during the Gates period and signed by a fellow who later became head of Strategic Air Command, Bruce Holloway. The specification was for an aircraft that was well beyond the state of the art. It called for airspeeds and legs (to go far distances with payloads) well beyond what any aircraft manufacturer or engine manufacturer could come up with. The Air Force was then trying for those specifications, which were well beyond anyone's capability. McNamara didn't ordain that. He didn't write the specifications and didn't approve them. The military departments were handling that on their own when McNamara came in, and they continued to handle it for quite some period afterward. Trying to have a joint development between the Air Force and the Navy--something that already existed with the F-4, wasn't out of the question.

Goldberg: The F-4 is really a Navy development, though, that the Air Force adopted.

Pursley: Sure, but it shows that under some circumstances you can have--

Goldberg: Yes, but there was a difference between the F-4 and the TFX.

Pursley: There was a lot of difference, but all I'm trying to suggest is that these were military department programs that were then handed to McNamara, who, I think very rightly and courageously defended them for quite some period of time before he became personally involved with their inability to get those programs managed correctly.

Goldberg: My point simply is how many really genuine cooperative projects for development have there been between services? The answer is, very few.

Pursley: That's neither here nor there with the point I'm trying to make. My point is whether you think the military departments on their own can in a timely manner effectively and efficiently handle situations where there are substantial difficulties.

Goldberg: You mean as between the services?

Pursley: Not necessarily, but that's part of it. The Air Force certainly had very substantial difficulties with the program on its own. Just forget the Navy for the time being. And that continued up to the point where we first deployed those into Vietnam in late 1966. Just as an Air Force program alone, it was replete with all sorts of very difficult issues that led ultimately not only to a lot of hearings on the Hill but also to McNamara starting a set of private discussions with the manufacturers--Roger Lewis of General Dynamics, and the fellow from Pratt-Whitney.

Goldberg: But ordinarily, would OSD have gotten involved in the development program of an individual service?

Pursley: Not unless it was in substantial distress, I would think.

Goldberg: Were there other instances in which that happened, that you know of?

Pursley: Not during the McNamara period, no.

Goldberg: If it didn't happen during McNamara's period, it was probably not likely to have happened in other cases either.

Pursley: I'm not sure that I would draw that conclusion. With all the programs and the troubles of the late '50s, it seems there were a lot of program cancellations at that time.

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Goldberg: Yes, but OSD wasn't in a position to do very much until the end of the '50s with the establishment of DDR&E [Director of Defense Research and Engineering], when they began to have some capability in this regard. Up to that time it was simply policy, it wasn't really reviewing.

Pursley: I'm trying to explain why in my judgment the secretary of defense had some reason to be a bit impatient at times with the ability of the military departments to handle specific kinds of programs.

Goldberg: I'm not challenging that at all, I'm simply trying to get a broader context in which to look at it.

Pursley: I'm not going to reason inductively to say that based on one occasion you can necessarily state that therefore in all circumstances the secretary of defense is justified. I'm taking this for what it is. Let me give you a second instance. I'm sure that if I sat down and thought for a while I could think of a lot of instances. Shortly after I joined the office in June of 1966 for the first time we bombed the POL establishment in Haiphong. The idea was that if we could interdict and interrupt the flow of petroleum and lubricants and so on to the North Vietnamese that we would have a significant impact. In part, that whole thesis had been fostered and carried forward by Walt Rostow from the White House. There were a lot of enthusiasts for that, particularly in the Air Force, and I am sure there probably were some in the Navy, too--that hitting those particular targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas was a good idea. I recall that the date was June 27, 1966. McNamara, in the wake of that strike and using some of the bomb damage assessment photography, gave a press conference. It occurred to him a day or so before the 4th of July holiday that it would be helpful, at least as

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far as he was thinking about the problem, if we had some better and more incisive analysis from the intelligence community about what the impact of all this was and was likely to be in the future. The raids themselves had been conducted to a degree at the insistence of Walt Rostow in the White House, but to a substantial degree by the military as well. McNamara approved those on the basis of that kind of judgment. But again, thinking as he was wont to do that there could and should be some better analysis than just intuition and "judgment," he asked me to write a memo to the DIA asking them a few specific questions about what the supply flows were, what this interdiction particularly would mean in the short term, what were the ways in which the North Vietnamese could circumvent this either by getting supplies in by different routes or by just carrying the supplies with manpower. So we put together a series of 12-15 questions that seemed to us pretty logical at the time. McNamara signed it and sent it down to DIA; we asked to have a response in 4 or 5 days. The assumption was that all this material was readily available and that someone could either direct the information toward those questions or just package it up and we could find the answers. It turned out there wasn't any of that kind of analysis, at all.

Goldberg: What about the CIA?

Pursley: We couldn't find it there either, at that time, as I recall. The CIA did come back later and respond. DIA never responded. We got no response to the memo at all, at least in my recollection. It is that kind of thing that I think produced a bit of frustration on the part of the secretary of defense--that when you go to a significant defense agency and ask for materials you have a hard time getting them in a timely and helpful way. McNamara did lean a lot more heavily on the CIA, at least while I was here, than he did on DIA, and that

was one of a number of instances (the POL interdiction analysis) where he felt rather poorly served by DoD elements.

Goldberg: Did he ever feel that he wasn't getting information because it was being withheld, rather than not being available?

Pursley: I never heard him say that.

Goldberg: You have no knowledge of that? I don't mean on this particular subject, but generally.

Pursley: I don't think so; I would be very surprised if that was the case. In isolated instances people might have done that for a period of time, but as a general conclusion, I would strongly guess that there was rather little willful withholding of material or information from the secretary of defense.

Goldberg: But it probably did happen on occasion.

Pursley: It would be hard to say that it wouldn't, in an organization this large.

Goldberg: It did. We asked McNamara that and he didn't think so, but there were specific instances. One case, in writing, was when Le May came back from a meeting with the Joint Chiefs saying, "We discussed this matter and we decided it was not necessary to tell the secretary of defense about it."

Pursley: In an organization this large, you could almost bet on it. But I would guess that would not be the general case.

Goldberg: But it has happened with many secretaries, not just McNamara.

Pursley: It happens in the business community, as a matter of fact, quite a bit.

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Trask: You wanted to lay out for yourself a role on substantive issues. I gather from what you have said that that worked out, that your role and functions were as you preferred them to be.

Pursley: Yes. And I think particularly with a person like Robert McNamara, who had a strong analytical bent and also, I think you could charitably say, was a bit on the impatient side with work that was not of a reasonable caliber, you had to earn that right. So you have to dig in and do your best to prove that you are capable. The role with McNamara amounted to a fairly substantial degree to being an analyst. You are there to work on special projects in a variety of areas. With the F-111, I became sort of a one-person secretary to handle what later became the Icarus meetings. That is illustrative of the kind of substance he would get into. McNamara would send you off to work with various assistant secretaries or with the military departments on a great variety of substantive issues. But that was just the analyst side. The military assistant position, as I saw it, was the equivalent of being a chief of staff to the secretary of defense.

Goldberg: Your experience as a systems analyst certainly stood you in good stead when you took this job.

Pursley: I think so, although that experience (systems analysis) of a couple of years was to a great degree directed to one issue, the supersonic transport.

Goldberg: But you knew what was going on in the department, in Systems Analysis and elsewhere.

Pursley: It certainly helped. Particularly the rigor of calling shots, trying your dead-level best to be objective, even if you step on a few toes in your own parent service. I remember

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one issue having to do with deploying the EC-121s and the whole Sentry detection system to Vietnam--the Starbird project in 1967. General McConnell, chief of staff of the Air Force, for whatever reason, wanted to base those airplanes in Nam Phong, which meant that they had to develop the base at Nam Phong. There was a runway there, but very little else. That had a lot of implications--cost, for example, but more particularly, security problems--because to put in proper security added to the complexity of the thing by a fairly substantial amount. Basing it became a contentious issue because it would potentially delay the deployment and add cost. McConnell very much wanted Nam Phong and was pushing hard for it. Starbird wanted to move ahead with the program on time. They were pushing McNamara hard. He called me in and gave me a memo saying, "You figure it out and tell me what we should do." I tagged Phil Odeen down in Systems Analysis and we looked into all sides of the problem. It turned out that the Air Force had not made the best calculation on the number of airplanes needed. The system was very sensitive to the numbers of EC-121s that we deployed and it raised a huge problem if we lost any. So security, if you were weighting criteria, took on a larger weight than if they had procured the right number of EC-121s. So we gave security a much higher weight. That pretty much killed Nam Phong all by itself.

Goldberg: Why did he insist so strongly on Nam Phong? There were alternatives, presumably.

Pursley: Yes, there were. It's pure conjecture. He felt very strongly about it. I've heard lots of stories, but it's not right for the record to believe gossip.

Goldberg: This gossip has a place in history, too, you know.

Pursley: That's so, I suppose. I put down in a little two- and a half page memo to Bob McNamara the analysis and the conclusion that we should stay with basing as it was laid out and forget Nam Phong. That created a huge brouhaha in the Air Force. They took my memo, which they had gotten a copy of through Bob Anthony, the comptroller. He had a small systems analysis shop of his own--four fellows, including Bill George, who had a copy of my memo. Anthony thought it (the memo) was so good that he distributed it to his people saying, "Here is a prototype of good analysis, the kind I'd like for you to use as a standard." That got to McConnell and he went into orbit. The Air Staff did a line-by-line analysis of my memo. Their critique was four times longer than my memo, on how bad all this was. I remember a funny side to it. The concept that Nam Phong's estimate of what costs and effort had been put into the runway was neither here nor there on a decision to be made downstream. Those costs were sunk, and sunk costs don't make any difference for a project that is on downstream, it's only what you have to do incrementally downstream that is meaningful. It was indicative of the distress caused to my parent service that they went to that degree to manipulate analysis on an issue that is pretty straightforward; that sunk costs are sunk costs, and they are important for a decision to be made about outlays downstream. They even contested that point. But the issue shows the kinds of things McNamara would assign. This, of course, was in addition to the standard day-to-day thing of being at the office early in the morning to get cable and intelligence traffic and make sure that all the things that the secretary wants and needs to know are all in the right place for him to review early. You follow the appointment schedule and what gets on the secretary's

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desk, and make sure that everything is substantively in proper form. This is where the military assistant's job gets delicate, telling officials what needs improving.

Goldberg: When did you move up to senior assistant?

Pursley: Al Moody left at the end of 1966, in December. Al wanted to get to Vietnam and have a combat tour. He was assigned as assistant division commander. I moved up at that time.

Goldberg: So most of the time you were senior military assistant?

Pursley: Yes.

Trask: Did a new junior assistant come in then?

Pursley: Yes, and McNamara let me pick him. I picked a fellow I had worked with, an Army officer, Bob Gard. Bob was a very bright fellow. He had done exceptionally well at Harvard, and won a prize for his Ph.D. dissertation. He had good credentials as a combat officer in addition, so he was ready made for that kind of thing.

Trask: How dominant was Vietnam in this period? You dealt with a variety of issues, I can see, but is it fair to say that Vietnam dominated everything else, for your work and obviously for McNamara?

Pursley: It's almost impossible to say no. You can tell by his book how dominant the issue was. What that doesn't say is that there was an immense capacity on the part of Robert McNamara to handle a variety of other things as well. It's very hard to convey, because most human beings don't have that capacity or that energy.

Goldberg: That doesn't come through in his book. That's one of the points I made with him, that it doesn't give the full picture of what he was doing while he was dealing with Vietnam.

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Pursley: You've joined a legion of folks that pushed hard on him about that point. Vietnam clearly, as illustrated by the McNamara book, was a major, huge issue. Again, what that disguises is his capacity. Let's take a variety of things, like nuclear warfare. McNamara became the tutor for the world on the dimensions and significance, dangers, and intricacies of nuclear warfare. Not that he had all the answers, but he had a great capacity and penchant for digging into it, because he sensed that this was one of the most compelling issues to deal with. His involvement in the early days of the comprehensive test ban and nonproliferation had led him to initiate such things as the Nuclear Planning Group within NATO. That was nothing more than a tutorial that he set up with the other NATO nations. You remember that there was a small permanent group there, Britain and France, then France dropped out; but he kept Germany in. That was a core group within the nuclear planning group, but of the other twelve he would rotate three of them through, so there would usually be five countries in the group. Two of them would rotate, so he would get everybody within a two- to three-year span. He was trying to explain the realities of nuclear strategy, and bring along the rest of the western world in understanding nuclear warfare. The episode at Glassboro, New Jersey, in June 1967 was illustrative. Premier Kosygin sat down with Secretary McNamara and that was like a nuclear planning group tutorial, starting from bedrock zero. That kind of an issue would have been illustrative of the kind of thing that Bob McNamara would get very heavily involved in.

Goldberg: And the ABM?

Pursley: Yes, a very large issue.

Goldberg: Were you involved with that?

Pursley: To some degree. The secretary relied heavily on Systems Analysis for that. Alain Enthoven was probably closer to him on that than any other individual.

Goldberg: And on many others.

Pursley: I helped some on that set of remarks he delivered in San Francisco in September 1967. Bob McNamara was, though, his own person on that. Johnny Foster to a degree, but Alain Enthoven was involved in that set of decisions more than any other individual.

But look at management of the Department of Defense, trying to get your hands around how this department operates, how it functions, what it does, trying to make it more effective. He had a great capacity for that. I'm sure people will argue forever about whether he did or did not do it well, but the institution of a planning, programming, and budgeting system (PPBS), where none existed, was a great achievement. Maybe copying is a form of flattery, but PPBS has been copied a lot around the rest of government and even outside government. That too is indicative of a major kind of capacity. Let me add some other dimensions, too. Something that impressed me just after I became military assistant was a special projects assignment that he gave me. He was concerned with allegations he had heard regarding wire tapping of phone conversations in various parts of the government, not necessarily in the Pentagon.

Goldberg: Even before Kissinger?

Pursley: Yes. Some of that had gone on with Kennedy and Johnson. He wanted to make sure that DoD was absolutely clean. He had me work with a man who worked for Solis Horwitz and had the job of monitoring security and had formulated guidelines.

Goldberg: Civilian or military?

Pursley: Civilian, a very fine gentleman. I thought he was very bright and informed. We dug through the business of what kinds of wiretaps were legal, what kind of authority was needed, whether it was overseas in an espionage case or domestic. All of that ultimately ended in a new regulation in the department to police the whole business rigorously, at least through the McNamara years. It showed a sense of ethics and morality about operations that I thought unusual and distinctive. A second way that that showed itself was McNamara's insistence on paying and reimbursing the government when he took trips, if there was any personal element to the trip at all. He took a trip to Montreal to deliver a talk in 1966. On the way back he stopped in Boston to see his son, who was in school in New Hampshire. When he got back to Washington McNamara wrote a check to pay for the whole return trip because part of it had been personal. I don't think you see that very often. He was rigorous in doing that in every instance where there was any possible personal element.

Goldberg: Secretary Robert Lovett was that way. He had a telephone in his office which he used for private calls, and he paid for it.

Pursley: McNamara was of that ilk. While all of that was going on, the presidents, Kennedy and Johnson both, leaned on him for other things. The SST is a case in point. All of those propositions, in turn, take a substantial amount of time and effort to be sure that they are done well. So here is a man of very large capability, even with Vietnam occupying an immense amount of time and attention.

Goldberg: And having a powerful psychological effect on him at the same time.

Trask: How aware were you of McNamara's thinking about Vietnam, particularly when you get into 1967, near the time when he resigned?

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Pursley: Quite a bit. Not that he unburdened the way that Mel Laird, for example, might. But it was easy to see in conversations and just on things I would be doing for him. To illustrate: He called me in and gave me the assignment to do the Pentagon Papers. It was in May 1967. He indicated he had just come back from a weekend at Amherst, where he had willingly spent some time in the Amherst Chapel with some students and family discussing Vietnam. Their probing, and his willingness to be probed at some length, indicated to him that he didn't have the necessary depth of knowledge of why and how we had become involved. It was extremely bothersome to him that we were so far into it and he didn't have anything like the equipment to satisfy himself that we understood how we had become so engaged. He asked me to put together an "encyclopedia for Cy and me." Cy was Cyrus Vance, of course, the Deputy Secretary of Defense. We were going to understand all sorts of things. The secretary's preparations for the Stennis hearings in September of that year on the air role in Southeast Asia made it clear that air power could not do the sorts of things that we were trying to have it do. Air power could do lots of good things, certainly the way we had gotten so much equipment and people to and from Vietnam; the Army's new capacity with helicopters; air/sea rescue and reconnaissance; you can go through a great variety of things. But one thing it couldn't do was interdict effectively in that kind of situation for a long period of time. McNamara was bright enough to know that, but he couldn't get any of the people in blue suits to acknowledge it, although books have been written by Air Force people who have said that. The role of air power in Southeast Asia was little understood; and the secretary of defense was very disturbed about this. The studies that we discussed earlier in talking about DIA--we asked for a detailed set of studies from CIA starting in early 1967.

George Carver was the fellow that I worked with directly on this. We laid out a twelve-volume set (as I recall), addressing the whole question of what staying power the North Vietnamese would really have and what we could do to them that would in any way affect the way in which they would be willing to negotiate or terminate the war in a way acceptable to us. That involved not just air power, but attrition, manpower flows, casualty levels, and a whole raft of things. That set of studies indicated what later became obvious, at least to some of us, that the North Vietnamese were willing to take losses that were inordinate in terms of anything that most of us in the West could comprehend. And that gave a whole new dimension on what we could do by way of prosecuting the war--at least at this period in time. Those are things indicating to me that McNamara was obviously at odds with probably much of the rest of the national security community about how to proceed in this conflict.

Goldberg: So you had a continuing close relationship with him and met with him frequently. Did you travel with him sometimes?

Pursley: Yes.

Goldberg: What about his deputies, Vance and Nitze, did you have much to do with them?

Pursley: Quite a bit. To a degree it was on special projects--with Vance on the F-111 project, and with Paul Nitze on that, too. Probably because Vance left not too long after I came, I had much more to do with Paul Nitze and got to know him well, particularly during the Clifford stay here.

Goldberg: How about with other officials in the department, assistant secretaries and the like?

Pursley: We worked a lot with them.

Goldberg: I presume you had a lot to do with Enthoven.

Pursley: I worked with all the service secretaries and assistant secretaries.

Goldberg: And the JCS staff?

Pursley: To some degree. But interestingly enough, which may be indicative of a number of things, one worked fairly closely with the assistant to the chairman and to a degree with the chairman, but not a great deal with the director of the Joint Staff, so that the contact was directly in the office of the chairman. That probably reveals something of the closeness or lack of it between the secretary and that whole organization of the Joint Staff. I wish I had worked a lot more closely with that organization, although it would have been difficult, the way that organization was set up, to work much past the chairman without creating a substantial amount of disruption. I would say that the contacts on a personal basis working directly were much larger with the military departments and with OSD than they were with the chairman's office, except right in the chairman's immediate office.

Goldberg: How about outside of OSD, did you have much to do with other organizations?

Pursley: I did a lot of work with State. My counterpart at State was Ben Reed. He was a very capable man. Some contact with the White House; though during the McNamara period not a lot. McNamara handled those kinds of relationships almost entirely personally. The famous Tuesday lunches had both pluses and minuses to them. It had the secretary very involved, but the feedback from those kinds of contacts left something to be desired. It would probably have been helpful for the department, and I think Bob McNamara would

agree today, if we had had some more explicit reading on what a lot of those discussions really were.

Goldberg: With Johnson I suppose there was a certain inhibition about talking too much.

Pursley: Yes, indeed. From time to time we would have involvement with other departments, but those were pretty sporadic.

Goldberg: We have some questions about the atmosphere in OSD and the McNamara legacy. Were there differences between top civilian military leadership and DoD in their approaches to the war in Vietnam?

Pursley: I think the answer certainly is yes. There are matters of degree, but in the McNamara period I don't think you would find the significance in degree to become a difference in kind. One of the things that is most striking about the McNamara period is the degree to which that team stayed together. The people who had come in with McNamara in one role or another would stay, it seemed to me, to a remarkable degree. Paul Ignatius, who came in 1961, was still there in 1966-67 and had been through a variety of incarnations. Like Johnny Foster, who came in later and stayed through the whole McNamara period.

Goldberg: Tom Morris was there the whole time, too.

Pursley: You can find exceptions to that, like Charles Hitch.

Goldberg: But then you have the military services and their attitude toward McNamara personally as well as in his official capacity, which was often negative. Did that influence their behavior and their thinking on the war?

Pursley: My own judgment would be that people supported McNamara and his judgment. A man like John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security

Affairs, would have been one of a mind with McNamara on just about everything, and he had significant influence, while he was still alive, on McNamara.

Goldberg: He was a favorite of McNamara's, too.

Pursley: At another end of the spectrum, you would have had Admiral Tom Moorer, for example, who would have been vehement in his opposition to McNamara's views on just about anything. One didn't have to go far to find, at least in the uniformed ranks, people who disagreed dramatically, and in some cases carried it almost to the point of insubordination. I thought it was to McNamara's great credit that he would tolerate that about as far as I think anyone should tolerate it.

Goldberg: What form did this subordination take?

Pursley: I think it wouldn't be carrying the case too far to say that the inauguration of the introduction of the F-14 was a way of resurrecting the F-111B, but under a Navy aegis. The information that was paramount to making the F-111B work found its way into the hands of Grumman and others so that a Navy airplane could be designed and brought about. The fact that it was designated Tomcat, I think for Tom McDonnell and Tom Moorer, is not an accident. I think that came pretty close. I believe Secretary McNamara would probably agree with that, too. He knew of that, and if he had not been on his way out at the time, that could have been a very sticky and unpleasant set of circumstances and issues around this department. I'm not sure if any of you would agree with that, but it's my own judgment.

Goldberg: We have Moorer on the record, as a matter of fact, and his attitude toward McNamara comes through very clearly and strongly. When did you become aware of

McNamara's growing disillusionment with the war and the stress and tension that he was feeling because of it?

Pursley: I sensed that very early after I joined the office. I thought one could see evidence of that even in 1966--that here was a person who was not comfortable with the way things were proceeding, with our understanding of what we were doing and how we were doing it, very concerned about casualty rates, very concerned about the ability of the Vietnamese and their allies to carry the burden there, and very concerned about the implications of the conflict for any chance of democracy or a political system to really take root. This is one of the first places you would have met Les Aspin, who was working at systems analysis on the piaster problem and inflation in Southeast Asia. We were then involved in that kind of a set of circumstances. So I think there were indications even in 1966 that we had real concerns that it was not proceeding well.

Goldberg: How do you react to the criticisms of McNamara now, as a result of the publication of his book? Feeling the way he did as early as he did, in 1966, why did he persist in going ahead? Why didn't he either take a stand against the war or leave earlier, or whatever? Why did he see it through as far as he did?

Pursley: I think that has two or three answers. One is that one has to and is entitled to make a choice about where you think you can be more effective in changing the course of events, whether from the inside or outside.

Goldberg: It's the way politicians think about getting elected; getting into office or not getting into office.

Pursley: I don't know if it's necessarily restricted to politicians, I think it is a perfectly legitimate way to think about where you can have more influence.

Goldberg: I'm not restricting it to politicians, I am thinking of members of Congress, who think, "I've got to compromise, but I'm still doing a better job with this than somebody else who might be here." You have to compromise principles, but they all do it at one time or another.

Pursley: I would hate to imply that in any way Bob McNamara was compromising principle. I don't think he was. I think I would disagree strongly with that. I think that on the sorts of things that he thought we should be pursuing in Southeast Asia, he felt that he could have more impact inside trying to persuade the key individual, who was clearly President Johnson, than he could if he stepped outside and started haranguing or trying to influence from a position outside where he would almost certainly have had no audience whatsoever. I was taken on that point by the piece in the New York Times Magazine Section by Tony Lake the other day. Lake had made a similar decision when he left the National Security Council staff with Henry Kissinger. He felt that if you're going to have some influence it's probably better to stay inside. He had chosen to step outside, but he had chosen then not to make a big issue about it on the premise that your chances of having any positive influence then have been greatly minimized, if not almost destroyed. I think that had everything to do with Bob McNamara's decision about trying to influence the direction of the conflict as long as he had any kind of bona fides with the president at all. Clearly, those were eroding, and had already eroded visibly. It wasn't hard to see that. The second point that McNamara makes is that in our system, the way we are structured under our Constitution, we have one elected

official, the president, and then he appoints all of his staff. The secretary of defense, unlike the minister of defense of Great Britain, is not a member of Parliament, or Congress, he is appointed by the president. In that system, Bob McNamara would argue, one has a responsibility to that individual. Certainly you have a responsibility to the Constitution, you take an oath to defend it; but you have a responsibility in our kind of system that is a little different than you would if you were working under a parliamentary system.

Therefore, one must, while trying to change the system, reflect on the fact that one has some kind of responsibility to the man who put you in that spot. McNamara felt that strongly and he would think that even if he were to walk out in very substantial disagreement with the person that put him in there, he must retain some degree of loyalty to the individual who gave him the opportunity to serve in that spot in the first place. You may say that is naive, and that as a matter of principle you have a responsibility to the people of the United States to show the courage of your convictions. But the two points I had made argue that if you have the courage of your convictions, that you are sure that you are right and that the policy being pursued is not the right one, your responsibility is to try to get it changed. If you ask yourself what is the best route to get it changed, I think he did the right thing. He stayed, I am sure, as long as he possibly could have under the circumstances. He doesn't know if he got fired or if he left. There were probably elements of both involved.

Trask: What was your view at the time, in November of 1967, when it became known that McNamara was resigning to become president of the World Bank? What interpretation did you place on that at the time, or what did you know about the circumstances?

Pursley: My gut reaction was that he had lost his bona fides with the president and this was a very convenient way to find a change. The shrillness of all the debate, whether it was about air power, or the long accumulation of increasingly strident tones in the dialogue about Vietnam; my interpretation was that it was a convenient way to find a new person to bring in here.

Goldberg: Did you perceive a deterioration in him physically and mentally during this period?

Pursley: Not mentally, but he was very tired, that was clear. Again, I say that only because his capacity was so far beyond mine. I'm not sure I would have known shades in mental capacity at that level, in any event. It would be presumptuous of me.

Trask: He stayed in the job about four months or so after it was known that he was going to leave, until the end of February. That was curious, too. Was that a matter of delay in Johnson selecting his successor, or was that an arrangement that McNamara made with Johnson at the time?

Pursley: I don't know. The Johnson Library would be full of things that probably would lead to the answer to that. A number of things were probably in the equation there; the ability to talk Clark Clifford into taking over the job; of making the transition appear to be a smooth, accommodating kind of thing. If you have a three-month period as opposed to a two-week period it gives a lot more credence to that whole thesis. But I don't know the answer to that.

Goldberg: How effective was systems analysis in connection with the war in Vietnam?

Enthoven has made the statement that there wasn't enough planning or systems analysis in connection with the war.

Pursley: I think that's probably right. All systems analysis, not just Alain Enthoven's piece, I think you could say was flawed. To get back to Alain's systems analysis: Bruce Palmer has said about the role of the military during the whole of the Southeast Asia conflict that we did not have a military strategy articulated for Southeast Asia, nor was Southeast Asia put in a strategic context with our whole national security policy all over the world.

Goldberg: In that connection, what did you think of the domino theory?

Pursley: I felt there was probably some credibility to it. Although I guess following the 1965 situation in Indonesia, the possibility of the domino theory playing out in any realistic way I thought went down rather markedly. It seems to me that was sort of a seminal event on the domino theory. Getting back to systems analysis, one of the things that systems analysis helps in is raising the right questions at the right time, which would lead you to make judicious policy decisions. The absence of any military strategy, as Bruce Palmer has indicated, and the absence of any positioning of Southeast Asia in a broader military strategy seems to me to point to analysis generally being flawed during that whole period, wherever it would be. I think the responsibility for that does not lie just with Alain Enthoven's systems analysis. If that whole situation were to have been rectified, given the personalities involved, it would most likely have come from Alain Enthoven's systems analysis if there were to have been an introduction of analytical thought as to what objectives we were really pursuing, what resources we had, and how that was all going to be put together in some kind of a strategic format. You could say to that degree the fact that Alain didn't do it is too bad. The fact is, though, that the major responsibility for trying to introduce that kind of analysis into the whole scheme of things probably rested more with

the uniformed military. It would have been logical for the Joint Staff to have come up with some kind of a strategy and a strategic format, and the fact that they didn't--I think that responsibility would have rested first with the uniformed military and secondly with OSD.

Goldberg: Why didn't McNamara demand it of the uniformed services?

Pursley: I don't know.

Goldberg: Was he aware that it was lacking?

Pursley: I think he was, yes. It's that old business, if you will excuse a very trite expression, of telling somebody how to suck eggs. It gets back to the very thing that I am sure Tom Moorer probably screamed most about, "you don't have to tell us, and we resent deeply civilians, particularly the secretary of defense, introducing themselves into our arena to tell us how to do our business." I think McNamara was sensitive to that.

Goldberg: After the experience with Admiral George Anderson, I suppose so.

Pursley: I would be interested in your views. That would be how I would see it, but I would probably be in a rank minority.

Goldberg: The military do not think that he was sensitive to them at all. On the contrary, as you know there was a long legacy of anti-McNamara feeling among the military. Even those who never knew him or had anything to do with him and weren't here at the time have inherited that attitude. They may have been children in the 1960s but are now officers in the mid-level or above and have inherited that.

Pursley: I had a military academy classmate who accosted me at a luncheon not long ago about the McNamara book and his opinion that it was bad. He not only has never met McNamara, but has never read the book. I think much of the criticism comes from those who

have not read the book. He was absolutely certain of his position about how bad McNamara was.

Goldberg: People think in stereotypes, and derive their knowledge from second-, third-, and fourth-hand sources. This is typical.

Let me ask you a few questions about PPBS. How important do you think the contribution was and how lasting was it in DoD?

Pursley: I think the contributions were major in terms of trying to introduce a management system into an organization that for all intents and purposes didn't have an effective system. I think from that standpoint just introducing a system into the DoD is a major management contribution.

Goldberg: And a lasting one.

Pursley: I think so. I know you can argue about the point that maybe it's outlived its utility or that one would have a hard time finding the vestiges of the original PPBS system around the organization (DoD) now; it has gone through changes here and there. There are those who say the whole direction is different, and that the difference in degree is enough to be a difference in kind. I understand that argument, but I think the legacy is pretty large, not only within the department just in terms of trying to have a management system that will allow logic to be introduced into the whole question of forces, modernization, and readiness, so that you can come to grips with issues of that magnitude in other than just a gut reaction or judgmental kind of way. It allows you to quantify things which are quantifiable, although clearly a lot of things aren't. There is still great latitude, I think, within the planning, programming, budgeting system to allow those purely judgmental things to be introduced.

It's a testimonial to the original PPBS system that so many other organizations around government have tried to emulate it. How successfully, I don't really know, but you can see semblances of the PPBS in a variety of places and even in private business. Information management systems, or whatever, gain a lot of momentum from the very existence of this in the Pentagon. One could hear it talked about in a variety of places, even when I got out of the military, and this was looked to as at least one of the places you should look into and try to emulate to a degree. Organizations of great size need a system of some kind. This was a very effective one in terms of coalescing and getting an organization to work with and within the system to an effective degree. Whether to a strikingly effective degree, we'd all debate that. I happen to think it probably was pretty effective.

Goldberg: What other long-lasting legacies do we have from McNamara that you can think of?

Pursley: One that I would go back to, that is substantially overlooked and could be argued as to its importance, is arms control and understanding what nuclear war is all about.

Without a person like McNamara being a tutor, if you will, not just for this department and U.S. government, but in a worldwide sense, we would have lost a lot and the dangers would have been much higher. This is evidenced by the fact that he chose to put an appendix in his book on the very subject.

Goldberg: He has spoken out on that subject more than on any other over the years since he was secretary.

Pursley: I think that his influence in moving us along an understanding spectrum of what the implications and meaning of nuclear warfare really are was a very major contribution. I

think it has helped in terms of the original strategic arms limitations agreement, SALT I; it has helped in terms of the progression of those, even though precious little has been done, perhaps, in ratifying. Nuclear armaments are at least to some degree on the decline in terms of gross overall numbers; proliferation, even though the threat still exists, would have been substantially higher in my judgment had there not been that kind of person out beating the drums, saying "this is a terribly important issue that we need to get our arms around." I would suppose that on a much lesser scale Bob McNamara's strong push for trying to manage and vigorously insert himself into the management of a large organization has carried over to a degree in terms of trying to find some way to make our government more efficient and effective. That's not as important as a lot of other things that he did, but it's not unimportant, either. In my judgment, Bob McNamara made an attempt at management that not many other secretaries of defense had shown.

Goldberg: Any other major achievements you think ought to be mentioned?

Pursley: Those would be the ones that come to mind almost immediately.

Goldberg: So your judgment of him as secretary would be that he was very effective?

Pursley: Yes, and that would put me in a very substantial minority, I am sure.

Goldberg: Not necessarily, a lot of people would agree with that. A lot of observers, some of them not with DoD.

Pursley: I should have qualified it--at least among my uniformed friends, I might find myself in the minority.

Goldberg: Did he have other major frustrations that you know of when he left, other than Vietnam? Vietnam really drove him out, I think, but were there others?

Pursley: You well know, and I do too, that his family was very important to him. That was a major source of concern. I think that when he left that was an increasingly large concern for him, that damage had been done to family relationships that were very meaningful to him.

Goldberg: I guess he was lucky that he was still a young man when he held the office. An older man couldn't have kept up the pace.

Pursley: It's hard to describe to people the pace that he maintained. I'm glad I was a little younger. I know full well I couldn't even start to maintain that pace today. This contributed, I think, in a small way to Bus Wheeler's heart attack over in Vietnam. Bob McNamara would like to work all day at the Pentagon, and if you are going to Southeast Asia, leave at 9:00 p.m. from Andrews AFB. That would allow you to refuel in Alaska-- working on board doing all the things you need to do--refuel, and get to Saigon around 8:00 a.m., with the benefit of a full day's work there, too. So in effect you have had three working days, one here, one on the airplane, and one in Saigon.

Trask: Did he nap along the way?

Pursley: A little bit, but most of this is going through material, discussions--

Goldberg: He's still doing the same thing now. It is incredible, the way he keeps it up.

Pursley: Anybody who worked for him will smile at this: He'd come out of his office at 3:00 or 4:00 on Saturday afternoon, after a pretty full work day, for the most part, and say, "A couple of things here I would like to have Monday morning, but I don't want you to spend the weekend on this." Between now and Monday morning there is one day. It was a nice expression of consideration, but you'd damn well better have it there on Monday morning.

Goldberg: What do you regard as your major contribution as a military assistant during the McNamara period?

Pursley: I hope that I made some input to not only Bob McNamara but other secretaries too that was helpful on some of the key issues. I intended to elevate that job a little bit so it could serve the department better. It struck me that not long after I was there that this department needs what in many organizations would be called a chief of staff, serving under the secretary of defense. He had no real buffer, analytically or otherwise, between him and the military departments, or between him and the OSD staff, or between him and the JCS.

Goldberg: What about the special assistant?

Pursley: The special assistant was used almost entirely on uniquely political affairs. Joe Califano spent a lot of time on civil rights in Alabama, as you well know. He was the secretary for the SST (Supersonic Transport) thing, that's where I got to know him. I had the debatable pleasure of getting appointments with Joe at 11:30 on Saturday night. He was as bad as Bob McNamara about work hours. The special assistants for the three secretaries of defense that I worked with tended to work almost uniquely on special kinds of projects, most of them with a largely political element to them.

Goldberg: What did Henry Glass do?

Pursley: Henry worked almost 100 percent on what we called the Posture Statement. That's all Henry did, but that's a tremendous amount. When Bob McNamara was trying to prepare to testify on the Hill, he would go through an intense amount of research, using the Posture Statement as his vehicle. He would blue-line it, indicating those things he particularly wanted to emphasize. As he went through, there would be parts that, for understandable

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reasons, weren't explained as fully as he needed. Rather than going back to Henry, he would go to his military assistant with long lists of 80 to 100 separate things that he would distribute trying to get answers to, work through to be sure they were right, and then give them back and brief him or let him have papers that you had done as a result. Henry did the original part of the thing, but he didn't do any of the rest. The military assistants did that. McNamara and the secretaries of defense could have elevated that position as military assistant in a way that served in effect as a de facto chief of staff.

Goldberg: It would be difficult to do, wouldn't it?

Pursley: I think that is what it sort of grew into. As you are there longer, as I'm sure our friends in the 1950s found, you gain a bit of license to do that. Maybe not during the McNamara period, but as you are there longer and have the endurance to do it, you gain that sort of a license.

Goldberg: I think that is true. I think it happened with Randall in the '50s. He was able to speak for the secretary, and people recognized that he was speaking for the secretary and they accepted it.

Pursley: I found, certainly during the time Laird was there, that I could do that. But your point is well taken. Nobody spoke for Bob McNamara except Bob McNamara. And I wouldn't have been audacious enough to have even dreamed of speaking for him.

Goldberg: Your service on McNamara's staff must have had some impact on your thinking about national security problems. Did they change in any particular way?

Pursley: They changed a lot. I think a lot of it had to with the educational process of seeing how the department really worked. Part of it was process, part of it was issues; certainly on

the nuclear part of the thing, I became educated just like everyone else. I came in as ignorant, or more so, than many others.

Goldberg: By and large, you were in accord with most of McNamara's positions, presumably?

Pursley: I have thought of that, and I can't think of a time when I was in strong disagreement. I can mention one, and maybe I didn't step up to it as much as I should have. It struck me as curious, maybe I was just too close to the forest during McNamara's period not to have seen what was going on. With an issue like Southeast Asia occupying so much of the time, energy, and attention of people, it was odd that the secretary of defense did not have an explicit vehicle for attaching himself to the rest of the department to influence the way it worked on Southeast Asian issues. He would give assignments to the chairman, and allow him to do things operationally, give certain assignments to Alain Enthoven; but it was all part of ongoing business. That was mixed in with nuclear management and everything else. There was not a dedicated effort, per se, to handling Southeast Asia. In juxtaposition, when I mentioned it to Mel Laird, he said it was curious that if it was important enough to occupy a third of our defense budget it would seem to demand a unique and personalized bit of attention on the part of the secretary of defense. Mel Laird's first act was to set up a Vietnam Task Group, which met daily. Then the secretary of defense had an involvement, known about, institutionalized, as a special part of the structure. The significance was perhaps as much symbolic as substantive, but it indicated an interest and a dedication on the part of the secretary that was justified by the significance of the issue. To say it the other way, in the absence of having a dedicated institutionalized kind of structure it sort of

implies that it is business as usual, not a lot different from any of the other great array of issues that are handled during the course of the day.

Trask: Wasn't it the central issue for McNamara even though he didn't have this structure?

Pursley: You could say that if you thought in terms of the importance of the issue, yet if you looked at his calendar and at what other people were following, a great array of other kinds of issues are floating around at the same time. Where is the structure? Tell me again, now, that this is important. It is implicit, but we are not dealing with it that way. Maybe I'm trying to make a point here that it is a bit more symbolic than it is anything else, because McNamara certainly spent a lot of time on Vietnam.

Trask: He did deal with it, but he didn't have this organization that Laird had later.

Pursley: But that could have been the stroke that really made the difference. It may seem like a small thing in a way, but in my judgment the symbolism is significant enough to make a whale of a difference in the way the department reacts.

Goldberg: One of the criticisms of McNamara has been that he played it too close to the chest, that he dealt with the president, the secretary of state, maybe the chairman, and that was it. It was a very small closed group. He didn't establish within DoD or OSD an element that could study, advise him, and help the process. He did it all on an ad hoc basis.

Pursley: The Vietnam task group usually had the CIA rep here, too. George Carver sat in on that more often than not.

Goldberg: And he was briefing regularly.

Pursley: George was over here a lot during the McNamara period, but not on nearly as regular a basis as he was when he met with Laird.

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Goldberg: He used to brief Laird, Schlesinger, and others regularly once a week. When McNamara left you were reappointed as military assistant. How did that come about?

Pursley: I just stayed on. Clifford accepted everybody except the special assistant. John Steadman left and he (Clifford) brought in George Elsey. He was the only one that Clark Clifford brought in. He never told me why he kept me. I guess he must have talked enough to Bob McNamara to be reassured that the military assistant wasn't going to scuttle the ship, that there was some utility to having some continuity. In the absence of being told to leave, I stayed.

Goldberg: Had you known Clifford previously?

Pursley: I had never met him.

Trask: Was there much communication between Clifford and McNamara during this transition period?

Pursley: Some, but not a lot. They talked.

Goldberg: Were your position and duties affected in any way by the changeover?

Pursley: Not a lot. A little bit, initially. Clark Clifford's context for thinking about a military assistant was the White House situation that he had had with Truman, so the utility was somewhat along those lines. That was a very close, small kind of thing, and he didn't have the comprehension that the military assistant has to have great contact through this whole department. That was a little foreign to him, and I think it took him a while to understand the little things, for example that somebody is going to be putting together and going over all the cables and intelligence material in the morning before he got here. He would initially come in and shove the stuff aside. I hate to say it, but we finally, at least for a

short period of time, started putting the material together and sending it with his driver so he could read it in the car coming to work in the morning. Our thinking was he couldn't get away from it there. But often President Johnson would intercept him on the way in and have something for him to do, so it was a way to impress upon him that there were lots of other things around the department that needed his attention. The whole system of laying out things that needed to be signed and why; the time frame in which he should pay attention to them.

Goldberg: Because he was so single-minded on the matter of Vietnam, didn't he turn a lot of this over to Nitze?

Pursley: A lot.

Goldberg: Nitze handled far more under Clifford than he did under McNamara, presumably.

Pursley: I think that's true. His latitude was wider. Clifford's management style was very substantially different from what most of us would see, outside of maybe a law office. He had a small group of people that he would meet and deal with, that became known as the "8:30 group" because that was the time that we met more frequently than other times. He gravitated to this very quickly after he came in. Everybody sat in the same seat each time, like it was orchestrated. There was Paul Nitze; then Paul Warnke, for whom Clark had great respect and admiration; Phil Goulding, assistant secretary for public affairs; George Elsey, in whom Clark had great trust; and me--I was the military man.

Goldberg: Did you continue to operate as before? Were your relationships with other members on the OSD staff, the JCS, the service departments, etc., pretty much the same?

Pursley: Yes, that continued to grow under Clifford and expanded even more with Laird. I guess you earn trust over time and the ability to speak with or for the secretary. That 8:30 group was the management vehicle under Clifford, and the format was the same. Clark would always start with issues that were on his mind. He would sit and talk through those points, pros and cons, and when he finished, without necessarily announcing how he felt about it, he would then ask Paul Nitze to make comments about whatever that issue was. When Paul Nitze finished, Paul Warnke would talk, and so on around the table. When it got around to me things had been well chewed over. Every once in a while Clark would tell us we were all wrong.

Goldberg: So he didn't really participate in the actual management of the department, he did leave that to Nitze, and presumably his relations with Nitze were good?

Pursley: To a very great degree. That could be overstated. I am sure if we went back through the files we would find lots of things that Clifford had handled and signed. But the general thrust of that characterization, I think, is right.

Goldberg: And he did obviously emphasize primarily his responsibility to the war in Vietnam?

Pursley: No doubt about it. If one put percentages on it, it would be a disproportionately large percentage of all of his time on Southeast Asia.

Goldberg: We'll stop now and schedule another interview later.