

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection  
Rusk RRR: Part 1 of 2  
Carl Thomas Rowan interviewed by Richard Rusk  
circa 1985

The complete interview also includes Rusk SSS: Part 2.

RICHARD RUSK: This interview with Carl Rowan concerns his reflections on Dean Rusk, some personal anecdotes, and his observations on my dad and his relations with the press. Carl, I am aware of some of my dad's opinions and observations of the Washington Press Corps and the media in general. You'd be a good one to give a little insight into how the Press Corps felt about Dean Rusk. Do you have anything along those lines?

ROWAN: Oh, yeah. I think the Press Corps had the highest respect for Dean Rusk. You have to separate it into two things, though. There's Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, and a man with whom they dealt for a great many years; and there is the other Dean Rusk, who to a degree got caught up in the criticism of being an architect of the war in Vietnam, you see. But I would say that the guys I knew had the greatest respect for him as a man, and as an intellect, and as a practitioner of the art of diplomacy. They always wanted to know more than Dean Rusk wanted to tell them. But I think he mentioned Bob [Robert Joseph] Manning and Jim [James Lloyd] Greenfield and how they did a pretty good job of selling the State Department on the need for dealing with the press. I think he helped to do a pretty good job. You know, one of the little stories I mentioned was that in '61, '62. Before every formal press conference, he was noticeably nervous about meeting the press.

RICHARD RUSK: Even later on in the sixties?

ROWAN: Oh, no. I'm not going past '62 now, because I left in early '63. But he knew this, and Mrs. Rusk knew it. So one day Mrs. Rusk said to me, "Carl, whatever you do, and I don't care what time of the day the press conference is going to take place, don't you let Dean go out there unless he's had a good slug of whiskey to loosen him up."

RICHARD RUSK: I wondered how important that bottle of scotch was. I think he got through his last year in office on that scotch.

ROWAN: Well, I can tell you [Anatoly F.] Dobrynin said he [Mr. Rusk] taught him to drink southern bourbon. But my recollection was that he drank scotch, and just straight scotch on the rocks. And so the truth of it was, I'd go up with these briefing papers and I'd say, "Don't forget, we ought to have a little slug of scotch." And he'd sit there and drink that slug of scotch and get just combative enough to deal with those bastards who were going to try to do him in. Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: He told me that early in the administration he was a little nervous before press conferences, but that eventually he found out that he knew as much or more than the fellows covering those stories, and when he realized that he began to loosen up a little bit.

ROWAN: Yes, well I'm sure that that's exactly right. I told you about his pulling up the ice chest and sitting on it from Geneva halfway back to New York to play poker?

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Go ahead and read that in to the tape.

ROWAN: I went with Dean Rusk to Geneva in 1962 to talk to [Andrei Andreevich] Gromyko: The same Gromyko about the same problem, disarmament, and also to talk about Berlin. And we had an interesting session where we did very well at briefing the press, and there were a lot of newsmen who went along on that trip. On the way back, John [Alfred] Scali and a few of the other guys and I started a poker game. Well, I guess we'd been playing about fifteen minutes when Dean spotted us, came back, and said "Hey, fellas, am I eligible to get in this game?" And somebody said, "Well certainly, Mr. Secretary." And two or three guys jumped up to give him their seat. He said, "Hell no, I don't want your seat." And he walked back to the ice cooler, dragged it about twenty yards down the aisle, threw a blanket on top, and sat on it and started playing poker. Well, this went on for three hours or more. And when we got back to Washington, a few days had passed, and I went to Senator Eugene [Joseph] McCarthy's house for dinner. And in the course of eating, McCarthy said to me, "What kind of guy is this Dean Rusk?"

RICHARD RUSK: When was this?

ROWAN: 1962. He says, "I hear that he's really a cold fish, that there's no warmth to him, that he's kind of a stuffed shirt."

RICHARD RUSK: Those were his words?

ROWAN: That's right, those were his words. And I said, "Oh, I don't think that's true at all." I said, "Let me give you a story to tell you why." I said, "Now, I know that we've got a couple of newsmen here, so I'm telling you this off the record here, just dinner party conversation." And I explained to them how Rusk had dragged the ice cooler down the aisle and sat in the plane aisle playing poker, two or three days later I picked up the *Washington Post*, and there is a big Jack [Northman] Anderson column. "Dean Rusk, poker nut," blah, blah, blah, and talked about how he had played poker on this trip. And he even pretended to know how much he'd won or lost. And I said to myself, "Jesus Christ! Now I know that you can't say anything off the record before some journalists!" I mean, there's just no way to do it.

RICHARD RUSK: Jack Anderson did this?

ROWAN: Yeah. And one of the first things a public official must learn is which journalists you can trust and which you can't trust.

RICHARD RUSK: You learn that only through hard experience. I suppose the fellow's reputation would follow him around, too?

ROWAN: Yeah. But I tell you, one of the things I would say is you must have some friends in the media. No public official of any consequence can stay aloof from the media, because there

will come times when the best and most powerful of them need a friend in the media. And there comes a time when one of your colleagues in government is leaking something to make you look bad because they don't like your policy, or they're just plain telling lies on you.

RICHARD RUSK: You've got to get that view across.

ROWAN: You've got to be able to call somebody and say, "Hey man, they're shafting me. I need a little help." And there was always somebody out trying to shaft somebody. I remember going into Dean Rusk's office one morning before a press conference and he was sitting at his desk reading the *New York Herald Tribune*. And he had this unhappy look on his face. I don't know if you know it, but members of the press used to say when he got that look on, they called it his bartender look.

RICHARD RUSK: Like a dour Buddha.

ROWAN: So, he looked at me and said, "You know anything about Tom [Thomas Bernard] Ross and David Wise?" And I said, "Yes, I know them both." He said, "Do they have any good contacts in the White House?" I said, "Well, Tom Ross was at a party President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy gave two nights ago and was at the White House until 2:00 a.m." And I knew what Dean Rusk had been reading. Ross had an item in there that said, "President Kennedy looking for replacement for Dean Rusk." And when I told him about Ross having been at the White House for dinner, Dean Rusk turned to me and said, "Mr. Rowan, Washington is a very wicked city." (laughter) And so it has been, is, and always will be. And anybody coming to Washington to take a top level job had better be aware that it's a wicked city.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. You said my dad had good relations with the press, and he was respected for his candor although he probably would never elaborate nearly to the extent that the press would like the Secretary of State to do. But how do you account for the fact that my dad was on good terms with the press, not necessarily always in agreement on policy, but I think he was respected for his degree of integrity and his candor. And yet, during that LBJ administration, especially with respect to Vietnam, there developed this terrific credibility gap and suspicion on the part of the American people that the Johnson administration was lying to the public about that war. How do you account for that discrepancy between the two?

ROWAN: Well, I can tell you some interesting stories in that respect. I think there was a whole lot of doubt and skepticism by the American pit lie at large because there was a lot of doubt and skepticism by people in government, including Lyndon Johnson. I went to Vietnam thirteen times as a government official, or as a newsman after I left government. I went over once with Bob [Robert Strange] McNamara, and I think I even made one trip to Vietnam with Dean Rusk and McNamara on the same flight. And each time we'd go we'd be briefed by MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam], the military command: briefed on the troops strength, and how much light there was at the end of the tunnel, etc. And I would listen to the questions that Dean Rusk would ask, McNamara would ask, the briefers, and clearly get the impression, that eerie feeling inside, that the briefers might be bullshitting them. And this feeling on my part became stronger one day when Johnson was talking to me, personally, and privately, about the Gulf of Tonkin deal. And Johnson said, "I'll go to my grave believing that the military pulled a fast one

on me there. I just can't fully trust the sons-of-bitches."

RICHARD RUSK: LBJ said that?

ROWAN: That's what he said to me, yeah. He thought that the military had contrived up and reported a crisis, an attack on our ships that was less than what they told him was the case.

RICHARD RUSK: I have seen reference where LBJ had guessed that the military was probably shooting at ducks or something. That's been out. It's in the public record somewhere.

ROWAN: Yeah, well he certainly told me that. Now, given that, the public found it more and more difficult to accept a policy statement that we want no wider war, which was one of the themes of Johnson's when, at the same time, we were sending in another fifty thousand troops, another hundred thousand troops. And then when the Tet Offensive came along, some of us, myself included, listened to Walt [Whitman] Rostow. I was asked to the White House for a one-on-one briefing in which he tried to convince me that the Tet Offensive was really a great American triumph. And I said, "Walt, do you really expect me to believe this?" I said, "I will quote you as saying it, but I'll be damned if I'll accept this on a background basis and then go out and say on my own behalf that this was a great American triumph." So you just had more and more of those developments to the point where a lot of the press, and a lot of the public, and especially on campuses and so forth, they just didn't want to believe anybody in the government any more.

RICHARD RUSK: Now, my dad has made the comment that when he dealt with the press he wouldn't always answer all of their questions, and there were some questions that he simply had to stay silent on, but he can't recall an instance where he ever lied to the press. Now, as his son, I'm going to take that statement at face value, entirely. And I'm not writing a critical biography of Dean Rusk. That's a contradiction in terms for family to write something like that about family. But do you recall any instance where my dad might have said something that really was being less than fully candid?

ROWAN: Well now, to say "less than fully candid" is quite different from lying. Let me say, I was there for two and a half years and I can think of many cases where he wasn't fully candid, and we had told him not to be fully candid. But you know, there are ways--

RICHARD RUSK: Did he ever lie?

ROWAN: No, not that I know of. There are ways to tell the truth and not lie, and still not spill all the beans, or not to reveal details that are detrimental to the national interests. So, you know, I thought he was far more effective in the end of the work-day sessions, with a small group of reporters sitting around having a drink and talking about developments, than he was in the formal press conferences. I think every newsman who went to those sessions regularly would tell you that they were valuable, because Dean Rusk always gave them a clear understanding of what was going on, what our problems were, what the dilemmas were. But if they asked him for some specific detail: "What did you tell Gromyko? What was in the note Dobrynin brought today?" he would just stop telling them, when he told them what he thought he could tell them. And they

would probably say, "Well, complete candor would have been to tell us everything." But that is not the role of a Secretary of State, to tell everything.

RICHARD RUSK: Those were weekly backgrounders?

ROWAN: Yes, once a week.

RICHARD RUSK: Did that practice continue after my dad left office?

ROWAN: I certainly was not invited to any after he left office. I'll tell you a story about leaks. Leaks are a very important part of life in Washington. Now, he mentioned to me that when he and Gromyko would agree on how much they would tell the press, that Gromyko kept his word. I happen to recall some sessions where I think the Soviets were playing a little fast and loose by having, say, another Soviet newsman put out a little extra material that they thought would serve the Soviet interests. And we used to get into some pretty good discussions, in fact: little arguments over whether or not it was in his interests and U.S. interests to make these deal with Gromyko, because I felt that there were occasions when Gromyko fudged and cheated a little. Now, one of the classic cases did not involve your father as the one who made the deal with Gromyko, as far as I know. But Gromyko had met with President Kennedy. And they had agreed to hold real tight everything that was said, and the memorandum of conversation was stamped "Top Secret, NODIS," meaning no distribution. And that meant that only four or five people in the State Department were to have a look at this memorandum of conversation. Well, it was my job at that time to meet President Kennedy in the basement of the State Department every time he'd come for a press conference and to brief him on any last minute news developments about which he might be asked. And often, Kennedy would come in and I'd say, "Well now, AP [Associated Press] just filed a story from Saigon about our using some missiles over there that haven't been there before. And I know they're going to ask you what it means in terms of this so-called escalation using these missiles." And sometimes Kennedy'd blow his stack, "What's the matter with the sons-of-bitches? Ain't they got no goddamn patriotism?" Then he'd put his TV smile, go out, and be just as affable with the newsmen as you can imagine. But one morning he came in after this meeting with Gromyko, and had just read some articles that suggested that Gromyko had suckered him in these conversations and that Kennedy had agreed to some things that Kennedy had not agreed to. So, I said to him, "Well, I mean, what do you expect? You slap a NODIS on this, and even though only a handful of people in the State Department get it the word does get around, but the Russians find a way to put out their version of what happened."

RICHARD RUSK: NODIS is no distribution?

ROWAN: That's right. Capital N-O-D-I-S, all caps. There was a LIMDIS, meaning limited distribution, that cut down the distribution shortly. But NODIS meant come as close as you can to no distribution. So Kennedy said to me, "I am assigning you to leak portions of the memorandum of conversation." He said, "If the sons-of-bitches want to play that game, I know how to play that game." So I went to lunch with Peter [Irvin] Lisagor and Marguerite Higgins. We sat there having lunch. I didn't give them any documents, you know, but I just said to them, "You know, I read in the paper today that Kennedy had agreed to this." I said, "That's a bunch of bullshit." I said, "I know what took place. I've seen the memorandum of conversation. What

Kennedy actually did was this," and I went over four or five things. Next day, page one *New York Herald Tribune*, page one *Chicago Daily News*, through the *Daily News* news service, etc. Well, Jesus, all over the State Department all hell was breaking loose. They wanted to know who leaked this. And what we called the State Department "gumshoes" got busy. So after about a day, one of them had tracked down the fact that I had had lunch with Pete Lisagore and Marguerite Higgins. So, this guy comes in my office and said, "Is it correct that you had access to that memcon?" I said, "It's correct." "Is it also true that you had lunch with Pete Lisagore and Marguerite Higgins." I said, "I have lunch with Pete Lisagore and Marguerite Higgins at least once every two weeks. Yes, I had lunch with them." He says, "Well, now can we talk?" I said, "Talk hell, get out of my office! I've got work to do!" Now I have never till this day known if your father knew that Kennedy had told me to leak it. But in any event, if those guys went up and told him, "We think Rowan did the leaking," he never said a word to me, and they never came to me again. I think Dean must have known, and when they went up he said, "Look, I'll give you a little advice. Cool it."

RICHARD RUSK: I have a question about the Tet Offensive. There has been some controversy over the press coverage of the Tet Offensive. Peter Braestrup wrote a book called *The Big Story* in which he said that the press misreported, or misunderstood the true nature of the Tet Offensive, in that it really had been an American success story, or at least it was a lot less negative in terms of our policy than had been reported. Do you have any comments about that? And while you're at it, could you just comment in general about the press's performance, with respect to Vietnam, in giving a true representation of what that war was all about to the American people. It's kind of a big general question I'm asking you here, but I'd be curious to hear your views on that.

ROWAN: Well, I would say that first of all, I think just as Walt Rostow did not convince me that it was a great American triumph, they failed utterly to convince most of the press that it was anything other than a small disaster for the United States. As for the press role in covering that war, I think the press was a major factor in producing the outcome that we got for the simple reason that this was the first American war ever fought on television. And the American public got a far different impact watching that war on television, watching the little bits and pieces of reportage: bits and pieces which often flew squarely in the face of things that had been said by the White House, or things that had been said by the Ambassador in Saigon, or things put out by the White House spokesman, or things put out by Terry Zorthian, USIA's [United States Information Agency] man in Saigon. I think the press, as much as the developments, convinced Americans that they were on a no win wicket and had to bail out. Now whether or not they convinced Americans of what was true or was not true, it had its impact, and the magnitude of the impact was manifested in the fact that his last months, Lyndon Johnson had to go around the country like a thief in the night; he couldn't set foot by day on college campuses, etc. This is the impact of the media that you saw reflected there.

RICHARD RUSK: We've had ten or fifteen years' worth of developments in southeast Asia since the end of the American presence in South Vietnam. We have a one million man standing army in Vietnam, Vietnam branded as an aggressive nation by the nations of the General Assembly of the U.N., Vietnamese in Laos and Cambodia, and all of this. Are you suggesting that we had a legitimate stake in the outcome of events over there? And should we have made the

commitment that we did over there?

ROWAN: Well, I have to go at that question two ways. I think, yes, we had a legitimate stake. I think the events of the last few years have said that the people who argued that there is no such thing as the domino theory were wrong. Because what we've seen happen in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia clearly illustrates that there are some domino effects that are just horrible in not just political consequences as between democracy and Communism, but in what has happened to some of the peoples of Laos and Cambodia. Now, the other side of the question is, did we as a nation and as a people have enough at stake ourselves to say, "We are going in there and We will use however much force it takes, however many men, and whatever weapons are necessary in order to prevail?" If you ask that last question, I would now say no, whereas I might have said yes way back at the start of that war. The fact is, nobody really knows what level of manpower or weaponry use would have been required for us to prevail.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, if you have the millions of (unintelligible) made us radicals of the sixties look a little foolish.

ROWAN: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: I thought I had my chapters all figured out on Vietnam as far as this book was concerned, but I must say--my brother Dave [David Patrick Rusk] said, "Rich, whatever you do, you take your dad's career at face value and you give it the respect that it deserves.

ROWAN: Of course. Well, it was a remarkable career and, I mean, it took some real guts and some fortitude to go through those last years of that war. I mean in your father's case, because not only was Lyndon Johnson catching all that hell, but your dad was catching a lot of it too.

RICHARD RUSK: He sure was.

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

RICHARD RUSK: Give me a critique of Dean Rusk as you experienced him as an employee of the Department of State with the USIA: some comments on his personality, his character, performance as Secretary, perhaps some of his problems as a Secretary of State. You know, every man has flaws, we all have them. I hope I'm not putting you on the spot here, with the tape recorder going and me asking these questions as the man's son. But whatever you can do along those lines will be helpful.

ROWAN: No, I'll be happy to tell you the truth. In the first place, Rusk became Secretary of State under one of the most difficult circumstances for a Secretary of State, in that he came in under a President who, to a large degree, wanted to be his own Secretary of State. I mean,

Kennedy wanted to be an expert in foreign affairs. Beyond that, he had a brother, Robert F. Kennedy, who wanted to be an expert on foreign affairs, and he brought into the job of National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, who considered himself an expert on foreign affairs. They also brought in some biases against the Foreign Service and the State Department. I told you about Kennedy meeting me in the basement of the State Department before his press conferences. One day he said to me, "What's wrong with this goddam place? I give orders. I say this is the policy, and this is what I want done. And I look up four months later, and not a goddam thing has been done. I mean, what do I have to do to change this place?" So, there you go. You have those biases and you have people who want to run foreign policy. You had an administration, also, that walked right into a disaster in the early days of the administration: the Bay of Pigs fiasco. So, Dean Rusk started out as Secretary of State under sane not extremely easy circumstances. He started out with the Berlin crisis at a fever pitch of danger. I must say that I thought one of the strongest points, one of the things I admired him for, for example, was that I never heard him complain about all the people in the White House who wanted to run foreign policy. I never heard him say, as we heard in the days of Bill [William Pierce] Rogers and Henry [Alfred] Kissinger what somebody over there, McGeorge Bundy, was trying to do to him personally, etc. I never heard a word of that.

RICHARD RUSK: Even when he knew it was going on, he wouldn't talk about it.

ROWAN: Right. But I found that he acted with professionalism. The only time, for instances in those staff meetings, he might allude to this, he always did it with a little bit of graceful humor. He'd make a little joke of saying, "Well, that's the policy it was when I talked to the President yesterday, unless somebody changed it overnight." You knew, that kind of stuff. He lacked what we call flair. In Washington, to be a superstar you have to have an ego like Henry Kissinger's and gall on top of gall, which people will call style and flair. And then you get a lot of attention, especially in the media. And people thought of Dean Rusk as thoroughly intellectual, but more a worker and architect of policy than a flamboyant, articulator of that policy. As for the State Department, to get off the policy aspect of it and to get into some things I know about personally, I never knew anyone to remotely suggest that he didn't have integrity. I don't know if you know it, but when I went into the State Department in 1961, no black American ever in the State Department had held a job as high as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.

RICHARD RUSK: So you were sort of the Jackie Robinson of the Foreign Service.

ROWAN: Well, yeah, they'd had some people in the Foreign Service.

RICHARD RUSK: But not that high up, huh?

ROWAN: Well, they had an ambassador too. You know, the ambassadors always went to Liberia and the Canary Islands, etc. But in terms of the hierarchy inside the State Department, there'd never been. And of course it was a page one story, when I was named.

RICHARD RUSK: Who was responsible for putting you there, was it my dad, or John Kennedy?

ROWAN: No, it was Kennedy. And let me tell you a little story of how this happened. I was out at the Rose Bowl, New Year's Day of '61 to do the front-page story on the Rose Bowl game for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, when I was awakened and asked if I'd come into the Kennedy administration. Well, I had the last appointment with Kennedy. I was home on consultation and I had the last appointment with him the night before he went to Dallas to his death. And after we'd gotten through talking about Finland and the President of Finland and--

RICHARD RUSK: This was before his death?

ROWAN: Yes, the night before.

RICHARD RUSK: In Dallas?

ROWAN: No. I had the last appointment in Washington with him before he went to Dallas the next day. I said, "Mr. President, I have never known why you asked me to come to Washington and take a job in the State Department." He said, "Do you remember that you came to Washington to do a series of articles on Nixon and me?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, my intelligence people told me that John Coles was going to endorse Nixon. And they said you were also doing a piece for *Ebony* magazine on Nixon and me, and they had learned that Johnny [John H. ] Johnson, the publisher of *Ebony* was going to endorse Nixon. So," he said, "I figured they had sent you down to do a hatchet job on me." He said, "But when I saw the articles later, I couldn't believe it. I said, my God, these articles are just flawlessly fair." And he said, "I never forgot your name. And after I was elected and we were sitting over talking about some people to bring in the administration, I asked what about you." So, I was given this job in the State Department. Now, I decided that first of all, I had to want and hold the respect of the old career guys and the others who were at the same level and higher. There were sessions that your father presided over where we'd get to talking about the Congo or something where I was a pretty hard-nosed son of a bitch, if you want to know the truth. In fact, when I first tried to quit because I got offered the job to test to be a syndicated (unintelligible) Edward R. Murrow.

RICHARD RUSK: Jody West?

ROWAN: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: That's a hard turn to make.

ROWAN: Yeah. Ed Murrow said to me, "Carl, don't go now, because if you do there won't be a wet eye in the State Department." But when I talk about integrity, your father stood up for this and he made it clear that he wanted me to speak out in those meetings, and in those struggles and so forth. When he talked about the foxholes, we were in them. God: We got into some where the Congress--old Tom [Thomas Joseph] Dodd, has he talked to you about old Tom Dodd and how old Senator Dodd was really out after our asses over that Congo deal?

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. He did talk about that.

ROWAN: We believed that old [Michael] Struelens and Union Miniere were pumping a little

money into old Tom Dodd. We secretly had the bank accounts of Struelens, and we knew that he was making some strange expenditures and taking money out for reasons that couldn't be totally accounted for.

RICHARD RUSK: Wasn't Dodd later thrown out of the Congress on some other charge?

ROWAN: Yeah, I think that's exactly what happened. I'd forgotten that.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, how was my dad as an administrator? He's been criticized by some since those years as having played his cards too close to his vest, and never really letting his colleagues know what was in his mind and giving them the direction they thought they might have needed. Did you run into any of that in your dealings with my dad?

ROWAN: I heard the criticisms with regard to administration, but not on the question of his playing his cards too close to his vest. But of the fact that he never had, for a lot of years, in the second and third jobs, people who would do some of the administrative chores the way they ought to be done. I mean, George [Wildman] Ball wasn't really as interested in doing some of these things of administering the State Department as he was in being a policymaker and letting everybody know what his views were on this or that. And the last year that I was there, or even when I was in USIA in '64 and '65, Ball seemed busier trying to set up a record of building himself up as the guy opposed Vietnam all along than he was in administering the State Department. And a lot of people thought maybe Rusk should have gotten him out of there earlier.

RICHARD RUSK: What kind of boss was my dad as far as you were concerned? Wasn't he your superior in terms of the USIA? Wasn't that an offshoot of the State Department?

ROWAN: Well, at the time I was there, USIA was totally independent and the Director reported to the President, directly. It's back the other way now, under the State Department, and it had been the other way before with it an offshoot of the State Department. But you see, one of the things that would happen there is that if they sat in a meeting at State, and they had a big argument, the people who last the meeting would often call me at USIA saying, "Well, we made our decision here. The Secretary's made his decision, and I can't undercut him. I can't talk to anybody, but you report directly to the President, why don't you tell the President that this is a big mistake?" And, I got several of those calls. And this was why, at one point, I was miffed. Because nobody at State had informed me that they were going to do something, and it turns out I did think it was a mistake. So, when I heard about from one of my assistant directors--This had something to do with our ships going into South Africa--I said, "Well damn it, that is a mistake and I'm pissed off. How could they do this without asking the director of USIA?" So, I picked up what we called the flamethrower, my direct--

RICHARD RUSK: Did you say ships going into South Africa?

ROWAN: Yeah, the ships were going to go into South Africa under circumstances where the white sailors would be able to go on leave, on liberty, and black sailors wouldn't. So I picked up the phone and I called the White House, and I said, "How in the hell are we going to do that?" And Johnson turned to Bill [William Don] Moyers and said, "You stop every bit of this. You tell

them I want nothing done until I get a memo from Carl Rowan telling me his side of this thing." So I rushed my memo over opposing it, and Johnson opposed it. And George Ball then called me up bitching, saying I was running a separate State Department. And I said, "I'm not trying to run any damn separate State Department, but what do you guys expect me to do? You sit in secret and hold this meeting and make this decision, and I only hear about it by accident." And apparently they went and told your father this, and he says, "Well, hell, he's right. We should have had him in the meeting." And from then on, in that little meeting of a half dozen people before the staff meetings, I was in there forever after that.

RICHARD RUSK: While you're on the subject of South Africa, What about my dad as far as civil rights? While we're discussing South Africa and the racial question, how did Dean Rusk stack up in terms of civil rights? Supposedly he passed the supreme test when my sister, Peggy [Margaret Elizabeth Rusk], married a black fellow there in Washington. I don't know if you remember that or not.

ROWAN: Oh, I remember.

RICHARD RUSK: That's supposed to be the litmus by which a family is to be judged on their racial intolerance. But in your experience how did he perform on the issue of civil rights?

ROWAN: Well, I'm glad you asked that because I had written a note to myself to be sure to talk to you about this one. I mentioned the fact that I'd come in as the first Deputy Assistant Secretary. We then began to see lots of promotions of blacks in that State Department. I mean, there had been a preponderance of messengers and lower level people. That was the last, I think, truly serious attempt to integrate the Foreign Service to the point that it looked reasonably like the population of the United States. We got a campaign going under one of his other aides, Bill [William J.] Crockett.

RICHARD RUSK: Another black fellow?

ROWAN: No, Bill Crockett was white, Chester [Bliss] Boles was a big help in this. We launched a mighty campaign to get more--

RICHARD RUSK: Were you involved in it?

ROWAN: Oh, God yes, was I ever involved in it! And with your father's encouragement, his initiative and encouragement. You know, he will tell you that we were having more racial incidents involving black ambassadors and their wives than you can imagine. You just cannot remember what 1961 was like, but this was still a pretty Jim Crow city. And the areas of Virginia and Maryland around it were just horrible. So, your father set up special machinery to deal with this. I remember that a fellow named Pedro San Juan was given a special job to do nothing but try to prevent those kinds of incidents. A section of the Protocol Department was set up to deal with this. But beyond that, the assignments being made oversees began to change. Instead of a black Foreign Service officer feeling that he could only serve only in Liberia and a couple of other African countries, you had a black ambassador in Norway. I went to Finland as a black ambassador.

RICHARD RUSK: Was that considered a major step?

ROWAN: Oh yes. And when Cliff [Clifton Reginald] Wharton [Jr.] went to Norway, etc., and we had a black ambassador in Syria as I recall, and so forth. Oh God, when I was named to go to Finland, the publicity was so great you wouldn't have believed it, both here and in Finland.

RICHARD RUSK: Front page stories?

ROWAN: Oh front page stories galore.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you have any bad incidents coming out of that?

ROWAN: No. It was a piece of cake. The Finns and I still have a love affair going. The Finns did magazine articles galore, and they worked so hard to be clever. I remember one in one of the big Finnish magazines: "The most colorful ambassador in Finland." And they were talking about the unorthodox style that I brought to the job in the sense of traveling more than any American had before, and going out bowling with the Finnish people, and playing golf with them, and etc.

RICHARD RUSK: You made the comment that that was the last genuine effort on the part of the federal government to really integrate the Foreign Service.

ROWAN: Yes. You look at the situation today, twenty-four years later, and you will find that the record of the State Department, in terms of race and in terms of assigning people abroad and in terms of bringing blacks into key level jobs, the record is worse now than it was in your father's time. And this is a source of some considerable concern. The protests and so forth are growing every day in the black community.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you have any personal anecdotes about my dad as far as civil rights is concerned, or any personal stories about my dad that you haven't already read into the machine there? Be sure you get them in there before we get to the airport.

ROWAN: Well, you know, sometimes a top government official can make a more effective statement to other diplomats and ambassadors, foreign ministers, through their actions and the actions of members of their family than they can ever make with any contrived speech. I mean, you could stand up and say to Africans of the diplomatic corps, "We're sorry about these incidents. We're not racists; we believe in racial equality, etc., etc., etc." But that does not speak in the way that your mother spoke to these people when we began to get all these new embassies in Washington, mostly third world embassies. They'd give their National Day parties, just wishing for a little prestige and a little extra respect. And your mother always showed up. And you could literally look at the faces and eyes of these people and see their eyes light up.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm glad to hear you say that. When Peggy got married--This was in '67, I guess--our experience with that interracial marriage was that it made the front pages and cover of *Time* magazine, etc., and was quite newsy at the time. But it blew over fairly quickly, and then they went on ahead with their lives, and nothing much was ever said of it afterwards.

ROWAN: Where is she now?

RICHARD RUSK: Peg's in Virginia. She's been there ever since. And she and Guy are both doing quite well there. They're involved with horses. They always have been; and they're making a living at it. They have a daughter and a good marriage. My brother-in-law has done everything he could to take care of my sister. But when all that happened, did that make much of a difference as far as Dean Rusk was concerned, in the way he was looked at, or the way some of these Ambassadors might have regarded Secretary of State? You know, you say it makes a bigger difference how officials sometimes live their personal lives than it does with whatever they had to say in their latest speech. Can you think of any comments that along those lines?

ROWAN: Well, I can recall a lot of comments made by blacks. But I had many a diplomat say just quite simply, "I sure do admire the way Dean Rusk handled that situation." And I knew by that they meant that he took it just as a natural situation of a young woman falling in love with a guy and getting married: no big deal, no pious proclamations, protestations, or whatever. And I think it made a tremendous difference to people.

RICHARD RUSK: To blacks--well white people too.

ROWAN: And a lot of whites, too.

RICHARD RUSK: He was a little bit alarmed about the marriage, but I don't think it was so much along racial lines as it was the fact that Peggy was quitting college to marry him and Guy was heading to Vietnam to fly helicopters. And he was hoping that, given the high risk of that kind of thing, that they'd be talked into waiting. But she went ahead. And they had his blessing.

ROWAN: Yeah. Well, I think the public knew they had his blessing and that made a tremendous difference. But that's the kind of thing I was referring to earlier when I said nobody ever questioned Dean Rusk's integrity.

RICHARD RUSK: Can you think of any aspect of my dad's performance as secretary, or any aspect of his personality, that did not measure up to some of his other strengths and attributes? Every man makes mistakes or has flaws in his character. What would they be with respect to my dad? Again, relate that to your own experience. I'm aware of what other people have written about my dad, and all this secondary source material. But in terms of your own experience, surely things have come up.

ROWAN: Well, the thing I thought of at the time, and I'm talking about--This would be after I'd gone, in '66, '67, '68. And I, by this time, of course, had concluded that the Vietnam War was a hopeless situation. And I was saying to myself then, Rusk ought to be stronger and tougher in talking to Lyndon Johnson and convincing him that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But of course I have no way, and certainly didn't then, of knowing with what force Rusk still believed that the situation was winnable. And if he didn't believe it, I don't think that I would have any right to argue that he should take that posture. But beyond that, the only other thing I could say is something that--you know, you can't have every quality in the world, and there are

times when I wished that with the press, with television, he'd have shown a little more flash, and maybe a little more showbiz, shall we say. But it's not his style.

RICHARD RUSK: Did being a Southerner make a difference? Was that held against him by certain members of the press corps, or is that more or less something that blew over fairly early in the Kennedy period?

ROWAN: Well, you know, I don't think so. Because while people were and always remained acutely aware of the fact that Lyndon Johnson was a southerner, and the Johnson drawl and so forth made it clear, and Johnson profoundly believed that he did not have the respect of what he called the "Harvard-types,"--In fact, I just see that I made a note on here that Johnson had indicated to me once that he liked Dean Rusk because he wasn't one of those phony Harvard types. Johnson profoundly disliked people he thought looked down on him. And I don't think anybody ever looked down on Dean Rusk because he was a Southerner, but I do think they did it with regard to Lyndon Johnson. Rusk had lost a lot of the Southern drawl and--not all of it.

END OF SIDE 2

