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RONALD REAGAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

# FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

# INTERVIEW WITH HOWARD BAKER

August 24, 2004
Washington, D.C.

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**Knott:** This is a Ronald Reagan Oral History interview with Howard Baker, and again, we're pleased that you're here. We thought that we would start by asking you how you came to be selected as Chief of Staff for President Reagan.

**Baker:** You'll have to find somebody else to tell you that, because I don't know. What I do know is that I had no expectation of working in government any further, and as a matter of fact, at the moment he called I was having a family conference. I took my family to Florida to have a conference to decide whether or not I might make another run at the Republican nomination for President.

We were in Miami and that conversation ran down in a hurry so I took my then six-year-old grandson to the zoo. While I was at the zoo, President Reagan called, and my late wife Joy [Baker] took the call. She related that it went like this: "Joy, where is Howard?" "Mr. President, Howard's at the zoo." She said there was a presidential chortle on the other end of the line and he was heard to say, "Wait until he sees the zoo I have in mind for him." But he didn't say what. He did ask that I come to Washington the next day. Of course I agreed to do that. I assumed he wanted me to do something in his administration since that was the height of the Iran-Contra affair and he wasn't doing very well politically then.

I marshaled all my arguments for why I couldn't do whatever it was he was going to ask me to do. I'd been 18 years in the Senate; I'd been both minority leader and majority leader; I had retired under my own power. At the moment he called, I was thinking about my own political future. Whatever it was, "I'm sorry Mr. President, I can't do it."

The White House sent a car to National Airport and met me and took me to the White House. We went in through the southwest gate, which is the way you go in if you want to try to avoid the press stakeout. They took me in the diplomatic reception room entrance and up to the third floor, which were the presidential living quarters. The elevator door opened and there stood Ronald Reagan who said, "Howard, I have to have a new Chief of Staff and I want you to do it." I heard myself say, "All right." That was the end of my good resolve.

Looking back on it, I was surprised that he asked and I was even more surprised that I agreed, but I did. I told him I'd stay for a while, that Joy wasn't well and I had other things I had to do. I ended up staying a year and a half, because once you're in that job, you've got to pay attention to when you leave and how you leave; otherwise it becomes a political statement. I stayed until

after the Moscow summit and then left. The last six months, Ken Duberstein, who was my deputy, did the job.

That's how I got to be Chief of Staff, and as I said, I had no expectation I would. I do not know how he arrived at the decision to ask. I was surprised that he did, and to repeat, I was also surprised that I agreed. There you are. That's as much as I know about it.

**Knott:** What kind of frame of mind did you find President Reagan to be in at that point? Was he down?

**Baker:** No, he wasn't a bit down. He seemed his ebullient normal self. Later, when I was established at the White House a few days later and it was clear that staff operation at the White House was in disarray and that the President's initiative was sort of at sea, then he appeared to be down. He seemed to be despondent but not depressed and, as a matter of fact, the first thing I did was say to Tom Griscom and Jim Cannon and one or two others, "The first thing we've got to do is build this man a program, an agenda, so he's busy and fully occupied and engaged."

We did that and he quickly picked up on it and was very agreeable to what we laid out for him. It involved a pretty significant speaking program and public events. Gradually it was clear that he was reengaged, and he resumed some more of the effervescent personality that we'd known before. That's the way it worked. He was not depressed and he was not despondent when I went there. I think deep down inside he was disappointed and surprised. Things had sort of gotten out of control.

**Knott:** There were reports at the time but also in Edmund Morris' book about some concern on your part about the President's—

**Baker:** Mental state?

**Knott:** Yes.

**Baker:** That's really inaccurate. It is true that there was a conversation among news staff, Cannon, Griscom, and others, about whether or not it might be necessary to invoke the—whatever it was—amendment.

**Knott:** Twenty-fifth.

**Baker:** But I never thought that Reagan was impaired. I never thought then, I do not think now, that he was impaired. I think he was fully functional, and after the first staff meeting I gathered up the senior staff and said, "Boys, this is a fully functioning and capable President and I don't want to hear any more talk about that." That's the way it really happened.

**Knott:** Did you hear a lot from Mrs. [Nancy] Reagan at this time? Did she talk to you at all about what she hoped for?

**Baker:** Not a lot. I saw Nancy regularly and talked to her freely, especially about scheduling matters, almost never about substantive matters, a little about political matters. She was a jealous guardian of his agenda, meaning of the commitment of his time and energy, and I'm told that

that became so particularly after the President was shot. She apparently took it as her prime responsibility to see over his schedule and make sure he wasn't overworked and he was committed to public appearances in an appropriate way. I saw Nancy Reagan anytime I wanted to see Nancy Reagan and I saw her from time to time in that context. I saw her in a social context more often. As Chief of Staff, I attended all the state dinners, all the official dinners that they had at the White House during my tenure, so I saw her there.

Nancy was not an intrusive person. She was clearly the protector of Ronald Reagan's welfare but she did not meddle in affairs of state. I can't think of a single time when she ever came to me with a concrete suggestion on some substantive issue. Often on scheduling matters and commitments of the President's time and energy, but I cannot remember a single time when she talked to me about substantive issues.

**Knott:** Personnel matters?

**Baker:** I can't honestly say that I ever had that conversation with her either. I know she did have a lot to say about personnel matters, perhaps even my own appointment as Chief of Staff, but I can't remember that I ever had a conversation with her about personnel matters. I had a lot of conversations with the President about personnel matters. As a matter of fact, one of the unhappy responsibilities as Chief of Staff was that Ronald Reagan was emotionally incapable of firing anybody. More than once he'd come to me and say, "Now Howard, tell me, how long has that fellow worked for us?"

I'd say, "Mr. President, let me make sure I understand what you're asking. Are you suggesting that perhaps he's worked here long enough?" Sometimes he'd say, "Yes, I think so." Then it would be my duty and responsibility to summon that person and tell them that the President did not require their services any longer, and can we be helpful in your future endeavor? That sort of thing. But I can't remember Nancy ever doing that.

**Knott:** Would you characterize the mood in the White House as the testimony of John Poindexter approached? Was there some concern about what he might say?

**Baker:** Oh sure. Who knows what anyone will ever say in an inquiry of any type? But Reagan didn't seem concerned about it.

**Knott:** He didn't?

**Baker:** No, he was perfectly tranquil and self-assured, confident.

**Knott:** Did the President ever give you his assessment as to what he thought had gone wrong?

**Baker:** Not directly, and I've thought a lot about that. The closest he ever came to it that I can remember was one day Ollie North came to the Oval Office—no, that's not right. One day at the nine o'clock meeting—I had a meeting with him every morning at nine o'clock—I went in and the President had his reading glasses on, and was thumbing through the *Washington Post.* I guess it was the *Post*. It was a morning paper. He looked up and said, "Howard, this article treats Ollie North like he was my son. The truth of the matter is I don't believe I'd know that fellow if he walked in the Oval Office right this minute."

Incidentally, after I left the office I went back—you know, we keep detailed records of whoever sees the President, who goes in the Oval Office—and found out truly he'd only been in the Oval Office two or three times, and only once with the President alone and then only for a very few minutes. That's the only time I recall that he had a direct, unequivocal comment about the circumstances of the Iran-Contra affair.

**Knott:** Did you view it as part of your responsibilities when you first became Chief of Staff to make sure that the NSC [National Security Council] was essentially cleaned out, or had that already taken place just prior?

**Baker:** No, it had pretty well taken place. Of course, Frank Carlucci came on board as the new director of the National Security Council almost the same day that I came on as the new Chief of Staff. So we were both new and that was his job.

**Knott:** Had you known Carlucci prior to this?

**Baker:** I had. Not well, but I'd known him.

**Knott:** So part of your goal right off the bat was to try and reinvigorate the President's legislative agenda?

**Baker:** Not just the legislative agenda, but to make sure that his leadership was reinforced. That included, of course, the legislative program but it included many other things too.

**Knott:** Could you tell us some of the other—

**Baker:** Well, international things, preparation for the Washington summit, and later on for the Moscow summit, weighing the equities on where he was going to appear and what speeches would be appropriate to that occasion, to review the first draft of speeches that the speechwriters might bring up—I did that. Reagan was a generous user of his yellow pad. More often than not, he wrote the outlines of whatever speech he wanted to make and we sent it down to very skillful speechwriters. They'd put together stuff and send it up. I got it first and then I took it in to the President. It usually went through two or three, sometimes many more iterations before everybody signed off on it.

**Knott:** Did you get tangled—I don't know if tangled up is the correct word, but the President nominated Robert Bork for Supreme Court in July of '87. Could you tell us a little bit about what you know about that selection?

**Baker:** The selection process was well established. The Justice Department had first responsibility for generating a list and then the White House and other agencies and departments would go over that list and vet it and establish his qualifications and the challenges, the opportunities, and the dangers. Then it usually was whittled down to three names. The President was involved in this as we went along, but when it went to three names it was purely the President's decision. He made the decision. A lot of people had a lot of input, especially the Attorney General and White House Counsel. A.B. Culvahouse [Jr.] was deeply involved in that, as was I. But Bork was the President's choice. It would serve no good purpose for me to say he

was not my first choice—I was not President. President Reagan wanted Bork, chose Bork, and nominated Bork.

It's unfortunate that Bork was not confirmed. He's not only a qualified jurist, but he's intellectually agile and a very talented legal scholar. For a lot of reasons, the nomination didn't set well with a lot of people.

**Knott:** There was a fairly vehement reaction from Senator [Edward] Kennedy on the very day that you—

**Baker:** That's true, and I like Teddy Kennedy, but to tell you the truth, vehement reactions are not unusual from Kennedy. They're the norm rather than otherwise. He didn't like him and was hard over against him, but that was not controlling. Bork himself was the issue.

**Chidester:** Did you anticipate that? Did anyone anticipate that kind of reaction?

**Baker:** No, no, we had done, if not whip checks, we had made an evaluation of the prospects for the nomination in the Senate. That was part of the briefing of the President. But the President had high confidence that he could move anything, whether it was a vote on an issue or a nomination or a treaty, or that he could convince a foreign leader or domestic leader of a particular point. He was supremely confident. He took account of the fact that there were big storm warnings about Bork ahead of time but it was very Reagan-like to say, "I want to do it anyway," and he did. I don't recall that he ever had any regrets. He regretted that Bork lost, but it was not a devastating loss to him. I'm sure it was to Judge Bork. Reagan just picked up and went on.

**Chidester:** Was that part of the reinvigoration that you talked about?

**Baker:** No, I think that's part of the Reagan personality. He is a unique personality, he really is. He's a multidimensional personality. Historians for years will try to analyze that personality. It's unique. One of his strengths was that he could move on to the next issue, and another of his strengths was that he almost never—sometimes, but almost never—held any sort of grudge or lingering regret about things. He just moved from base to base. I admired that.

**Knott:** Was he a very different politician? You've known a lot of politicians in your life. Would you characterize Reagan as very—

**Baker:** Oh yes, he was a very special politician. I knew him for many years as a politician. He was elected Governor of California the same year I was elected to the Senate from Tennessee. So we knew each other first as politicians know each other, and later of course we ran against each other for the Republican presidential nomination, which is a real opportunity to get acquainted. When he was elected President, which was of course the same year I was elected majority leader, I dealt with him extensively and almost daily. It wasn't long before I thought I had a pretty good and in-depth feeling for the Reagan personality, which was very special. I still think of it that way.

That may be the most unappreciated part of the Reagan legacy, not just his achievements, which were extraordinary, or his political successes, which were obvious, or his foreign policy endeavors, which are historic, but the personality itself. He was a very special personality. That's

hard even now for me to say why I think that so fervently, but I do. Part of it is he's quick and insightful. He was a quick study. By the way, the least deserved thing about the Reagan legacy is that he wasn't very bright. He was very bright, very quick. The idea that he forgot stuff is sort of true, but is more in the nature of a delete key than it was actual forgetting. When things were done he just deleted them from his mind and went on to other things. The dimensions of the Reagan political personality have not yet been fully explored.

**Knott:** What about this notion that he was passive?

**Baker:** He was the most unpassive person I ever saw in the Oval Office. He was quiet and well modulated. He was careful, but he was not passive. He had strong views on international affairs. He had strong views on political matters. He coupled that with a willingness to—forgive the immodesty if it is immodest—to have strong people around him and to listen to them. He seldom argued with George Shultz or with Cap [Caspar] Weinberger or others, but he listened attentively, and if you'd go back at him a few days later, he knew exactly what the essence of their position was. He was not afraid of strong people.

He also was not afraid to delegate. As long as that delegation stayed within the parameters of his fundamental conviction on whatever the issue was, he gave people extraordinary latitude. I look back on my time as Chief of Staff and to this day marvel at how much flexibility he gave me to do things. I'm not sure I would have done that, but he did. Only when you seemed to veer over the line of what he really wanted to do or really thought, did he pull you back. Occasionally he would say, "Howard, remember I'm President and you're not." That made the point.

**Hohenstein:** We've also heard he was a self-confident man, for a politician, unusually comfortable in his own skin.

**Baker:** He was. The way I like to characterize that is I say he knew who he was and he was content with it.

**Hohenstein:** He even knew people thought low of his intelligence but it was something that didn't bother him because—

**Baker:** The whole thing is of a piece. He knew who he was. He was comfortable in his own skin. He understood that people thought he wasn't intellectually agile and that he wasn't very smart but he knew better. It didn't bother him if they thought that. It almost bordered on a sort of arrogance, that is, *They think that. I'll take that into account when I judge their personality*. It didn't seem to bother him.

**Knott:** We've heard a lot of reports about what a gentleman he was, a very kind person. Did you ever see any flashes of anger?

**Baker:** Oh yes. Not often, but occasionally. It usually ended up in unexpected ways. For instance, I once went in the Oval Office for a nine o'clock meeting and Reagan was reading some paper. Whatever the story was really excited him, because he took his glasses and flung them down on the desk and made some exclamation—I've forgotten long since what. The glasses bounced off his desk and the next thing I knew, the President of the United States and I

were on our hands and knees trying to find his glasses. We looked up at each other and both laughed.

**Knott:** Is there an official White House photograph of this?

**Baker:** I don't know, there might be. But Reagan had flashes of anger and they were not contrived. He really felt these things. They usually were soluble in humor. He usually put them in perspective almost instantly.

**Hohenstein:** That's another thing we have heard about him—the opposite side is his sense of humor. Are there any good stories that come to mind?

**Baker:** There are thousands. You don't have time and neither do I to get into the Reagan stories, but we'll continue that some time if you want to. I doubt that I'll ever write a book about Reagan but if I did, the backbone of the book would be the Reagan humor. That's not because it would be superficial but because so much of his policy, so many of his decisions, were hung on the tree of humor and the analogies that would be available to illustrate his point. Forgive me for saying it, but it was very much like what I believe Abraham Lincoln must have been. The more I read about Lincoln, especially Lincoln's stories, the more I realize that they had that in common, or at least I think they did.

**Chidester:** So it's not an artificiality, it's inside.

**Baker:** It's inside. The flashes of humor would come out spontaneously in the most unexpected ways but it would illustrate a point. Almost always it would illustrate some point. It was amazing to watch.

**Chidester:** When you were appointed Chief of Staff, there were a lot of news reports about how well received you were. It's almost like there's another honeymoon period for you. I want you to tell me—I had some difficulty believing all that. I know you're highly respected in the Congress and they welcomed you there, but what was it like? I know the personal reception, but what was it like in terms of the relationship that the Reagan White House had with Congress?

**Baker:** That's a very good question. I'm stunned when I hear these stories about how I was received. In fact I was well received. One staffer—I'll give you his name in a little bit—said, "Baker's appointment was just like a breath of fresh air." I suppose that's true. I suppose it signaled a new era. Certainly I was different from Don Regan. Don Regan and I had known each other a long time. I had worked with him on matters for Merrill Lynch when I was practicing law. We're very different. I was obviously a politician, and pretty obviously Don wasn't, so that was different.

When people say that, they may be thinking it's nice to have a politician in the White House. They may have been thinking it's nice to have somebody who's savvy about Congress, if anybody is savvy about Congress in the White House, or somebody who's not intimidated by Reagan. I'd been in public service as long as he had. All those things were true. Each of those things may have come into play. But I was not intoxicated by it. I don't respond to adulation very well and it didn't bother me one way or another. I just didn't take it very seriously, but I'm

grateful for it and it was even useful in trying to establish the new regime at the White House or to move legislative matters. It was not intoxicating.

**Chidester:** Inside the White House or elsewhere, was there any opposition to this sort of a different kind of approach with Congress?

**Baker:** I'm sure there were. When I first got Don Regan's staff together they were obviously apprehensive and even some were hostile. I began by saying, "Look, you're not all fired immediately, but some of you will be fired. Some of you will be changed, but I'll be glad to help you any way I can. In order to serve the President well, I've got to have my own people, people I already know and trust." With one or two exceptions, that went down amazingly well. I'm surprised and gratified by that. But I don't know that there was any stated opposition to the "Baker personality" coming to the White House. It seemed to be welcomed, as you have pointed out.

**Chidester:** Did it help in Congress?

**Baker:** It probably did help, yes.

**Chidester:** They talk in the news accounts that it is an ocean of fresh air. How long did this last? You obviously knew of it and were able to use in some sense. How long did this last?

**Baker:** It lasted a long time. It lasted the whole time I was there, in a way, which isn't to say we won every fight on the Hill, but is to say that—forgive the vanity, if it is vain—I believe that the relationship between Congress, especially the Senate, and the White House was significantly different even after the year and a half I was there, from what it was in the beginning. Then there was an element of bipartisanship that I'd been involved with for years, because as Republican leader, or as minority leader for that matter, you've got to sort of bridge that chasm between the two sides, and that was known. So when I went to the White House—I'm not going to tell you who—a number of my Democratic former colleagues and friends came to me and wanted to know if I'd still be available to talk and I said, "Of course we will." I'd reach out to them regularly.

That bipartisan approach, which was different from the White House, seemed to go down well in the White House. The President, by the way, welcomed that. He'd had that experience in the California legislature, and that is to have to reach out and bridge the gap between Republicans and Democrats. He seemed fully on-board with that.

**Knott:** The President did take some heat, and you took some heat, as well, from groups, let's say on the far right of the Republican Party, for not letting Reagan be Reagan.

**Baker:** Which is a bum rap. I'm not defensive about things that are said about me, but nobody could keep Reagan from being Reagan. What they were saying, whether they knew it or not, was keeping Reagan from being Reagan the other way. Reagan was going to do what Reagan wanted to do, and if they were disappointed, they blamed me instead of blaming Reagan, which is all right with me. I didn't care. They really, I guess, did not cheer for my appointment as Chief of Staff, but they accepted it, by and large.

I remember one Republican Senator was quoted as saying, when I went down there, "I don't know how Baker got along so well with the Senate. All he ever did was get members in the cloakroom and tell them a funny story, and then they'd just do whatever it was he wanted." Which of course isn't true but it makes another point, which is that legislation and governance is a very personal matter. I believed in the personality of politics.

**Knott:** There was some criticism from these same groups about what they thought was a tardy response to the criticism of Bork. Any comments about that?

**Baker:** A tardy response. You could make that criticism. I don't think it's a valid one. To think about the alternative, that is to come out with all guns blazing, I'm not sure it would have made a difference in any event. But it is true that by the time we were in the trenches, opinions had been fixed pretty well on Bork and there wasn't much we could do about it, looking back on it. You know, you can argue that both ways. Maybe we should have done it a different way. But we tried to do it in a more conciliatory way and to try to bridge the gap with some Democrats was essentially my decision. I guess I have no regrets. Bork himself had questions about that. That's okay. He's entitled to be concerned about that, but he was wrong.

**Knott:** You then nominated Douglas Ginsburg to the bench. That didn't last too long, and then finally Judge [Anthony] Kennedy. Any particular recollections from those two?

**Baker:** Not really. I didn't have much to do with the Ginsburg choice. I was the conduit between the White House counsel, A.B. Culvahouse, the Justice Department, of the list to President Reagan, but to tell you the truth, I never had any candidate for the Supreme Court. I guess that was intentional. I sort of figured I was going to work for whomever the President chooses, but I'm sure I never tried to advance any candidate over another, or objected to any candidate over another. I gave them the best data I could, and faithfully passed on the President's views on that.

**Knott:** If we could switch to some foreign policy issues. You had a kind of difficult situation in Central America, Contra war, Sandinistas. Any recollections from that, as far as dealing with Congress, which was getting particularly assertive on that issue? Speaker [James] Wright was determined to have his own foreign policy in Central America.

**Baker:** That's the way it appeared. Jim Wright was my friend and I respected him as Democratic leader and Speaker, but I was also determined that the President runs foreign policy, not the Congress and not Wright. That raised some hackles in some quarters but that was my job and that was our responsibility and that's what I did.

**Knott:** Can we talk a little bit now about the two summits, the Washington summit and the Moscow summit?

**Hohenstein:** If I could go back, before we get to the Washington summit—You mentioned earlier that as Chief of Staff you did play a role in the construction of some of President Reagan's speeches.

**Baker:** That's not quite right. I was the first person, in most cases, if not all cases, to see the speech product that the speechwriters wrote. Before it went to the President, they brought it to me.

**Hohenstein:** Six months before the Washington summit, Reagan gives his famous speech at the Brandenburg Gate. Do you have any thoughts on how that speech came about?

**Baker:** Yes, I know exactly how that speech came about. I'll tell you a self-incriminating story about that, which is also a true story. Tommy Griscom was Communications Director and when I read the speech that came out from the speechwriters I got to that part where it said, "Mr. [Mikhail] Gorbachev, tear down this wall." I called Tommy, who was my interface with the speechwriters, and I said, "Griscom, come up here." He came up. I said, "This section where you have the President saying, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall," you really ought to take that out. It's so unlikely, it's unpresidential. And Griscom said, "But that's where I'll get my sound bite." Being a man of high principle, I said, "Okay, then leave it in." That's a true story. It's not a flattering story but it's a true story. I've thought a lot of times how terrible it would have been if I had insisted on that coming out.

Those were Reagan's words, as it turns out. He did that. Those were what we called "yellow pad words." He really worked his yellow pad. Did you ever see a presidential yellow pad? It looks just like a regular yellow pad but it has secret watermarks on it. If you hold it up the right way you can see those identifying marks in there. The reason is obvious. Yellow pads are everywhere and the President was using yellow pads, but we needed to be able to tell—was this, sure enough, Ronald Reagan's yellow pad? That's why I called them yellow pad words. If they were written down on Ronald Reagan's yellow pad, we used them.

**Hohenstein:** What kind of opposition was there in the State Department or other parts of the Cabinet, or even in the White House, to that line in the speech? We've heard stories that Reagan kept inserting it into every draft and they kept taking it out.

**Baker:** Right, that's true. That is also true. I didn't try to encourage State or Defense to be on that side, but two or three times we got a clamor saying that really ought to come out. But Reagan was tough on it. He said leave it in. Some of the others didn't take the presidential directive as quickly and fully as I did, but it didn't take Reagan but one time to tell me, "Leave it in." It stayed in. I was with him when he made that speech in Germany in Berlin.

**Knott:** How was the reaction?

**Baker:** The public reaction was not nearly as great as I thought it would be because by that time I'd worked myself into sort of an anticipatory rage on what the reaction would be and it was sort of muted. I thought, *Well damn, maybe it wasn't as important as I thought it was*. History has treated it very differently.

**Knott:** How was Ronald Reagan in terms of interacting with foreign leaders on the occasions that you—

**Baker:** He was very good. He was very gentle. He was very well structured, that is, his conversation was structured. He almost never strayed from his notes and from his preparation. He had a very human touch and by and large it survived translation, which is always uncertain. But he was also very firm. I was not with him at Reykjavik. That was just before I went to the White House but witnessed the fact that when Gorbachev turned him down on the missile stand-down he just closed his book and left. He could be very abrupt and very tough. He handled

foreign leaders very well. I must say I have had no real experience with presidential dealings with foreign leaders except Reagan, but he was very good with them.

**Chidester:** One thing that I thought was remarkable was watching the funeral. The foreign leaders that were there spoke about him not like the President but as a friend. He was a friend.

**Baker:** There was a very personal relationship. Can I tell you one more story about that?

**Chidester:** Please do.

**Baker:** He had a great respect for Mrs. [Margaret] Thatcher. I was impressed by her speech at the funeral. But I remember vividly, on a Sunday night before the invasion of Grenada, that President Reagan called the four leaders of Congress down to the White House in a very secret meeting at six o'clock. We were ushered up to the oval sitting room on the third or fourth floor and there was the President and the Vice President; there was the Secretary of Defense, who was Cap Weinberger; Secretary of State, who was George Shultz; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I've forgotten who that was. They had their flip charts and they were preparing to brief the leaders of Congress on this upcoming invasion of Grenada.

Just as they were getting started, one of the White House butlers came in and said to the President in a rather firm, loud voice, because he didn't hear very well, and we could all hear. He said, "Mr. President, the Prime Minister is on the phone." Reagan excused himself, and said, "Mrs. Thatcher's on the phone." He went next door from the oval sitting room and closed the door, but as is typical of many people who don't hear very well, he also spoke in a loud voice. I could hear him plain as day. He said, "Margaret," long pause. "But Margaret," and he went through that about three times and he came back sort of sheepish and said, "Mrs. Thatcher has strong reservations about this."

I've often thought—I believe Maggie Thatcher was the only person who could intimidate Ronald Reagan, but I believe she could. He'd make friends with about anybody. He became friends with Gorbachev.

**Knott:** Could you tell us a little bit about the Washington summit of December '87?

**Baker:** My main recollection of that is not that substantive but, as I said, I was responsible for running those summits, making them work. We'd finished all the plenary sessions and it was time to go to the departure ceremony, but just before the departure ceremony there was a departure luncheon. The President hosted Gorbachev and the others, a small group. I've got a picture of it someplace, the departure luncheon. The luncheon was about to run down and a page brought me a note from George Shultz that said, "Stretch it out. We have not agreed on a departure statement." I whispered that in the President's ear and I said, "Maybe you can tell them some stories." The President did. He told a couple of funny stories and looked at me sort of quizzically and I said, "I don't have any notes from Shultz," so he told some more stories. By that time, the Russians were beginning to wonder what was going on. *This was entertaining, but what's happening?*

Then another page came in and handed me a note, which I gave to the President. The note said, "Raisa Gorbachev and the First Lady are in the Red Room alone and do not appear happy." I

gave it to the President and I said, "We've got to go." We excused ourselves without a departure statement and went upstairs and joined the others in the library on the ground floor of the White House. About that time Shultz showed up and said, "We have not agreed on a departure statement." President Reagan said, "Well, we're going to have to go anyway. My statement will be that we were not able to agree on a departure statement." Gorbachev recoiled from that and in another minute we had agreed on the original statement that Shultz had been trying to peddle all along.

We went outside, had a perfectly wonderful departure ceremony on the South Lawn with live television and all the good paraphernalia that goes with that for a state visit. It must have looked to people who didn't know that there'd never been a hitch anyplace. Ronald Reagan just stood him down. He said, "You're either going to agree to our statement or I'm going to go out there and say we couldn't agree on a statement." The Russians were determined that it was going to be a success. I remember Gorbachev saying in English, "Oh, all right." That was that.

But the summit itself was well organized. To tell you the honest truth, they're so well orchestrated and so well researched and staffed that some of the meetings are really boring. Think of the worst plenary session of some event that you can think of and then add to that the necessity for all the pomp and ceremony that goes with it and that's what you have.

I'm going to have to go but I've enjoyed this and I'll be glad to continue it at some point.

**Knott:** We would like to continue it and we also really would like to do an oral history project of your Senate career. Is there someone on your staff that I could get in touch with to talk about this?

**Baker:** I don't have much staff anymore but get in touch with Tom Griscom. He was the Communications Director on my staff for years and he's publisher of the Chattanooga paper, the *Times and Free Press.*

**Chidester:** He's on your board?

**Baker:** He is, at the Baker Center. By the way, I told Allen Lowe he has to come up and see the Miller Center and see what you all have done up there. We're right now in the business of raising 13 million dollars for the building. We've got the lot. The University has given us that.

**Knott:** Tell him to come up to the Miller Center any time.

**Baker:** I told him that.

**Knott:** I'll get in touch with him.

**Baker:** Why don't you call Allen Lowe at the Baker Center at the University of Tennessee.

**Knott:** You would be open to an oral history of your Senate career, perhaps working in concert—

**Baker:** I owe my first responsibility to the Baker Center, but as we can put those things together I'd be glad to do it.

**Knott:** Thank you for your time. We really would like to follow up with the Reagan project at some point if we can. I know you've got other obligations.

**Baker:** I do, but we'll do that.