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Alexander Meigs Haig, Jr. interviewed by Richard Rusk
March 1985

RICHARD RUSK: --Haig. Former Secretary of State 1981 through 1982 with President Ronald [Wilson] Reagan. Formerly he was with the Defense Department from 1962 to 1965 holding various positions. 1966 through '67 a battalion and brigade commander in Vietnam; '67 through '69 Deputy Commandant at West Point; Chief of Staff of the White House for Presidency of Richard [Milhous] Nixon; Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, 1974-79. This is March of 1985. Rich Rusk doing the interview. My father has told me he had very few actual contacts with you during all this time; is his memory correct on that point, or what do you think?

HAIG: He is correct--in a direct sense, with the exception of what he didn't know was that I was working during his time as Secretary of State, as the Deputy to Joe [Joseph Anthony] Califano [Jr.] in Defense and--I worked in between and for both [Robert Strange] McNamara and Cy [Cyrus Roberts] Vance. And that period was from 1963 to the end of 1965. I then went to the Army War College. While in the Pentagon, I had a number of opportunities to watch your father execute his role. I also was liaison, incidentally, with the White House at that time with President Lyndon Johnson.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you privy to his relationship with Robert McNamara?

HAIG: Yes I was and even before that I was with Cy Vance as his military assistant when he was Secretary of the Army. During that time, Cy was the executive agent for counter-insurgency in Central America under the [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy task force concept. You remember he used to form task forces every time there'd be a problem to be solved.

RICHARD RUSK: Yes.

HAIG: And so I did a great deal of work with the State Department with [John H.] Crimmons who handled the Latin America Bureau and of course, therefore, was again very familiar with the Secretary's views on a number of contemporary issues.

RICHARD RUSK: You had no contacts with my dad as a field commander of troops in Vietnam.

HAIG: No, I did not but I knew of his reputation and his military experience.

RICHARD RUSK: As commanding officer at West Point, any contacts?

HAIG: I think he came up there maybe once during the time I was there.

RICHARD RUSK: For a speech or something?

HAIG: Either for a speech or to get an award or something and of course I followed his policies during Vietnam. I was heavily engaged in Vietnam from the early period until I went to Vietnam and followed your father's testimonies, not only then, but afterwards. I followed him very carefully because I was so interested in the subject.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I'm intrigued in talking with you because you were a commander of troops in Vietnam and had direct field experience and you also served in that same position that he held, and I think this could be valuable in spite of the fact that you were not in as close touch with him as some of his other friends and colleagues.

HAIG: No, but I was very intimately involved in the events that led up to the landing of our troops in Da Nang in the Spring of '65, the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and the whole evolution of our involvement in Southeast Asia. And subsequently, of course, in the whole evolution of our disengagement, when I was working for Nixon with [Henry Alfred] Kissinger.

RICHARD RUSK: I don't have a lot of specific questions about the details of policy for you, I'm not writing that kind of book. I'm writing more of a son's story about his dad, and I'll let the historians and the scholars worry about his policies. I'll say a few things about them. There's a fellow following me named Tom [Thomas J.] Schoenbaum, the Director of the Rusk Center, and you might hear from him some day, he's under contract with Simon and Schuster to produce a more comprehensive biography in 1988 and he wanted to be here today but was unable to be here. My interest is in your general impressions, the anecdotal kind of comments--

HAIG: Okay.

RICHARD RUSK: So, direct questions about the Vietnam experience--whatever you think might help me understand my dad's role in those years. We might start with your work with the Defense Department and your knowledge of my father.

HAIG: Fine.

RICHARD RUSK: How did he impress you?

HAIG: I'm an unabashed admirer of your father. I want you to know that and to know that I probably am more familiar with the problems he faced in the office of Secretary of State when he first came into that position. Under the Kennedy Administration, Washington was replete with what we called at that time "the Irish Mafia."

RICHARD RUSK: Lot of the same back channels that you ran into during the Reagan term.

HAIG: Right. It was an anti-organizational bias in the Kennedy Administration. Ad hocism and an informalism had to have been at times frustrating times for your father as Secretary of the largest department responsible for national security and foreign affairs. There was during that time a great tendency to create little task forces which reported on foreign policy not to your father, the Secretary of State, but directly to Bobby [Robert Francis] Kennedy, who was the

enforcer for his brother, the President. I don't mean that in a critical way, because every President's got to have an enforcer. And initially, I think Kennedy was closer to Bob McNamara, probably philosophically if not personally, and probably both, than he was to your father. That also must have added to your father's frustration and challenges. I saw your father over a period of time, act as a very courageous buffer to a number of policies, especially in our relationships with Europe, and the Soviet Union. And your father was the voice of classic and I think more realistic policy. For example, McNamara repeatedly was proposing initiatives for Western Europe which could have had the practical consequences of unraveling the alliance. And your father courageously fought him in a very elegant way.

RICHARD RUSK: About the multi-lateral force, things of that nature?

HAIG: Oh, on forces, troop levels, defense expenditures, I found your father always on the side with which I was in agreement. Not empathetic, but sympathetic. And he prevented a number of initiatives, without going into detail that could have been catastrophic. He slowly but surely maintained his course. After the assassination of President Kennedy, and the emergence of Lyndon Johnson, your father was confronted again for different reasons for then the situation was one in which he had to really fight his way back into influence in the White House.

RICHARD RUSK: At the time of the assassination, the transition.

HAIG: Yes, because at times of crisis of that kind, all of the levers of transition and power are really domestically concentrated in the Pentagon. The Pentagon is a natural source of intelligence and access, and for that reason, I think, initially Lyndon Johnson was heavily reliant on Bob McNamara.

RICHARD RUSK: Was Bob McNamara a little bit alarmed by that? The fact that he may--he personally may have felt that he was overriding my father on issues of foreign affairs.

HAIG: I don't think it was an issue that would have disturbed him.

RICHARD RUSK: Because in other ways he did try to defer to my dad.

HAIG: Yes, he did, I think personally he deferred. You know, Bob McNamara is not a confrontational person. He is very, very intelligent. Very sensitive. But, politically, in a foreign policy sense he is totally naive. In this area, he had no feel. He was a problematic thinker, systems analyst, a fellow who was devoid of the kind of judgmental acumen that your father had, thank God. I think your father had been more experienced in foreign affairs, government, and dealing with those abroad. And had to be very courageous, repeatedly. People don't realize the kind of subterranean tension that existed because we didn't have a disciplined administration just like the present one that allows all the fights to be fought in the press. They were there during your father's time as Secretary and I know because I was at the junction box of a lot of them. Most importantly, as I say, in addition to other accomplishments, he saved the NATO Alliance, which I think he did against great obstacles and with great personal sacrifice and courage.

RICHARD RUSK: I've never seen recognition of this--

HAIG: Yes, he really did. There is also a great tendency, in an effort to improve East-West relations, at times to depart from reality for atmospherics and I think your father was a very realistic shock absorber in preventing excess. I think the area where I developed perhaps the most admiration for your father was his incredible articulateness. He's a very articulate man, and he would go constantly to a session in the Congress, defend the administration's position as a loyal cabinet member, but never fail to patiently and moderately and very, very convincingly present his case against the worst kind of rudeness and harassment. I can remember thinking, not only during the time, but since, what a remarkable internal mechanism your dad must have had. With his own sense of direction and self-assurance, he would intellectually arrive at a solution, stick to it and hold to it against a lot of barrages.

RICHARD RUSK: You recall where a specific instance of this hostility, this rudeness in Congress--

HAIG: Well, they used to be shown on the TV night after night, you know.

RICHARD RUSK: The [James William] Fulbright hearings, this type of thing?

HAIG: Yes, yes. Terrible statements were made. I don't mean personally insulting, but intellectually arrogant and often wrong.

RICHARD RUSK: Right. I recall that, I was tuned in on all that stuff.

HAIG: He always held his ground, never lost his cool, and when he did it was really for technical reasons to make a point needed to be made. I think he was the past master of that. In other words, I think he was a teacher. People around him learned from him. And he was very generous with his willingness to share his perceptions, which was so essential for a cabinet officer with his responsibility. He was not a solemn, introverted man. He shared his capacity with others. You know, getting back to the point, I think ultimately he ended up enjoying Lyndon Johnson's confidence to a far greater degree than anyone in the cabinet.

RICHARD RUSK: Walt Rostow has called it coming in first among equals, referring to that McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara relationship. Is that the way you saw it from where you sat?

HAIG: Yes. Well, it was earned. It was not a foregone conclusion. It didn't start out that way, any more than it did with Kennedy. He earned it, because Johnson began to find that some of the more fast stepping fellows around him were frequently wrong. And he came to rely on your father for the kind of counsel that he should have heard.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting.

HAIG: Now I'd like to tell you, not for your book, that I got to know Lyndon Johnson rather well after his return to private life, because I'd go down and I'd brief him for President Nixon on events in Southeast Asia and we'd spend some time together.

RICHARD RUSK: You would go to Texas to brief him.

HAIG: Yes, to the Ranch--

RICHARD RUSK: Huh!

HAIG: I know, I think two or three trips I made when we spent the whole day sitting, reminiscing, and it became very clear to me that Lyndon Johnson held your father in very high regard.

RICHARD RUSK: Yes, it was almost a love relationship in a way, from what people have told me.

HAIG: Yes. But built on the what I call experienced judgment, rather than chemical.

RICHARD RUSK: You're giving me one of the better interviews I've had, I appreciate your analysis and your patience in these oral histories. I feel obliged to ask a few obligatory types of objective questions--

HAIG: Sure.

RICHARD RUSK: So people don't accuse me of cooking the records--

HAIG: That's what you have to be very careful on.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm not writing a critical book of my father, that's a contradiction in terms. There have been enough of those written. But I do feel obliged to ask you a few questions. Such as: What were some of the more negative aspects of my dad's performance as Secretary that you recall? Obviously, it was a mixed record like that of any official in government.

HAIG: Well, I saw a little more of him than he knows because working for McNamara we used to have regular Congressional briefings of the Congressional leadership over in the West Wing of the White House. Sometimes as many as two a week. The President used these meetings with small groups of Senators or Congressmen to try to keep their support for the Vietnam effort. I used to prepare the briefings, the charts and graphs for McNamara for the briefings. McNamara was a great chart and graph man. Your father was always there and I thought, the most articulate and effective spokesman on the issue.

RICHARD RUSK: With the kind of--with these groups?

HAIG: With these groups and I must say that despite his reputation for not being a good communicator, Lyndon Johnson was also. Johnson was very poor with the media--television, radio--but he was a spell-binder in these small groups. So they [Johnson and your dad] were a very good one-two combination, very effective. Now I haven't given you the criticism, and I frankly don't have any. I wouldn't presume to have any. I think in hindsight that our policies in

the Southeast Asia were less than what they might have been. I don't mean that in criticism of your father, because the way we got involved was essentially driven by the White House and the Defense Department, not the State Department. The Gulf of Tonkin, I thought, was an aberration. It was a product of modern technology which kept the President, through modern technology, more informed than the bureaucracy and above all the field.

RICHARD RUSK: Huh! That's interesting.

HAIG: I don't know what your father's view on it is.

RICHARD RUSK: Gulf of Tonkin was primarily a presidential show, I take it. He was the desk officer on that one and ran that through his office.

HAIG: Right. And I think in hindsight facts were that there probably never was an attack on our ship in the Tonkin Gulf that night.

RICHARD RUSK: He, himself made that point in conversation with a colleague. For all I know they may have been shooting at flying fish out there.

HAIG: I think that there were technical aberrations, electronic intercepts perhaps and perhaps not.

RICHARD RUSK: The critics have said that people walked around with the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in their hip pocket waiting for an instance to pull it out. Do you tend to lay any credence to that theory at all?

HAIG: I can't say. I just have remained highly suspicious that the whole incident was a series of misjudgments and mistakes in which there was no maliciousness involved and that the President was a victim of new technology and intelligence which was not seasoned by human judgment. And so, almost from the moment of our involvement, your father had to be an apologist for things which in the first instance he may have not been a party to, and wasn't asked. I am presuming this, it may or may not be true. And your father and I might differ on what we should have done in Vietnam. It was my view that before we ever put troops in that we should have mobilized.

RICHARD RUSK: Mobilized the country?

HAIGH: Mobilized the country. Avoided the guns and butter syndrome, and put the Soviet Union, which was really behind the whole thing, on notice that we were prepared to win a victory if it meant landing 12 or 15 American combat divisions in North Vietnam. And I believed, sincerely, and I continue to believe that had we taken that position--

RICHARD RUSK: Right at the start?

HAIG: Right at the start, there would never have been a conflict.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting.

HAIG: That the Soviets would have pulled back because under a similar set of conditions, during your father's time when there was a crisis in Burma, Kennedy mobilized a brigade of troops and took all the steps necessary to indicate he was ready to intervene. Well, that stretched the rubber band and the next time around we had to do something far more dramatic to convince Moscow to convince its proxies to butt out. Now that's a bad term to use, because Hanoi was not really a proxy at that time-- but all of us in Washington were living under the illusion that Hanoi was run under the wing of the People's Republic of China, and therefore we were more subject to the kind of thing we faced in Korea than was ever the case. And I reconstructed that with my Chinese friends since. I tell you, they didn't want us to lose in Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: No, Chou En-Lai begged Henry Kissinger, I believe, in the early seventies to keep an American presence in Vietnam, as a barrier. He told you that probably.

HAIG: Chou En-Lai did. He said to me do not lose and do not withdraw from Southeast Asia.

RICHARD RUSK: Isn't that something.

HAIG: Now he--

RICHARD RUSK: But, Vietnam was a variative--Chinese expansion was sort of a fallacy on our part.

HAIG: It was a fallacy. And it was an aberration. Again I think a product of unsophisticated American intelligence resulting from our downgrading the human in favor of the technological and we got caught unawares, but hell, we were caught unawares in Korea. For an entirely different set of reasons and with a different outcome.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad has never, to this day, wavered in his beliefs and premises that underlay that policy. He believes the issues were valid, that we had a valid reason for being there. He had questioned--

HAIG: I agree with that.

RICHARD RUSK: You do. I suppose the post-Vietnam era has suggested that there were issues at stake. A lot of us sixties campus radicals--

HAIG: Well, China has in fact prevented all the worst scenarios of the conflict in Southeast Asia. We would have had a domino theory take place in reality. The North Vietnamese would have overrun Thailand in 1975 and were in the process of preparing to do so but the Chinese prevented it.

RICHARD RUSK: Has that story been made public at all?

HAIG: I say it publicly. A lot of people don't accept it. The Chinese know it's so. They told me.

RICHARD RUSK: My dad has come to question the tactics that he recommended back there, especially the idea of gradualism as opposed to shoving in a stack of blue chips at the very beginning of that struggle--

HAIG: I think we would have had more success. This would be my criticism of Vietnam and I'm not a Johnny-come-lately because I broke with McNamara on that issue. There was a feeling that if Vietnam was indeed worth fighting for, if it was "a vital interest", then, as a nation we had to understand that the steps we took must involve everything, credibly that we could do to convince the other side that we intended to make it a matter of priorities. That meant not gradualism, not a Marine division followed by an Army division and in the local area which is only a manifestation of the ill rather than the real cause of that ill. I happen to believe that the Soviet Union, even in the mid-sixties, was sufficiently wary of United States overall power that had we demonstrated that power, they would have flinched. That would probably be less true today in a critical area. Now, in that sense you can say that as a nation we should have learned something. I think your father has learned these things. I think he'll never say anything that would be disloyal to his President that he served and I don't assume he could be that way--

RICHARD RUSK: I've got him down to a great extent on oral history talks with him, his policies and his whole life, we've talked at great length about it. We've got a lot of transcripts. Yet on the issue of Vietnam, he remains a spokesman for the official policy of that era. He doesn't really go beyond into what was.

HAIG: It's asking too much of him.

RICHARD RUSK: I think so.

HAIG: It's asking too much of him. And I agree with him, in every sense of the word with the fact that it was a vital interest, it was an issue that we had to address. My only problem was as to the gradualist approach.

RICHARD RUSK: Did that bother you as a battalion or brigade commander in Vietnam, the idea that we weren't using our power to its fullest extent?

HAIG: Of course.

RICHARD RUSK: It did.

HAIG: I went there intellectually convinced we were not doing it the right way, and after a year plus in the field commanding a battalion and a brigade, I left all the more convinced. A lot of that came from the perversion of the so-called spectrum of conflict. This came with Max [Maxwell Davenport] Taylor and the Democrats and the transition between [Dwight David] Eisenhower and the Democratic administration. They started saying that since we could neutralize the Soviets with our nuclear power and since we have sufficient conventional power to deter them in a major confrontation what we had to focus on was the gray area down at the lower spectrum, lower edge of the spectrum of conflict. At that time, it was referred to as counter-insurgency, the hearts and

minds notion and that's where the Special Forces concept came up. The Army, the military let itself be prostituted in order to get money. If they joined right in they got the resources. As an Army officer at that time I was appalled by it. And I remember the package of steps to be taken after the Gulf of Tonkin. Then we had the destruction of the hotel. Johnson was having his number called on every ultimatum he put down, North Vietnam would hit him on it. And it was really not the Brinks [?] Hotel, the other hotel that finally culminated in the decision to send the Marines into Da Nang. Now, before that decision was made, the Chief of Staff of the Army, Johnny [Harold K.] Johnson, was ordered to go to Korea, I mean Vietnam, and make a survey, and come back and make recommendations to the President. Another officer, I touch upon this in my book, another officer and I were asked by our Chief of Staff before he went for ideas. And I remember spending a weekend with a Lieutenant Colonel outside of McNamara's office writing thirty-some steps that the United States should take. They started with mobilization, an ultimatum to the Soviet Union. I don't mean we're going to go to war with you, but we want to put you on notice that we mean business.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

HAIG: Now when it came back, when the Chief of Staff of the Army came back with a response to our memorandum, the first fifteen recommendations had been deleted.

RICHARD RUSK: Were not in the presentation itself?

HAIG: Were not considered acceptable options. Instead, all of the easy political steps which didn't disturb the tranquility of the domestic economy, get the American people riled up, create tensions with Moscow, were retained as options. As to the Soviet Union, you will recall this was the post-Cuban missile crisis era, and that's where we got started. I know one thing about your father, also. You know there was folklore around the department, around the State Department, with respect to your father being a very controlled public figure. In private, however, he really let his hair down. He was really one of the fellows. I remember he used to take a drink with you at night, with a few of the people he trusted and he let his hair down.

RICHARD RUSK: He has what they called a Bottle Club at the--

HAIG: Yeah. A very human portrayal. I think sometimes in fact he spoke of a couple of bottles!

RICHARD RUSK: My dad never had combat experience. He served in--see back there in World War II as Deputy Chief--

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RICHARD RUSK: -- influence his decision making on Vietnam and his understanding of

Vietnam--he had been in the military and around the military for years, but never out there in the field, under battlefield conditions, and to what extent did that affect him?

HAIG: I can't answer that. But I always found in your father evidence that his military experience, whatever it was, enabled him to be more effective and more realistic, and I thought he was the most realistic fellow in the administration.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting--more understanding of military concerns, strategy, than the average--

HAIG: Sometimes also understanding of the foibles of the military, too.

RICHARD RUSK: Part of his desire for gradualism probably stemmed from his Korean War experience in which he and all of his fellow advisers did not anticipate the Chinese intervention. You add that one up and then add to that the Cuban Missile Crisis--having his finger on that--

HAIG: This is a historically evolutionary policy for the United States that really didn't even start in Korea, it started in World War II. The extension of the [Franklin Delano] Rooseveltian approach which I think was more right than it was wrong at that time. With respect to Korea, with my work as an adviser, very close to being an adviser when the war broke out, on [Douglas] MacArthur's staff, and he of course, was very, very frustrated for he really fundamentally opposed it, and so I left Korea after a year's experience in the battlefield there with a distinctive impression that we weren't doing it right there. Another thing that I didn't like was the way we exercised the draft.

RICHARD RUSK: Student deferment system?

HAIG: The draft which meant it was for the poor people and the underprivileged from the inner cities who were bleeding and dying, not the children of the elite, and therefore the country could go along its merry way with a no-win war. That was a terrible mistake.

RICHARD RUSK: I suppose they--

HAIG: This same draft had matured by the time Vietnam came.

RICHARD RUSK: I suppose the professional army itself is a direct consequence of Vietnam, and without Vietnam we'd likely not have ended up with this--

HAIG: Well, I'm violently opposed to all-volunteer army.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. And it's probably not as good an army, in a sense.

HAIG: Well, you know in time it is not, but day to day, our young folks are just super.

RICHARD RUSK: Have you ever thought about making a public issue and you yourself get--

HAIG: Oh, yes.

RICHARD RUSK: You have.

HAIG: I fought it when Nixon was heading toward lifting the draft until he ordered me to stay the hell out of it. You can't undermine your Commander-in-Chief, if you're going to be a leader.

RICHARD RUSK: Got another question for you, and as a former commander of troops in battle, I think you might have some insights for me, and that is-- involves the psychology of command decision making and what happens to people like my father who get involved in decisions that result in war, everything that war entails, fellows getting killed over policies that you either work out or don't work out, but nevertheless a lot of suffering, a lot of violence, a lot of dead men, and it's a cumulative type of thing. How does that responsibility affect people like my father? How does it affect the decision-making process? And was that one of the factors that helped lock him in to that policy probably long beyond a point when it was evident to most other observers that the darn thing was just not going to work out?

HAIG: I think the answer to that is it works both ways.

RICHARD RUSK: It's a hard question.

HAIG: Yes. Having been there, I think anyone who presides over or participates in a very meaningful way in national decisions that result in a loss of any American lives--it poses tremendous contradictions, subjective contradictions to that individual. On the one hand, of course, he is very reluctant to pursue anything that would add to the prolongation of the conflict. On the other hand, he is very reluctant to adopt policies that would appear that we squandered those lives. And, you know, your father, I thought, held a middle course. That's one of the reasons I had a great admiration for him. Robert McNamara recoiled.

RICHARD RUSK: Recoiled, you say?

HAIG: He recoiled.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

HAIG: In the duration of saying "no more."

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. He was unable to function beyond a certain point there.

HAIG: God knows I can't answer for the subjective agony involved with Robert McNamara or others around him, such as Cy Vance who also flew into left field as a result no doubt of experiences with Vietnam. Your father has never done that. He's the strong one.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh it that right.

HAIG: And the right one. It doesn't mean I think he went the other way, in other words by

saying it has cost so much I can't abandon the position which I contributed to without looking like I'm too cowardly to face up to reality. That's not the issue. I have never found your father on that extreme end of it. Just the opposite. He's a very rational, logical, precise thinker. I never asked him about gradualism, which was really the culprit. It was a misreading of who was really behind the power push and the price you had to pay if you wanted to come out successful.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm heavily interested in this question of combat command and the effect of lives upon you as an individual and upon your decision making. That's the one I feel is the-- you know the fact that there was blood on his hands. Regardless of your views about the policy, it was a factor-- had to be a factor. David Halberstam made brief reference to it and he's the only one I've ever seen that he called it "the process whereby one dead American begets another dead American". The need to somehow make the thing work, because if you turn around on it and admit the policy is no good, you're not simply a decision maker who made a mistake, you're a murderer in your own eyes almost, you know the fact that--

HAIG: Well, that's what I say, but it works both ways, in McNamara's case, it worked the other way. I have a feeling your father, a tub-thumping justifier of those policies, I've heard him, I'm being public, where a number of these questions were asked. I don't think he will ever abandon the fact that we had not only the right to be in Vietnam but perhaps a major obligation to be there. And in that sense he's totally right.

RICHARD RUSK: The post-war developments have confirmed you in your feelings there in-- from North Vietnamese or Vietnamese involvements in Cambodia and the rest of the world? It's caused a lot of us to rethink what we--

HAIG: Slaves of South Vietnam. We murdered five million Cambodians. Don't tell me that the stakes in Vietnam didn't justify standing up to them. Afghanistan was an easy step for the Soviets after the failures in Southeast Asia. Ethiopia, Southern Yemen, Afghanistan, what's going on in Central America are the byproducts and we're on the verge of making the same mistakes in Central America that we made in Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: Within the military perhaps with the war college, or within the military training programs are officers who are in command of field units, do they get into this question of how an individual commander should deal with this issue when lives are lost partially as a result of decisions that he had made? Does the military treat that at all?

HAIG: No. Not as such. But the whole, I think the whole culture in our schools deals with it.

RICHARD RUSK: You're talking about military schools?

HAIG: Yes, military schools are designed with the full understanding that the young officer, through his development, could be the instrument of a very brutal, almost mindless, sacrifice in lives, but that he's got to make his decision on what he knows in a local sense. Further, with respect to the orders that he receives from above, that they are put up against his individual assessment. He's got to recognize that there are larger issues, and higher authorities to be considered, and that makes them somewhat more reflexive in a sense. I use the word martinet in

the sense of "do what I do because I say so" but that's a stronger thread in the military ethic than it would be in any other discipline in our country.

RICHARD RUSK: You refer to that point in your book *Caveat* and if I can quote you just briefly, you make the point that "a servant of the President owes his Chief the truth in this obligation even more than the confidential relationship between the President and the subordinate is permanently binding" and I guess it's your feeling on that that might have ultimately led to your resignation as Secretary, you believed certain things and they were more fundamental to you than the relationship itself. My dad may have taken a little different stance on that, he almost held the relationship and the presidency sacred and I'm not suggesting that he in any way abandoned his search for what the truth was in his willingness to stick up for truth, but there was a slight difference between the two of you and yet you both have the same military background in which you are taught to--

HAIG: Well, it would be presumptuous of me to suggest that what you say is true of your father. I don't know that-- and there is no reason to believe it. I would be more inclined to believe the opposite. I guess I-- you're on the subject of loyalty-- and I've always felt that there are loyalties and loyalties. In that the ultimate loyalty of a public servant is to his own conscience with respect to that assessment of what's right for the American people. Wow, loyalty to the division commander is above your loyalty to your regimental commander. Loyalty to the president is above your loyalty to your division commander or your departmental commander. But there is a greater loyalty to what your conscience and your own subjective intellect tells you is in the best common interest of the American people and when you have a clash between those two, then you've got to opt for the greater loyalty and face your own reality.

RICHARD RUSK: Well a world war was fought over that. Just a question of individual conscience and--

HAIG: I guess one thing I've learned after many years of public service is that everyone, from presidents on down, is human. They put their pants on the same way every morning and they're as susceptible to misjudgment, because they're human and the greatest obligation that you have as a subordinate is to disagree; when your conscience tells you. You have to pick and choose and you've got to be practical. In my case I opted out from President Reagan, not because I didn't respect the man, I do. Not because I didn't, in general, support his policies. I do. But rather, because I was in a bureaucratic situation in which the men around the President prevented my access to him in the way that I should have had access. Anything I recommended, they would recommend the opposite just to be doing so. And therefore, my presence in the government was counter-productive. It's a good policy. That's really why I left. I had determined that after eighteen bloody months of trying a number of different approaches, none would succeed, and I didn't think that the President was going to change.

RICHARD RUSK: I raised that question about truth and loyalty because some of the critics of my father suggested that in too many issues he was for too long the good soldier. That's the phrase they used, and I wondered to what extent that might have tried in to his military training and chain of command--

HAIG: I'd be careful about that. Most of the guys that say that about your father were anti-Vietniks whose only approach is one of criticism.

RICHARD RUSK: He hasn't had good press. Not at all.

HAIG: How could he? He presided over a foreign policy and most unpopular war our country ever fought. And the fact that he came out of it unscathed as a person in human terms, is to me the greatest confirmation of the man.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm getting more from this interview than any interview I've had; I appreciate your analysis.

HAIG: Well, you believe me.

RICHARD RUSK: You are giving me something--

HAIG: Having been there, I think I know some of the things your father was up against. He didn't lose his sense of proportion, he didn't lose his sense of balance, or his values. He didn't even lose his sense of humor. Some of these other guys came out basket cases. Be very, very careful of what I call conventional logic on that troubled period in our history. Remember another thing about your father. He stuck to his guns longer under the most adverse set of circumstances than probably any Secretary of State in history. And I think the people for whom he worked, through their own talents, led him to believe that he could make a difference, so he hung in there. That's nothing to be critical of.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, in spite of what happened in Southeast Asia, I'm immensely proud of my father. I came through that Cornell experience very much colored by a lot of anti-war thinking at the time. I joined the Marines in '65 and if the Fourth Marine Division had had an airlift, I guess we would have gone, but we were not activated. By the time I got done with Cornell, I was more than merely the brain I was when I started. But yet with this project here has given me a look at my dad's total of seventy-five years and if you look at the whole story, it is quite a story.

HAIG: You keep the macro issues in focus. You gain a lot of intellectual credibility by, if necessary, being questioning of some of the tactics and some of the details. But keep the macro issues center stage in whatever you write. The book may help you give your dad very high marks, I know it.

RICHARD RUSK: The story is there.

HAIG: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: If I can do my job.

HAIG: I'll tell you another thing about your father. In all the time I was Secretary, he could not, being a Democrat, albeit a southern Democrat, it makes a big difference, have been comfortable

with all of the things we were doing. But any time I called on him, he never did anything but support me, or make a constructive contribution, and if he couldn't he would have said no, don't ask me.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you have a lot of contacts with him?

HAIG: I had some. I had some.

RICHARD RUSK: You did. Do you recall exactly what they may have been?

HAIG: Well, I think on some of the early parts of our policy on Central America. I remember I think I called him on the phone and I think I got a letter from him. He always has conducted himself, since leaving office, in such a way that he tried to ease the burden of his successor incumbents. And he taught me a very good lesson in that regard. You know it's very easy to be out carping if you've been there before and say "Oh, the son-of-a-bitch, if I'd been there I'd have done it this way." He never engaged in any of that.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. That is true.

HAIG: And I say--

RICHARD RUSK: He's awfully disturbed with some of this arms control stuff that's been going on but even that he holds his punches.

HAIG: Well, you know, he told me a year ago down in Atlanta, that if the President went along with this Strategic Defense thing he was going to depart from the long-held practice of not attacking publicly. I asked him not to, but frankly I was as appalled by the President's speech as I think your father was. Maybe for different reasons, but I thought it was ill-timed and ill-conceived. It's complicated to do what's right. But I support our exploring outer space for defense purposes.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally he has a question--

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: When you were Chief of Staff for President Nixon, I understand there was an effort made to deactivate the nuclear firing trigger; at least put some additional steps in there so that the President in a moment of extreme stress could not do something dramatic. There wasn't any effort made there?

HAIG: No, you're referring to the last days of Watergate--

RICHARD RUSK: That's right.

HAIG: That is totally untrue. And it was done by a mischievous staff.

RICHARD RUSK: Should this be on or off the tape--it doesn't matter?

HAIG: Sure.

RICHARD RUSK: It doesn't matter.

HAIG: It's totally untrue. At this point, it would be inconceivable to me that the American military with its orientation and its overall set of democratic values could ever be so used. Secondly, it was the product of a very mischievous press briefing given on the background basis by a Cabinet Officer who was later fired for having done it.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting.

HAIG: That's off the record--

RICHARD RUSK: I'm going to ask you perhaps one more and then I'm going to allow you to kick me out of here. I would love to talk to you at great length, but this--I know your time is more limited than mine. My dad said he made a lot of decisions in office under conditions in which he was "bone tired" and that the fatigue factor alone may well have had an influence on policies and decision making. Based on your eighteen months as Secretary of State, would you suggest that that also can be a factor?

HAIG: Absolutely. It's a factor in any executive position. It's aggravating modern statecraft for Secretaries of State and Defense by the consequences of modern communications. Because of the press, the people expect almost an instantaneous reaction. Presidents can no longer wait for the system, for principles within that system to meet and discuss and think. He's got to have the answers now. If there is a plane hijacked, the press is all over the White House and he's got to have a position. Principals like Secretaries of State are very, very infrequently permitted time to think. They are constantly putting out fires. And it's very true Presidents too. I was thinking Jimmy Carter was less able to do that than this fellow. This fellow can walk away from a problem, go to bed, sleep all night. He's pretty good at it. I have to admire him for it. I don't think your father was of that ilk, and I know I'm not. If I've got a problem, I worry about it. You know, Richard Nixon worried about it. He'd anguish over a decision. Not because he was indecisive, he's not an indecisive man, but because the consequences of these decisions are sometimes so momentous you can't do less. Reagan is pretty good. The combination of fatigue and crisis management constantly has you in the vortex of every event that happens around the world because television and modern communication has changed the nature of statecraft very fundamentally. It's very important.

RICHARD RUSK: Very good. I want to thank you again. Not only the interview, but again, everything you did during the Nixon era as Chief of Staff. I told myself that if I ever had the chance to meet you I would thank you for that because we all followed that, of course, very intensely and that was quite a period in our history and we all owe you.

END OF SIDE 2