

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection  
Rusk ZZ  
William Tapley Bennett interviewed by Richard Rusk  
circa 1985

RICHARD RUSK: Former ambassador to the Dominican Republic, W. Tapley Bennett, who has also been involved with the United Nations in Europe and [had] a career in the Foreign Service, I believe. And this is--

BENNETT: Retired (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: Just retired? And coming back to Athens, I believe.

BENNETT: (Unintelligible) the foreign service by the time I retired. I've just been around longer than anybody else. I'm the last officer who went into the Foreign Service before World War II; still on active duty.

RICHARD RUSK: What my dad refers to as the last of the old Bolsheviks. (laughter)

BENNETT: Well, I entered in July '41, and, of course, Pearl Harbor came along in December '41, and so I'm the last leaf of that tree.

RICHARD RUSK: You served during the war with the foreign service?

BENNETT: Until '44. Then I got out and went into the army. I was at that time at the embassy in Panama, and you could still volunteer overseas.

RICHARD RUSK: I see.

BENNETT: In the Canal Zone and in Hawaii and in Puerto Rico [you could volunteer but] you couldn't volunteer at home. It was all selective service by that time. I was unmarried, and I felt that I was missing that experience that my peers were having, and so I walked over across the street one day into the Canal Zone from Panama and volunteered and had two years in the army and then went back into the service.

RICHARD RUSK: I see.

BENNETT: Our service, the foreign service.

RICHARD RUSK: Your World War II service in the foreign service included what? Were you located in Washington?

BENNETT: Well, my basic training and that sort of thing was in Panama. Then I was brought up to Washington and worked on intelligence on the special area of intelligence where a lot of

people of my type--young professionals, young lawyers, and young government people--had been sort of co-opted for this particular thing. We were actually working with broken codes, the German and Japanese codes, and that sort of thing.

RICHARD RUSK: You didn't have any contact with my dad?

BENNETT: Not a bit. Then I served for a time in Europe, Germany and Austria, but that was after the hostilities broke out, so we were getting information about what had gone on in Germany.

RICHARD RUSK: And your first contact with my father would have been in Panama while he was secretary of state attending the--

BENNETT: No, no. He was assistant secretary of state in Washington.

RICHARD RUSK: I see.

BENNETT: This is what, about 1948, I guess. But then that was very minor. Later I was ambassador to the Dominican Republic when he was secretary of state. And I was a rookie ambassador. It was my first embassy. This was 1964, '65.

RICHARD RUSK: How long had you been there before everything more or less blew up with the (unintelligible)?

BENNETT: Just a year.

RICHARD RUSK: About a year, huh?

BENNETT: I went down in March of '64, and in April '65 was when everything blew. That was a very busy time.

RICHARD RUSK: I was going to our university at the time.

BENNETT: Were you?

RICHARD RUSK: We heard about it. (laughter)

BENNETT: Well, it was very controversial at the time.

RICHARD RUSK: I recall it being controversial. I remember you specifically as the fellow who called for the marines, but I remember my dad as the one who helped send them in.

BENNETT: That's right. And that was--look here, oh, I was very much criticized in the press. I had my calvary very publicly. I never had any problems with the secretary of state or with the president. And I've always been extremely grateful that they knew the facts and they stood by me and--

RICHARD RUSK: That episode deserves a separate interview in conjunction with my father.

BENNETT: Well, yes, it probably does.

RICHARD RUSK: It really does. We can really do a good one hopefully in April and explain that one in some detail.

BENNETT: As I say, I was a rookie ambassador. They could have thrown me overboard very easily, you know, but they didn't. (laughter) And I've always been very grateful to both Dean Rusk and to Lyndon Johnson for their understanding in a hard time. And what we did there--we won't get into that today--but just in summary, nobody wanted to land troops. It's just that it was necessary in that particular circumstance. And what happened with Ellsworth Bunker coming in and the OAS [Organization of American States] team, and we worked together putting Humpty Dumpty back on the wall.

RICHARD RUSK: I remember despite all the ruckus that there was a reasonably successful outcome to it.

BENNETT: Well, there was. And that country has been stable ever since, as stability goes, is measured in the Caribbean. They have their economic problems, but they have evolved into a democratic process, and they've had a free government now for over twenty years. And that's more than most countries down there can say. And it's the first time they've ever survived longer than five years without, in their whole history since Columbus. It's a fascinating island, and it's had such a tortured history. And the longest period of freely elected government that they'd ever had from 1492 to 1965 was four and a half years' worth. And then the fellow was assassinated. But they had alternated between dictatorship and chaos. And that was what we were doing there.

RICHARD RUSK: How long has the present regime been in power?

BENNETT: I believe it was last year they had a turnover and an inauguration, but they've had regular four-year elections since.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, good for them. Good for them.

BENNETT: Oh, yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: Where is the best place to begin in terms of what you might want to tell me about my father?

BENNETT: Well, I was going to say, of course, that period.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, can I offer you a cup of coffee?

BENNETT: No, I don't need that. It may be my just reminiscence that, and I wouldn't give any date to this, but I used to, first from the Dominican Republic and then I went on from there as

ambassador to Portugal in the last days of [Antonio de Oliveira] Salazar, the longtime strongman of Portugal. I was there when he had his stroke and fell out of the picture. He was still alive but was no longer prime minister. That was after some forty years of government that this happened to him. So I would come home and go in to see your father as secretary of state, and I would propose the issue of the moment, what I thought we should do. He never gave much of himself. He was very (laughter)--

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

BENNETT: As a son perhaps you've had the same experience. But at any rate--

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, I have.

BENNETT: He wouldn't say yes or no. And then I would go back to post, and a few days later I would see either what I recommended would be done or else I would get a very courteous letter from him saying that he had decided to not do that or to do something else instead. So you were always treated with great courtesy. But then after he left office, I found that he was much more outspoken and doesn't mind passing judgments on individuals as well as (unintelligible)--

RICHARD RUSK: I understand that there were some colleagues of his in the department of state who got quite skilled at reading Dean Rusk's mind through various things as facial expressions and nervous tics and things like that. But I guess he was--

BENNETT: He was considered pretty impassive, though, not-- What you described as Buddha-like and that sort of thing.

RICHARD RUSK: The neighborhood bartender. Kept his cards pretty close to the extent that did it complicate your job at all as ambassador?

BENNETT: Oh, no, no.

RICHARD RUSK: On the important things did you know where he stood or what his intentions were?

BENNETT: Yes. We always got, I'd say, clear instructions on that. And then he visited Portugal once while I was there and stayed in the house with us, of course. And he had known the then foreign minister, Franco [?], who was the Portuguese foreign minister for many years. They'd served in the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] council together all during their respective terms of office. So it was while he had the same reservations about the kind of government Portugal was having that the rest of us would have had, still they were an ally; they were a charter member of NATO and had always been good allies. So that was a very successful visit, although your father arrived and spent most of the time in bed because he came down with the flu. So we had to call off the big dinner and that sort of thing. I'm sure he didn't mind.

RICHARD RUSK: Did my mom come along on that particular trip?

BENNETT: She was not on that trip, no.

RICHARD RUSK: You don't recall?

BENNETT: We knew Mrs. [Virginia Foisie] Rusk otherwise. I remember I was deputy chief of mission in Greece when they came there for, I believe it was a visit as well as a NATO meeting. And your mother always was extremely conscientious about seeing the staff and picking up the things that he was too busy because of his official duties to do. She had a great interest in the staffs overseas which means a lot to morale in foreign service, to know that somebody at the top really cares about them.

RICHARD RUSK: She worked hard at that job. She really did.

BENNETT: Yes, very much.

RICHARD RUSK: Matter of fact she had heard, oh, within the last few months that Nancy Kissinger took quite a different role with respect to a lot of these semi-official duties, really didn't do too much of that, didn't go to the national date [?] parties. My mom heard that and said it made her wonder if any of that was necessary at all. (laughter) 'Cause she did work hard at it; she worked just as hard as my dad did.

BENNETT: I know she did. She had a great reputation for doing it, too, whereas I think that her reputation and that of Mrs. [Nancy] Kissinger is quite different, too. They say so.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, she has her own briefing books that her staff would prepare, and she'd try to memorize all those names and something about each one of them.

BENNETT: She kept in touch with my wife and called back. When Margaret [Bennett] would come to Washington, she'd want to see her and that sort of thing and know what was going on.

RICHARD RUSK: The times that my father visited you abroad on these trips, do you recall anything unusual or of an anecdotal nature that I might be interested in? Is there anything that stands out after all these years?

BENNETT: I don't offhand because I don't want to overemphasize my intimacy with him because I was not that intimate at that time. I've known him much more and much more closely since he's been here and I've come back and forth each year because this is my home. I was an ambassador abroad, but I was not in the state department in the policy-level jobs, in on the daily meetings with him and that sort of thing.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you serve as ambassador for other administrations?

BENNETT: Yeah. Well, I served five presidents as ambassador.

RICHARD RUSK: You'd be a good one to answer this question: How was my dad as a secretary of state for ambassadors in comparison with other secretaries under which you have served? Surely you've had a chance to form a few judgments--

BENNETT: I think that everybody knew that Rusk believed in the career service and gave it support and was very equitable in his treatment of people, certainly far different from a man like [Henry Alfred] Kissinger who really was so bound up in his own ego.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you serve as ambassador under Henry Kissinger?

BENNETT: Yes. In fact, all my years at the UN [United Nations] were under him. Yeah, that's right. Then I went to NATO under [Cyrus Roberts] Cy Vance and stayed under [Edmund Sixtus] Muskie and [Alexander Meigs, Jr.] Haig and [George] Shultz, four secretaries of state during my six years at NATO. But in New York, you see, I was the deputy U.S. representative at the UN. I was the career man in the operation. You have two full ambassadors there, ambassadors extraordinary and plenipotentiary, that nineteenth-century title, and then you have three others who have the rank of ambassador, but they don't have the full title as confirmed by the Congress. I had the same title as the (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: Let's see, you served in Panama, the Dominican Republic, and the other three?

BENNETT: But I was not ambassador to Panama.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. Okay. The other four countries for which you were ambassador?

BENNETT: Well, I was ambassador in the Dominican Republic, Portugal, two different jobs actually at the UN, and then NATO. So five ambassadorships, actually, over a twenty-odd, twenty-year period.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you abroad as ambassador during the late sixties?

BENNETT: Yes, '66 [to] '69 I was ambassador to Portugal.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you remember my sister's wedding to a black fellow back in 1969?

BENNETT: Was it '69? I remember it but I don't remember (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: You weren't abroad at that [time]; you weren't in Portugal at the time? Or was it 1970? Let's see--Carl Rowan was here a couple weeks ago, and of course Carl would have a quite different perspective.

BENNETT: (laughter) Yes.

RICHARD RUSK: And he had some of the neatest recollections about my dad in office. He'd seen a great deal of him. And we got to talking about civil rights and the fact that my dad came out of the rural south, and when I asked him about Peggy's [Peggy Rusk's] marriage, and the type of impression that made upon him in Washington. He spoke at great length about it. I just wondered if this thing really had that kind of impact overseas like it may have impacted Carl Rowan. You probably don't recall.

BENNETT: Well, I'm trying to recall whether--you don't know whether it was '69 or '70? It seems to me that I had already come home.

RICHARD RUSK: That could well be.

BENNETT: I came home in July--August of '69. And I remember it was obviously a splash [in the] news here at home.

RICHARD RUSK: A big story back in those days.

BENNETT: In those days it was a big story. The general reaction from many people who wouldn't have liked it to happen in their families--you know, I'm just being frank about it--

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

BENNETT: That's the way life was-- thought that your father and mother handled it with great nobility. I mean--

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. Did you know my dad in Georgia growing up as a boy?

BENNETT: No.

RICHARD RUSK: From the Atlanta days?

BENNETT: No, I grew up in Griffin.

RICHARD RUSK: I see.

BENNETT: A mixture of Griffin and Athens, and so I didn't--

RICHARD RUSK: Your very first contact would have been with the Department [of State]?

BENNETT: Yeah. I have other friends who went to Boys' High, but I didn't know him. He was a little ahead of me. I'm sixty-seven.

RICHARD RUSK: I've got a list of generalized questions that I've been sending to various people. Did you know enough about my father in the '40s to have had a reaction to his appointment in 1961 by John Kennedy?

BENNETT: I don't recall any special--well, it was, as you remember, a rather surprising appointment. There were other names of people that had been more prominently in political life, etc., but I think his qualifications quickly manifested themselves. And so it was a good appointment from the beginning as far as the career service went. Having nothing else to latch onto, I remembered that very minor contact I'd had with him when he was assistant secretary and I was a desk officer.

RICHARD RUSK: Were you surprised by any particular aspect of his performance in Washington?

BENNETT: No. It was a good, workmanlike, non-flamboyant [performance], and I've always felt that given some of the characters in the Kennedy administration, you had to watch your flanks and be noncommittal on things. I can understand why--

RICHARD RUSK: It took him a while to get on a good relationship with John Kennedy or at least to form the type of relationship that dealt with some of the staffing problems.

BENNETT: I don't have a close enough "in" to know the facts there, but my impression was that Kennedy knew him and esteemed him. It was some of the extremely partisan people around Kennedy that would have been troublesome, I would have thought. I've got to say I'm not an admirer of the Kennedy entourage. I never have been.

RICHARD RUSK: How would you critique--I'll just ask a very general question. I hope I'm not putting you on the spot. Asking the question as his son, number one, and with a tape machine going, but how would you critique his eight years in office in a general kind of way, both in terms of his strengths and perhaps some of the more negative aspects of his particular style or performance, speaking candidly.

BENNETT: I think very professional. As I said earlier, not flamboyant, but certainly in the area I knew best, Europeans came to know they could rely on him, that he was a very solid colleague, and I personally think that's better than the more flashy approach which is in some ways, as in [Henry] Kissinger's case, self-serving. In addition, I recognize that Kissinger has great ability, but he's so wrapped up with ego sometimes that you're not sure whose ends are being served. That was never the case with Dean Rusk, and obviously he was completely loyal to both of his presidents. Now the Vietnam tragedy came to obscure the latter years of his office as it did [Lyndon] Johnson's, I suppose, but I suffered the same dilemma because I backed the Vietnam policy all the way. I don't have any doubts to this day, but somewhere we went wrong. Nobody has yet to prove that the analysis was wrong. As I understand your father's position, it was based in major part on the fact that we had to show loyalty to our allies and that there would be all sorts of unraveling's, if we walked out on Vietnam, in other areas. Well, I happened to believe that, and I think if you have to go down in a cause, you go down nobly. And I think he did on the Vietnam thing, I'm happy to say.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I must say that particular chapter in my book is going to be probably the hardest thing for me to write. I thought I had all the answers figured out back in the sixties as a student. But then again--



BENNETT: You came along when it was such an issue.

RICHARD RUSK: I was right there when all the anti-war protest was breaking. As a matter of fact, I was a little sympathetic towards it but never publicly involved with it. They were very tense on campus.

BENNETT: What age are you?

RICHARD RUSK: I was-- well, right now I'm thirty-eight.

BENNETT: Thirty-eight. Well, see, I have a son who's thirty-eight. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: We're the sixties crowd, you see. We grew up with this thing.

BENNETT: He did his year in Vietnam.

RICHARD RUSK: He did?

BENNETT: Yeah. In the service, yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: He came back all right?

BENNETT: He didn't want to go. Yes. Well, it's taken him time to work it out, there's no question about that.

RICHARD RUSK: What branch, what unit was he in?

BENNETT: He was army. But he graduated from Haverford College in '67. That's a Quaker school to begin with, and you can imagine the feelings that there were on that campus. I remember the graduation. But he never had any doubts about doing his duty, and so he went in--

RICHARD RUSK: Good for him.

BENNETT: Yeah, when a lot of his peers and a lot of his age were finding ways not to. The sons of one or two friends of mine whom I'll never really have much respect for simply because I know.

RICHARD RUSK: There's a lot of people in my generation, right or wrong, who decided that the best way they could serve their country back in those days was to refuse to serve their country.

BENNETT: Well, I know--

RICHARD RUSK: And some very--

BENNETT: Well, I just find that hard to accept. I can accept intellectually that that may be somebody's out.

RICHARD RUSK: My brother-in-law, the fellow who married my sister, black fellow, he went as a helicopter pilot.

BENNETT: I was going to say, I remember he was in the service, wasn't he?

RICHARD RUSK: And he returned. He was wounded over there and he came back okay. He wrote my dad a letter over there, and he said, after he had been there for about six months, gave him a rundown on various Vietnamese units he was working in, working with, just his critique of the war as he saw it. And he also said, "I want you to know, Pop"--he called him Pop--"that I realize you're under terrific criticism for this thing, but I think you're doing the right thing and that's why I'm here." He came back believing as firmly in our reasons for being there as he did when he left.

BENNETT: Yeah. That's interesting. My son went in, just enlisted rather than be called; it was still in the draft period at that time.

RICHARD RUSK: I see.

BENNETT: And he was picked up because he has a brilliant mind for languages and was, I guess, tested and was sent out to Monterey and had that Russian training and then had a year in Berlin listening to the Russians at that big complex they have at Berlin and so forth, which he apparently did very well because he was given a direct commission as a lieutenant from that. And from there, however, he was given a choice of Vietnam or Korea. No rhyme or reason for being sent out there. He had none of the attributes that were needed, but still that was the way the army operated. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: And still do, I'm sure.

BENNETT: I'd tell you some more but we'd be wasting your (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: No, no. We need to let these things burn. You go right ahead. I'm really interested in your son's experience.

BENNETT: He chose to go to Vietnam because he didn't want the cold weather in Korea. (laughter) I remember him saying to me once, "Well, you believed in your war. I don't believe in what we're doing in Vietnam." But he went. He did his duty. Got the bronze star which he gave no value to. I remember he came home and threw it on the bed. He said, "You can have this. It means nothing to me."

RICHARD RUSK: That was painful.

BENNETT: It was painful. Painful for him.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah. Was he--

BENNETT: I said, "I hope when you're older you'll recognize, realize that people do give that--"

RICHARD RUSK: I'm hoping that what I can come up with in this book about my father might help shed a little light on some of the mystery of that period.

BENNETT: Well, the interesting thing about him now is that he's a lawyer, and he's in a small law firm, Birch and Bennett, there in Washington, and most of his work is with Vietnam veterans.

RICHARD RUSK: No kidding.

BENNETT: So he's turned around on that.

RICHARD RUSK: Can you give me his address? Do you know his address offhand? I'd like to get hold of him sometime.

BENNETT: Oh, sure. Well, you'd find it interesting. He's never wanted to talk--

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: We're talking about the Vietnam War as being somewhat of a great effort and tragedy for this country. And the effects of Vietnam, the aftereffects, the by-products of that policy for foreign affairs for former ambassador Tapley Bennett, in your [work] with NATO, just in general. How did it affect you fellows in the foreign service and how might it have complicated the job?

BENNETT: Well, I was thinking you've got in a way you might say a whole generation or a slice of a generation that sees us as the villain in Southeast Asia and that colors their attitude towards many allied policies in Europe today and NATO policies. I did a lot of speaking when I was ambassador to NATO. I speak German so I spoke in Germany, did a lot of sort of weekend seminars. I didn't find any trouble with the very young Germans. But it was the thirty-five [to] forty age group that--

RICHARD RUSK: Did you do this speaking recently, or was this earlier?

BENNETT: About two years ago.

RICHARD RUSK: Two years ago.

BENNETT: For the last (unintelligible)--the period '77 to '83.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. So the Germans that you had some problems with, reacted negatively to our experience [in Vietnam] was the same group that lived that experience.

BENNETT: Yes, and then, of course, you get the Scandinavians who always tend to be highly moralistic rather than moral in some of their approaches to foreign policy issues. And you had a Danish prime minister who'd been very affected by the Vietnamese War, and he still held it against us, and that affected, it seemed to me, some of his judgments on what we needed to do about the defense of the West.

RICHARD RUSK: I'll be darned. How did it affect you specifically? How did it affect people in the foreign service? It must have--

BENNETT: It didn't affect me because I was loyal to the policy, and I believed we had done the best we could. A little bit like your father, I believe in soldiering on. If you're on the right path, just take the mud along with the sunshine, but, you see, I had had that earlier experience--that's one reason--in the Dominican Republic, where I was made the butt of so much criticism, I knew, to me it was very unfair criticism because the liberal press distorted the issues down there. They never got the real facts.

RICHARD RUSK: What did you think of Theodore Draper's book on the Dominican crisis? I think it was a paperbound thing about this size, about yay thick. I remember reading that in the sixties.

BENNETT: Yeah. It was a great distortion of the facts. As somebody once said about Draper, I believe he'd been a former Communist, hadn't he? But anyway he--

RICHARD RUSK: Possibly. As a lot of the fellows--

BENNETT: He was good at finding Communism in a situation after it had already gone Communist. I mean, apparently he wrote some very damning things about Castro afterwards, when it was too late to do anything about it. And I felt he was a little bit that way on the Dominican Republic.

RICHARD RUSK: I see. Getting back to this Vietnam--

BENNETT: At any rate, Draper's, I thought, was a very distorted and even venomous kind of work, so I had been so conditioned by that that I didn't buy the liberal line on Vietnam at all.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, did you ever respond to your critics regarding the Dominican Republic?

BENNETT: No, no. I was a career officer. I never tried to answer [the critics]. I did answer questions on people that were doing books, one young man in particular, until I really gave him more than I should have probably because I was trying to put the balance in the picture. And I came to the conclusion towards the end that he'd had his conclusions already drawn before he began getting his material.

RICHARD RUSK: Like a lot of us tend to do. (laughter)

BENNETT: Then I broke off with him and didn't finish it.

RICHARD RUSK: Did he ever come out with his book?

BENNETT: Yes, and it wasn't a very good book.

RICHARD RUSK: What would you recommend for me to read to get a good understanding of that particular crisis?

BENNETT: Well, so little has been done. It has distressed me that we haven't had more objective--the best thing that was done, and still is, as far as I know, although I haven't really followed it that closely in recent years as to what may have come out in the last five or ten years--the Georgetown Center for Strategic Studies did a--well, it was just a paperback small monograph on the Dominican incident. And they came out with that in 19--either late '65 or early '66.

RICHARD RUSK: Monograph--paperbound.

BENNETT: But it has the best chronology of events, and it really did attempt to be--

RICHARD RUSK: You don't remember the title for that, do you?

BENNETT: I think it was just called "The Dominican Incident". It's a white thing, as I remember, a green title.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall an author?

BENNETT: No, because the Georgetown Center did it. The person I talked most with about it was Eleanor Dulles. She was one of the staffers at the time and senior fellows who wrote it.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay, well, I'll see if we can get hold of it.

BENNETT: But I don't think it had an author as such. It was just a paper put out by the Center. It was one of the earlier pieces of work. They were just founded about '63 or '64.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, did you ever read Warren Cohen's book on my dad?

BENNETT: No, I noticed a reference in it here.

RICHARD RUSK: This is it.

BENNETT: Oh, I'd love to. Is it for sale (unintelligible)?

RICHARD RUSK: The publisher still has them, I guess. They'd have to order them. It's costing about twenty-three [or] twenty-four dollars. (laughter) I don't know if it's worth that.

BENNETT: Oh, books are that way these days. But, you know, to tell you the truth, I'm not even aware of this.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I just wondered. I was going to ask you to critique that one, but that can be ordered through a bookstore. I'd let you have that one except [that] I'm just about out of copies.

BENNETT: No, no.

RICHARD RUSK: But that does have a section on the Dominican thing and other things, too, that you may have been involved with. And if you do get involved in this in April, that might be a good starting point, reference.

BENNETT: Well, do you want to lend me this to read, and I'll send it back to you?

RICHARD RUSK: I could-- let's see--yeah, why don't you take that.

BENNETT: Well, I won't do it if it hampers you.

RICHARD RUSK: I was just trying to think what my obligations are. Why don't you go ahead? Take that.

BENNETT: Well, I'll give it back to you.

RICHARD RUSK: It belongs to Parks Rusk, my dad's brother. I borrowed it from him, so the best thing [is to see that it] goes back to Parks.

BENNETT: I see.

[break in recording]

BENNETT: When I say liberals in Vietnam and elsewhere--

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BENNETT: Are you interested in his telephone number at all?

RICHARD RUSK: Yes.

BENNETT: 'Cause I have both of those. His office is 833-8400. Sorry, I don't have his office address. It's right off Dupont Circle.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay, I will get hold of him.

BENNETT: Home is 244-1326.

RICHARD RUSK: Is he a married man?

BENNETT: No, he's not.

RICHARD RUSK: He's about my age, though, huh?

BENNETT: He'll be thirty-nine in April. He's in the modern generation. He has a girlfriend, but he hasn't tied the knot. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: They haven't made it legal yet. I wonder if the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] has come up with a category for those kinds of people?

BENNETT: I don't know. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Getting back to this Vietnam situation and the implications of that for the foreign service, do you recall what the effect of that would have been? I'm sure it must have led somewhat to the demoralization of the foreign service, the fact that this terrific controversy was breaking in foreign affairs.

BENNETT: Yes, although I'm really not the man to tell you about that. I wasn't affected by it myself, and I don't recall. In my post as ambassador in Portugal, I had a very large staff, and then later on in New York at the UN, the UN mission, I don't recall that it was any particular issue one way or the other with people, although I have the feeling there was a good bit of turmoil among more junior officers, people of your age group and so forth. You would have had the college atmosphere in those days, but I can't honestly say it affected anybody's work that I'm aware of. But I'm not the best person to talk about that.

RICHARD RUSK: Incidentally, I don't want to let this interview interfere with your schedule at all.

BENNETT: Well, I'm perfectly all right till--I've got more time, you know. I've got lunch.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. Moving to the Dominican situation, why don't we just get into it briefly, even despite the fact that we won't be talking about it for a while and I haven't done any prior reading about it, not at least since the sixties.

BENNETT: Well, I should probably review my memory.

RICHARD RUSK: Maybe we can get you on just a little bit so I'll have a better idea what to look for and what some of your concerns and experiences might have been. How about describing to me that experience as it relates to my dad, as it relates to your communications with

him, perhaps as it relates to his willingness to stick up for you and your interpretation of things when everything broke and it was a very controversial period. Were you in direct contact with my dad for a portion of that crisis?

BENNETT: Yes, back and forth, although [at] some of the more climactic moments we went through George Ball, and it was Ball who called me at one point and said, "Don't hesitate to ask for troops. Don't be timid about asking." (laughter) It was clear he thought the time had come, and I wasn't ready to pull the plug yet. And then later on I felt that George Ball sort of shifted some of that over to indicate that maybe we'd been a little bit--

RICHARD RUSK: A little hasty.

BENNETT: Well, not that. He never said we did the wrong thing. He's implied it wasn't handled very well, but--

RICHARD RUSK: Warren Cohen, in his book, seems to suggest that on that particular crisis, Lyndon Johnson himself took a high degree of personal control.

BENNETT: I was going to say, he was the first--

RICHARD RUSK: And my dad was not really as instrumental in the decision making for that one as he would have been for the same thing in [a place] like Berlin.

BENNETT: That may well be, and I suspect that was the case. There's no question of Johnson [being personally involved] 'cause he would call me on the phone personally several times. He'd catch me at the worst possible moment, of course. I remember once I was going up to meet with the OAS commission, which had by that time arrived, and he got me on the telephone of the landing of this hotel, with the elevator clanging up and down, and here I was trying to talk to the president of the United States. (laughter) And the phone service was by no means as good in those days as it has come to be later with satellites and all that stuff. I could hardly hear what he was asking. He wanted to know how many we'd gotten out that day because we were evacuating people. Well, I didn't have the figure, but I gave one. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: That's your job to have a figure, isn't it?

BENNETT: Apparently it wasn't too far off 'cause I didn't get in any trouble over it. And then another time, you see, the lights went out. We had generators. We had water problems. They came just at the end of the dry season, just as the heavy air was about to drop the rainstorms, so it was from the climatic point of view. And that was part of, had to do with the uprisings. We'd had reports before this all broke open that there were bad tempers all through the slum areas of the capital because of lack of water and this extreme heat, and people were getting into fights. And the kind of things that do play a factor, play a role in things, although they don't often get listed. But the telephone service continued to operate. It never went out. And the headquarters of Central [Central Intelligence Agency?] were in the rebel headquarters, I mean it was in their area, so they listened in on every telephone. My experience is the higher you go in the government, the less secure people are.



RICHARD RUSK: I asked my dad if he ever thought there had been a Soviet mole at the highest levels of our government. He just assumed from the day he walked in there that we had been penetrated. (laughter) That's one of the reasons that he kept as quiet as he did. In larger circles, you know, like cabinet meetings--

BENNETT: Yeah. Well, as you know, they say the only ship that leaks at the top is the ship of state. They tell everything. And it was once after we had this special group of [McGeorge] Mac Bundy and [Thomas] Tom Mann had come down to see what they could do about righting this crisis. So, Johnson called us one night, and there were about seven or nine of us in the room, and on the phone polled each one of us as to what he thought we should do next. Well, you knew perfectly well that the--quote--enemy was downtown listening to all of this. (laughter) Didn't bother Johnson.

RICHARD RUSK: I'll be darned. Didn't bother him. I'll be darned. All right. Now that's a little bit unusual, wouldn't it be, for a president to call an ambassador directly?

BENNETT: Oh, yes.

RICHARD RUSK: Especially during the crisis. John Kennedy used to do this quite often during his tenure and call desk officers and scare the hell out of them.

BENNETT: He called me about piracy once, [wanting to know] what's the law of piracy.

RICHARD RUSK: He called you about that?

BENNETT: He called somebody in the department, one of the legal officers. And this was after a ship had been seized somewhere.

RICHARD RUSK: And wanted to know about piracy.

BENNETT: The phone rang, and the fellow picked it up, and [Kennedy] said, "This is the president. What can you tell me about piracy?" (laughter) Scared the fellow to death.

RICHARD RUSK: All right. Now when Johnson did this with you, and you heard about these other incidents where presidents themselves directly involved themselves in policy, does it tend to make for better policy? Or does it really create some problems there?

BENNETT: Probably distorts it a bit.

RICHARD RUSK: You think so?

BENNETT: Probably does. And, of course, I'm going to defend Johnson because I have a great respect for him, but he did exaggerate, there's no question about that. It was part of his nature.

RICHARD RUSK: Exaggerated the way he looked at that crisis?

BENNETT: Well, for instance, he said--I can't quote it directly, but it was one of these press conferences--[that] there were rioting and murder in the streets and twelve hundred people with their heads cut off lying there.

RICHARD RUSK: I remember that.

BENNETT: Well, the press jumped. Well, at the time, I remember the first account of it; people said [about] Mr. Johnson that hyperbole had run away with him and so forth. But then later they began attacking that as though it were his considered view, and it seemed to me that everybody knew that that was an exaggeration. However, at one point when I had come up, and everybody said there'd been nothing of that sort, [that] it was all gentlemanly [?], fighting and all that kind of thing. And I was there, and he said, "I want you to go back down there and find me some headless bodies." (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Johnson said that? That's funny.

BENNETT: Yeah. He said, "I don't like people calling me a liar." (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: I hope he wasn't implying that you should go out and create some headless bodies.

BENNETT: No, it wasn't that at all 'cause we all knew that had had happened.

RICHARD RUSK: That is funny. Has that ever made--

BENNETT: I don't think it ever has. I remember it very plainly. He said, "I want you to find me some headless bodies. I don't like people calling me a liar." (laughter) I went back and we found three.

RICHARD RUSK: You found three? Oh, that's something. That is something.

BENNETT: With some very grisly pictures, which I don't know what happened to, the pictures I sent off, and I didn't keep any, and I have often thought that was an error, not to have that proof.

RICHARD RUSK: Would that be an embarrassment to you, if I work that in, if it works in, in the course of my writing this chapter on my dad? Is that the kind of thing that--?

BENNETT: No, it wouldn't bother me.

RICHARD RUSK: It wouldn't bother you?

BENNETT: Because I think it sheds a light on the truth. We all knew that there'd been these awful atrocities, and there had been, but he, of course, exaggerated. And then people said he was lying through his teeth and nothing had ever happened. And so we found it had happened.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall any other conversations with Johnson that are as illuminating?

BENNETT: (laughter) That is one of the more picturesque, I'd say. And, of course, he had me under the desk, you know. And that got all mixed up because I wasn't talking to him. He said, "I was talking to our ambassador and he was under the desk because they were shooting all around."

RICHARD RUSK: And bullets coming through the windows.

BENNETT: And then people sort of poked fun at me that I had taken refuge, you know.

RICHARD RUSK: Talking to the president--

BENNETT: I learned to take cover from the marines' cause they're the ones who said, "Get down."

RICHARD RUSK: Your marine guards.

BENNETT: Yeah, yeah. And by that time, the marines had landed and were guarding the embassy. So a plane did come diving over, and I was on the phone with the Argentine ambassador, I remember very clearly. So as it came down I sort of swooped down along with it, you know, and made a joke of it. I remember saying on the phone to the Argentine ambassador, "Well, I've just dived under the desk." Because you could hear the plane, and the plane was bombing the radio station up the street. So it just made its run over us. And one of the most critical of the newsmen, Tad Szulc--

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. He wrote some stuff on it.

BENNETT: Ah. his was in a way the worst of all 'cause it was pure novel, and then he just--

RICHARD RUSK: Was it a book on the Dominican crisis?

BENNETT: Yeah, his was a real book, and it was called *Dominican Diary*.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. Well, how do you spell his last name?

BENNETT: S-C-U-L-C [sic], I think. Sculc [sic]. Tad Sculc [sic]. It's a Polish name.

RICHARD RUSK: That's right. There's a "z" in there somewhere.

BENNETT: S-Z-U-L-C, I believe.

RICHARD RUSK: Okay. Then he was down there for that.

BENNETT: His was pure novel and malicious, you know. That was the kind of thing he specialized in.

RICHARD RUSK: Right.

BENNETT: And he was the one who dove so that he almost dislocated the shoulder of the marine standing next to him.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, Tad did.

BENNETT: On this very occasion. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: He didn't write about that.

BENNETT: But then it was written up as though I was lacking in courage, you know, so I always resented that. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: I'll be darned.

BENNETT: But those are the ways things happen. But you see.

RICHARD RUSK: Are you going to write a book someday? Are you thinking about it?

BENNETT: I don't think I'm organized enough to write a book. Maybe I'm too lazy intellectually. I don't have much to say. After all, this is--

RICHARD RUSK: You'd be surprised. Now, as far as my dad's involvement with this crisis, as far as you personally were aware of my dad's involvement and your own communications with him, do you recall any?

BENNETT: I had more than one with the president and two with Ball than I had with your father, but then I was aware later that he was defending my position, and he said at one stage, I remember, there was this idea that we had invented these communists. There were no communists around. Well, we never claimed that there were a lot of communists. And he said, "I remember that Hitler started with twelve men in a beer cellar." Said, "You don't have to have big numbers as long as you've got a determined group that knows what it wants, and in a period of chaos it goes and gets what it wants." Well, that's exactly what was happening there.

RICHARD RUSK: You remember that's the way he defended you.

BENNETT: Yeah, exactly.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, good for him. Good for you.

BENNETT: (laughter) No, no. Well, actually the first person that spoke out in defense of me and my position was [Robert Strange] McNamara, who was defense secretary, of course, at the time. After all, the landings had been under his jurisdiction and all that, and it may be that it was just the first opportunity. But I remember at the time I was enormously lifted by the fact that he

said, "Here's a man that has done his duty and has done it in a very fine way and I want to speak out and say that he's done the right thing." That was the first public (unintelligible).

RICHARD RUSK: How did the marines do? I was part of that group for a while.

BENNETT: Were you there?

RICHARD RUSK: I wasn't there. I wasn't in the active marines, but I went to Parris Island and had my taste of the marine corps, and I've still got the old pride in the corps. How did they perform?

BENNETT: Well, they did extremely well, of course. And the only thing they complained about was they landed, oh, just at night. They don't have much twilight in the tropics, but we were burning documents when they got to the embassy. They landed on the hotel grounds which was about, I guess, a half mile away. They came in by helicopter from the Carrier [?], which was a helicopter carrier, didn't have planes on it, and they landed at the polo field at the hotel and then got trucked over to us, and they complained that we were burning these things and that the flames from the oil cans silhouetted them against the night sky and made it easy for snipers to pick them off. (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, I see, trying to get rid of those documents. (laughter)

BENNETT: That was the time. (laughter) As I say, George Ball was pressing me.

RICHARD RUSK: I'll be darned. Have you written anything on the Dominican [crisis]?

BENNETT: No, because I've been in active service and I just didn't think it was proper. Now that I'm out, if I could get a good collaborator like you, maybe I could come up with something.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, I was just thinking, you know, I wonder if it's worth just at least getting a little bit of oral history down.

BENNETT: We'll see how this develops.

RICHARD RUSK: We could do this in conjunction with my dad.

BENNETT: I'm serious about that. I'm interested in seeing whether this leads to something.

RICHARD RUSK: You fellows, you know, regardless of how you personally feel about memoirs and writing books and publishing, we all have, those of you who have served in those positions, have a certain obligation to get your views down for the benefit of those of us who will follow.

BENNETT: I remember what your father said. He was not going to serve up the tidbits of history for the delectation of graduate students who were writing theses, but it's a pity that he hasn't.

RICHARD RUSK: We've got him on a roll with this oral history, and I'm trying to get as much from him with that--

BENNETT: Well, he and [George Catlett] Marshall are the two great figures that consistently refuse to write anything, and they both have so much to give (unintelligible). As you say, I don't feel that mine is in anywhere in the range of importance--

RICHARD RUSK: Tell me briefly about your contacts in Athens since you left office. Is there anything there that I would possibly take an interest in, you know, of an anecdotal nature?

BENNETT: Well, just that it's been an enormous satisfaction to me to get to know him better and to have this sort of intimacy each time I come down. I come several times a year to see him, and we usually have lunch together as we did earlier (unintelligible)--the whole unfolding of him as he has relaxed--I've enjoyed getting to know that. His observations on issues and people. See, I was at the UN when [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan was--I had five. I went to the UN as deputy to George Bush and stayed on through [Andrew] Andy Young, so five perm reps [?] to whom I was deputy, and that was an interesting variety of individuals and personalities. I remember he got so concerned about Moynihan and the damage Moynihan was doing through his sort of unbridled attacks and so forth. He showed me in confidence once a letter he had written to the president--I think it was to the president or to the UN secretary--as to the damage this was doing.

RICHARD RUSK: No kidding.

BENNETT: (unintelligible) He told me a wonderful story just yesterday or two days ago when I was here. You ever heard this one?

RICHARD RUSK: I think I've heard most of his stories but try me.

BENNETT: The one about Kissinger, about he asked me, "Did you ever do any lecturing?" And I said, "Well, I've done a good bit of that." He said, "Well, I don't charge the nonprofit organizations; I don't ask an honorarium, but I charge the fat cats all they can bear." He said, "I had this approach from some organization that wanted me to speak out in Phoenix, and I said I didn't care about going to Phoenix and didn't want to do it," he said, "But the man as a come on said to me, 'Oh, well, Henry Kissinger is on the platform. It would be wonderful to have the two of you.' You know, that would be four times as much." (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: He said he would speak for whatever they were paying Henry Kissinger?

BENNETT: Yes, he said, "He served two years and I served eight. I won't charge you four times what you're paying Kissinger." (laughter)

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, I didn't hear that particular (unintelligible).

BENNETT: 'Cause he said, "But I'll come for what you're paying Kissinger." "Oh," he said, "But it's astronomical." Then his answer was, "He served two years, and I served eight. I won't charge you four times as much."

RICHARD RUSK: Well, my dad has stories like that (unintelligible).

BENNETT: Well, that's the marvel of him, the humanity of him, just general--

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall the controversy regarding his appointment here? Or was there any degree of controversy?

BENNETT: Oh, I think there was a certain amount. I was not in the state at the time, but this fellow Roy Harris from Augusta, who's antediluvian in his social views, was concerned about it and raised a certain issue. But I'm not close enough--

RICHARD RUSK: He didn't like the idea of the university hiring, quote, old broken-down politicians, end of quote. That plus my sister's marriage didn't set too well.

BENNETT: Yes, well, that would seem [to be] an issue with people like Roy Harris. I forget who was governor at the time.

RICHARD RUSK: Lester Maddox, I believe.

BENNETT: Well, I was wondering whether he was there then.

RICHARD RUSK: Right. Did my dad ever tell you his reaction, the reaction of people here when he first stepped on campus?

BENNETT: No.

RICHARD RUSK: Of course, this is right during the Vietnam period, and things were controversial here, too, as well. The student leader of the Students for a Democratic Society came up to him and said, "Well, Mr. Rusk--"

BENNETT: Oh, the SDS?

RICHARD RUSK: Yes. He said they had a chapter here at Georgia, and he said, "Mr. Rusk, Mr. Secretary, I do want you to know that I really didn't care much for your policies in Southeast Asia, but nevertheless, welcome to Georgia." He stuck his hand out. And it's been like that from day one down here. I've had a chance to follow my dad around on some of his speaking tours. He gets standing ovations everywhere he goes.

BENNETT: Oh, well, he's become a (unintelligible). It's seldom in a man's lifetime, I think, you become an institution. He has because he's given of himself completely, unsparingly, gone around to every little small town speaking to civic clubs. You know, a lot of people with far less national prominence and background than your father wouldn't want to do that."

RICHARD RUSK: It doesn't matter [who] the group [is]. He'll speak to boilermakers--

BENNETT: Well, that's what I mean, and people know that. And yet if you get to the high-toned affairs such as the former secretaries' meeting at the Southern Center [for International Studies] these last two years--I came down for the first one; I wasn't there this last year--he so clearly dominates those sessions.

RICHARD RUSK: He did; he did. I couldn't believe it. This last one. [Edmund] Muskie was good. I thought Muskie was good, but my dad was--

BENNETT: So, that's just it, and that must be a great satisfaction to him to have that publicity.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, to me, too. I left in the late sixties and headed for Alaska. And at that time I remember this terrific bitterness, you know, and my dad right in the middle of it. And then I come back here and I see what's happened here. Boy, it's been a nice ending.

BENNETT: Well, because he was treated shamefully on leaving office, along with two or three others--Walt Rostow, for instance.

RICHARD RUSK: (unintelligible)

BENNETT: Well, that to me is the negation of the university, that lack of objectivity. And while there are a lot of things about Mrs. [Jeane] Kirkpatrick I don't agree with, I think it's shameful for Smith [College] to withdraw its invitation to her to speak. So, well, with all of that, this is great fun.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, it sure is.

END OF SIDE 2