

INTERVIEW WITH MCNAMARA APRIL 28, 1967 -- 4:45-5:30 pm

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He looked fit, was writing longhand on note pad when Goulding and I came in. I handed him the attached note on the theory he would feel obliged to answer all the points rather than filibuster on the first verbal question for the whole time. I had only been promised 10 minutes; it turned out to be 45. I have never seen him more direct; usually will not go beyond boilerplate responses in such interviews. He even got emotional at one point -- which I touch on below.

RESIGNATION -- "There is absolutely no foundation for that whatsoever. No I doubt want to dignify all this crap about me resigning by having my name used. But for your guidance it is all wet. Now one of the NY papers had both ~~me~~ and Rusk being replaced. The President has been kidding both of us about that article. He said he saw where Connally was going to take my job...Some body was just in here this morning asking me what I wanted to do when I go through here. I wouldn't even hear him out, even though he had several attractive proposals. I told him I am not even going to think about another job right now. I amⁱⁿ this one and I'm not thinking of any other one.

DISTRESS ABOUT EFFORT TO STIFLE DISSENT -- "I think it is a mistake to lump together thoughtful criticism of the Vietnam War and flag burning. Scotty was in here the other day because he was worried about this stifling of dissent. I was talking about the former, not the latter...I ~~walked~~ told him it is true that Hanoi confuses these demonstrations with policy; that Hanoi does watch and is influenced by them. But that doesn't mean we should try to avoid this constructive criticism. That would mean paying the higher price we have built up for 200 years. That passage Scotty quoted is not a new thing with me. I had it in my wallet because I have taken it out and read ~~in~~ it to Congressional committees...I am utterly opposed to flag burning....But don't forget the bloodiest battle I ever had around here was back in the True Blue Walker hearings. I ~~was~~ fought that effort to stifle dissent tooth and nail, and we won that one. But that was a really bitter battle...

HIS DILEMMA -- (See note for how it was described to him -- basically he could quit to express his protest but then the dove voice would be gone from policy making)
"I'M part of this thing...I've been participating in these decisions. I feel a responsibility for what has been done and what is being done...I take full responsibility for these programs.

HIS INFLUENCE ON DECISIONS -- "You'll have to ask the President about my influence...But I think our policy has been moderate, is moderate and will be moderate in the future...I don't agree with your inference that the war may be getting out of hand...I think, as a matter of fact, that Vietnam in the long scheme of things is going to show -- ~~mmmm~~ together with Cuba -- that a great nuclear power can exercise restraint...This ~~mmmm~~ war is a controlled application of power...We're getting a lot of practice at it...

~~mmmm~~ The Mig case -- "Well you know what I've said on that...I said three weeks ago that it is always a balancing of gains against losses...Look at all the Mig activity since I talked about bombing the fields....

(I interjected: Mr. Secretary, ~~mmmmmmmmmm~~ from the outside it looks like you were overruled -- Mig activity notwithstanding...Is that true...Are we losing the moderate voice.)

"Well I'm not going to tell you about Presidential decisions. But let's go back in time a bit. I was against bombing the SAM sites. I argued that I didn't think it was worth the risk; the SAMs were not bothering us that much. Well, all right, it was decided to give the pilots permission to bomb the SAM sites. Now look what happened. We walked right into a trap. They set us up beautifully. We went to bomb the first SAM site and we lost five planes doing it. Five planes -- and don't you print this but I want you to understand how it looks from where I sit -- in one attack. Hell, we've only lost 40 planes to SAM all told--to date. Why should I lose five planes in one raid. I think in hindsight I was right.

"Now the Mig fields were the same kind of ~~mmmmmm~~ thing. It boils down to whether you want to destroy the Migs in the air or on the ground. We've knocked down 40 Migs in the Air compared to 11 we lost. Is that enough of a threat to risk losing planes in hitting them on the ground? Look what happened when we did bomb the fields. We lost three airplanes--three planes compared to 11 Migs got in the air during the whole war. Is that a good tradeoff? Don't print we lost three, that's completely off the record. I think we've only admitted to two because the search and rescue isn't over for the third. We know they know they got two. I'm responsible for lives and planes. Why should I lose three airplanes.

(I asked: "What is your rebuttal to Air Force types who tell me all the fields should have been hit at once, if at all; that if you're going to take out the fields you can't do it piecemeal)

"Well I don't know what the generals are telling you, but the truth is that the Joint Chiefs recommended hitting the two we hit; they didn't ~~want~~ want to hit all the fields at once. And the reason is that you have to have one bomber for every Mig in bunkers on the ground. They didn't want to do that. They asked for the two."

it then

~~then~~ (I take that you think the Mig raid then was moderate; more of an effort to cool them off rather than knock them out.)

"That's right. The Mig activity stepped up so we hit two of their fields. We have the power to do it, why shouldn't we."

(This admittedly sounds ambivalent; but I think he was trying to portray the Mig raid as gradual escalation rather than forcing a confrontation with China; I came away feeling it may be a long time before we hit the other Mig fields; I was surprised, frankly we did it at all, and I feel sure the loss of three planes strengthened McN's hand next time Mig fields come up.)

ROSTOW AND MCNAMARA ON BOMBING -- "Rostow ~~knows~~ knows the limits of bombing...He was in on the World War 2 bombing survey...I don't believe half of what the Air Force tells me..."

URGING SENATORS TO SPEAK OUT THEIR DISSENT ON WAR --
 "That's absolutely untrue...I never talk to any individual under any circumstances about Presidential decisions...I couldn't believe more strongly in the need for unity of action and support. Never once have I broken this rule. No one is ever going to be able ^{point to} to a single instance where I drove a wedge into the administration, either under President Kennedy or under President Johnson..I always have a chance to give my opinion, and I give it. But once the decision is made I support it...I don't talk with any Senators in private, except Senator Kennedy. And even with him I never talk about Presidential decisions. We are good friends, but I don't go into decision making, least of all with Bob. ...It is absolutely inconceivable to me or anybody who knows me that I would ask a Senator to speak out against the President's policy...Now it is true some of them take my views and expound on them, as is certainly proper after all the time I spend giving my views on the war...My ~~explanation~~ explanation of why we're not bombing certain targets are certainly available to them

BOMBING HAIPHONG -- "That's always under study. I don't think it would do any good...They're talking really of mining the harbor, not bombing it. ..But all ~~these~~ these things are under constant review..."

BOMBING DIKES -- "We have hit some of these navigational dikes. But as far as the irrigation dikes, the ones people mean when they talk about bombing the dikes, I don't know of anybody in any senior position of this government who wants to do that. First of all, dikes are hard to hit. Then you have to make an awfully big hole in them to do any real damage. And then you can only bomb them when the water is high...We're not ~~trying~~ out to ~~punish~~ punish the people of North Vietnam...We are hitting military targets. We're not trying to cut off their food.

TWO-FACED ATTITUDE -- "You'll have to get the guy up here on your sheet who says I'm a moderate to talk to the guy down here who says I'm really a hawk...Let them fight it out. ~~Man~~ You're right; that question does belong at the bottom of the list."

UNSOLICITED COMPLAINT, WITH SOME HEAT -- "There is too much emphasis by everybody on the bombing...That is only one part of the war...People don't ~~blame me~~ blame me for killing 120 men in one week in South Vietnam...All anybody talks about is the bombing...It is all out of proportion...The differences are all out of proportion...If you count the 30,000 sorties we fly and then figure how many we would fly different, there is only a small difference of opinion...Even if LeMay was running it; for Christ Sake, it wouldn't ~~be~~ be too much difference...But the bombing is all anybody seems to think about, talk about or write about...I'm looking at South Vietnam. That is where the main war is."

(McNamara is on record as saying breaking the will of Hanoi is the key to victory--making it too expensive for them to think it is worth doing is really closer to what he believes. So I think his point is that this persuasion of Hanoi must come from not just the bombing, but the fighting on the ground and the pacification in SV.)

MANPOWER -- "Under constant ~~manpower~~ review. But I'm not going to look beyond 90 days. And I can promise you no dramatic increase in 90 days."

MILITARY MUST SELL TROOP NEED TO CONGRESS BUT MUST
BOMB HAIPHONG TO GET HAWK AP ROVAL FOR TROOPS -- "I can
see why some Senators might think there is a relationship
between closing Haiphong and more troops. But there
just isn't; the two things are not interconnected at all

HOW DO YOU FEEL PERSONALY ABOUT THIS WAR? YOU'RE
THE ONE WHO HAS TO THINK ABOUT THE 9000 GUYS KILLED
OVER THERE?

McNamara for a fleeting instant lost his ~~composure~~
composure, looked aside, down at the rug; then quickly
got his grip back and said: "Some day I'll tell you how
I feel about the war personally. But not today."

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