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RONALD REAGAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL EDITED TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM CLARK

August 17, 2003
Paso Robles, California

Interviewers

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Knott: This is the Ronald Reagan oral history interview with Judge William Clark, and again we're very grateful that you're giving us this time. I'd like to ask you, Judge Clark, if you could tell us how you first met Ronald Reagan.

Clark: Steve, in 1965, I had switched parties the year before from a family of four generations of Jeffersonian Democrats to Republican, and that was noted by my friends in Ventura County, a county that my family helped establish in its earliest days. I was a young lawyer, had five children at the time. I had my own practice. It was developing well and I became interested in the political scene. It was during the Great Society, which I had doubts about its greatness.

The county asked me to consider running against an incumbent Democrat in the state legislature. I believe it was John MacDonald. So there was a telephone campaign that urged me to file for the next election. Within that campaign I received a call from the former actor Ronald Reagan, stating that in his study of state politics he hoped I would enter this particular legislative race. I thanked him profusely, was impressed with the fact that though I'd never met the man he would make a case to call a county lawyer to run for office. I told him that with my young family responsibilities, and my law firm moving along nicely, that office was out of the question at the time. I thanked him and we both suggested that at some point we meet along some trail, which did in fact occur later that year. This was before there was any suggestion, as I recall, that he himself enter as a candidate, in his case for Governor.

When he did he asked me to be his campaign chairman for that particular county, we call it a cow county, one of the 58 California counties. I got to know him fairly well during the course of the primary campaign against several strong names. And when he won the primary we geared up for the general against Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, the incumbent Governor. I got to know Ronald Reagan even better during that time and then after his success in 1966 in the general election by a million votes, totally unexpected by the pollsters and everyone else. In fact, a poll a month before the election had us down and behind the incumbent. We had campaign headquarters in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, where he asked me to join a small group to consider going to Sacramento as an advance team to determine the issues he would be confronting as the new Governor.

I accepted that on a 90-day commitment and joined Cap Weinberger and one or two others to go to Sacramento and, as the Irish would say, sort out the issues. We found many surprises, fiscal

chaos, and came back to report to him in December on the state of affairs in Sacramento. And with that wonderful twinkle in his eye the Governor-elect said, "Do you think we can ask for a vote recount?" We said, "No. You're going to be Governor and we're going to straighten this all out." That's how I got to know him personally.

Knott: What were your initial impressions of Ronald Reagan as a person? What struck you about him?

Clark: Certainly his very sincere desire to move into the public square on issues that moved even beyond California borders and trying to develop a better world. I saw he was a man of truth and integrity, and his philosophy made so much sense. It was my first political experience. I felt that he had all the qualities of a leader. He reminded me very much of my own father, a rancher, and a man who while later being called the "great communicator" was really a man of very simple words, simple diet, not verbose. We always seemed to hit it off together, from the first meeting onward.

Knott: You mentioned that you came from a family of Jeffersonian Democrats. What caused you to switch your allegiance from Democrat to Republican?

Clark: The social programs, and I thought Mr. Reagan's position or comment in that regard, "I didn't leave the Democratic Party, it left me" was the situation in our own account. I had great interest—we were a low-income family, ranchers barely making it. I felt that the old party principles of the Democratic Party—family, labor, church—were being forgotten and handed over to government for solutions. I had to agree with Mr. Reagan's early statements that more government was not the answer in solving these moral and social problems we were encountering. I hoped the Republican Party would offer more to minorities, particularly the Hispanic community that I had grown up in.

My mother and father were very much involved in the social justice activity of the Hispanic community that surrounded us in Ventura County. I just felt that the Democratic Party had all the wrong answers to the issues that I was concerned with as a young lawyer—and I wasn't sure that the Republican Party was totally in synch with my thoughts but certainly far more so than the Democratic Party.

Knott: Do you remember when you actually made the jump from Democrat to Republican? Was there a first presidential election?

Clark: I believe it was 1964, my wife and I both.

Knott: You voted for [Barry] Goldwater that year.

Clark: Yes.

Knott: Now, when Governor Reagan becomes Governor, you're appointed executive secretary? Do I have the right title there?

Clark: No, he asked me to serve as Cabinet secretary in reorganizing the executive branch. The executive secretary or chief of staff was Mr. Phil Battaglia, who had been chairman of the gubernatorial campaign. It was certainly expected that he would be chief of staff. At some point in 1967, Mr. Battaglia had to leave the office and the Governor asked me to step into that position of chief of staff or executive secretary in mid-1967. I don't recall the date.

Knott: That's okay.

Clark: So my first month in the administration I had expected to be returning to my law practice after my 90-day term was up. But my 90 days became two years in which I spent a lot of time organizing the structure and decision-making process, the Cabinet approach to government, three-time-a-week full Cabinet meetings, the paper process that the Governor quickly endorsed, and reorganization of the executive branch, working with the Little Hoover Commission, a commission on efficiency and cost control that the Governor liked. We carried elements of it into the government in Washington a few years later.

Knott: Would it be fair to say that Governor Reagan was a believer in the Cabinet form of government?

Clark: Yes, he had no preconceptions on what he wanted. I did a lot of study, Cap Weinberger helped me in looking at the approaches. The new Governor soon realized that with the problems of the sixth largest economy in the world in the state of California he certainly didn't have the answers. He had the underlying philosophy and the vision in approaching these issues, but he had to rely on expertise. He called it round-tabling. Our Cabinet meetings were composed of maybe 12 to 16 members, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, as often as we could outside of his travel schedule, which was mostly in state, very few trips outside, but we called it round-tabling. Whatever the issue, whether it was social welfare, resources, or personnel, he would want comments from everyone at the table on an issue that we felt was of high priority and required a decision. He would look for consensus, but that would not necessarily dictate his conclusion and decision.

It soon became apparent that he enjoyed listening as well as making the decision if the issue were ripe. He didn't defer matters. He was like a good judge, he would rule from the bench as often as he could. If there was time, given ongoing issues, most of us would understand where he stood or would stand on a decision, but he certainly wanted to share the thoughts of as many members of the Cabinet and senior staff as he could receive.

Knott: Were there certain issues that stand out in your mind from your tenure as chief of staff and Cabinet secretary, ones that were particularly contentious?

Clark: Oh, yes. Any reform such as in welfare would be contentious. Spencer Williams was the secretary, later replaced, who was inclined to want to solve every problem or issue and most of us, particularly the Governor, realized we had to go slowly but reform there would be. We learned, in that example, Williams wanted to create public fora throughout the state for citizenry to come in over a period of time and give their views. It did not work well, trying to keep track, because many of them became protest sessions rather than constructive sessions.

The fiscal situation was particularly difficult. I recall Cap Weinberger coming to the Governor pointing out that the budget had crossed the $5 billion mark. The current budget I think is $140 billion in Sacramento, with a deficit of $40 billion. Unfortunately, the state constitution, unlike the U.S. Constitution, requires a balanced budget and we had no difficulty balancing. In fact, at the end I think of the second year we were able to send tax rebates to all taxpayers, if my memory serves me. But that was a major issue.

Resources, under Ike Livermore, became contentious at times, the redwoods, the building of dams. The Governor of course always took a most reasoned position in meeting the conditions and requirements there. Arguments of both industry and agriculture on one side and the conservation groups on the other and balancing as a good steward must do, as he did as President.

Knott: This was also a time of a lot of student protests on the campuses, and in particular in Berkeley. Any particular recollections from the Berkeley student difficulties?

Clark: Yes, of course, the record is clear. He actually went to the campuses of Berkeley and Santa Cruz. I recall in the first days of the gubernatorial period, 1967, Mr. [Gordon Paul] Smith was then director of finance looking at different potential sources of revenue. One item for discussion was tuition at the University of California system's nine campuses. Somehow that discussion leaked out to the media. There was immediate reaction from the faculty senate at Berkeley, and student protests were planned. They planned a Saturday afternoon march, I think it was in February of '67, so some 5,000 gathered on the mall in Sacramento to march on the Capitol.

We staff felt it was fortunate that the Governor was to be out of town that Saturday, visiting Governor [Thomas Lawson] McCall in Oregon to compare problems and solutions, and he wouldn't be there. However, Ronald Reagan being Ronald Reagan, on hearing of the plan for the march said, "I'm not going up there. I wouldn't miss this for anything." So we said, "Governor, if you keep your appointment, we'll handle the march and the protest." He said, "No, I'd like to be able to meet them and talk to them." But he didn't want it known.

So we stayed in the corner office, which was his office in the Capitol. I recall it was a cold, foggy morning and he said, "Let me know when they're out there." I said, "Yes, Governor, we will. Are you sure you want to go out there? These people are quite angry. They were even discussing the possibility of tuition at the UC campuses." And he said, "Oh, yes, we have to do this."

So we could hear the shouting and the leader speaking to them from the steps of the Capitol. And he went to the north end of the building and he said, "Bill, isn't it time that we walk on down the hall and join them?" I said, "Governor, if you insist, we will." So we walked through the double doors to the steps where this man was carrying on, I think he was a student leader. He of course couldn't see us approach, his back would be to us as we went out the doors, but this vast crowd suddenly spotted the Governor himself and shocked faces told the speaker that something was going on behind him.

He turned around and saw the Governor and in shock just handed him the mike as a matter of courtesy. He was stunned, and the Governor of course in a very few minutes had the—maybe not the group in his hand by any means, but gave a rational explanation as to different options but no decisions being made and expressed he was glad to see them this morning. He effectively won the day. While we had very little support for college tuition, one long Western Union telegram that morning in support, it was a two-pager: "If you need help, let us know. We agree with tuition for all students." Signed by the Sacramento chapter of the Hell's Angels. Needless to say he didn't accept their help. We listened to them, however.

Anyway, several of us fanned out to different campuses to explain the tuition issue. He did go aboard the campuses at several junctures. Again, he was always well received. I recall the first time we went onto the UC campus at Berkeley, he was very quiet, studying the scene and this one particular group of poorly dressed, straggly, we were not sure they were students, beards and long hair on the men and one carrying a sign, "Make love, not war." The Governor leaned over and he said, "Bill, do you think they're capable of either?" I didn't answer. [laughter]

Knott: The story you were telling about walking into the meeting and the speaker handing him the microphone. I guess I'm trying to get a picture, it sounds as if he sort of took command of the room, is that an accurate—?

Clark: It would have been outside, a crowd of 5,000 had gathered on the lawn and on the steps. I still have a good photo of that. I can't recall his words, though I'm sure they're of record somewhere press-wise, but it calmed the crowd and showed that he was quite willing—I don't know that it ever came out that he had canceled a trip to Oregon to be with them. He wouldn't have said that himself. But it did put the issue nicely on the table as a matter of need, in light of the fiscal situation that had been left him by the prior administration. The revenue shortfall was grave. We had to consider many potential sources of income. I'm not even sure that tuition was in fact discussed at that time. Certainly student costs and fees were in order, but I can't recall exactly what was done concerning tuition itself.

Knott: In 1968, Judge Clark, there was a brief Reagan for President boomlet. I was wondering if you had any recollections of that fairly brief event that put Ronald Reagan in the presidential picture.

Clark: Yes, there were press reports but no effort on the part of the staff. My position or recommendation was that it might be his calling someday. He certainly was on top of all the national issues, he had opinions, he had requisite vision. But he had to prove his ability to govern in an executive position before we could properly be thinking of national exposure and inserting him in a presidential run. There was some speculation in early '68 in that regard following a couple of Governors' conferences where he showed great presence and presidential ability to the pundits. Nancy [Reagan] agreed with me on the point that all such talk was premature.

We went to the Republican National convention in Florida, and there was speculation about his maybe winding up as a candidate, but certainly no effort on his or the staff's part. Tom Reed was reconnoitering the situation and at the last-minute submission of names for nomination, I recall,

and this is pretty hazy, the California delegation said, "Well, why not?" They came to me to ask if that was okay, and I tried to put cold water on it. I've frequently said of that moment of decision, before the head of our delegation placed the Governor Reagan name forward, if Mrs. Reagan had not been under a hair dryer in the beauty parlor she would have vetoed the whole idea. But it was obviously premature, at least obvious to me. We had a lot of work to do in our second year as Governor in Sacramento before we could make, in my opinion, a legitimate attempt at the presidential run.

Knott: You mentioned Mrs. Reagan. Could you tell us a little about the role you saw Mrs. Reagan playing, from your perspective as chief of staff?

Clark: Well, she was, in my opinion, the ideal First Lady. She was interested in all of our major issues and sometimes minor ones as well. I would receive her calls several times a day, saying, "Bill, what about this?" or "What about that?" Never influencing but commenting, and her judgment and analysis were very good. In the early days they would start their mornings on 45th Street in the residence reading the *LA Times* and *Sacramento Bee* to see what was happening. Not that these papers were influential, but it showed them what was probably uppermost at issue in the public mind.

She obviously would give her opinion to the Governor and sometimes, if she felt strongly about an issue, she'd wait until the Governor got into the limousine to go the 15-minute trip from the residence to the basement garage in the Capitol. She'd use that 15 minutes to call me and say, "Bill, please talk to Ronnie about this or that," indicating to me that she had not necessarily gotten her position in his mind solidly enough. He'd come off the elevator with a smile at me, knowing darn well she had phoned to make her position very clear. That was not every day but frequent. I'd come in to his office and talk about the issues of the morning as expressed in the press, or perhaps not even in the press, something he had been thinking about in the night. He took a lot of work home to study at night. He always left a clean desktop. But Nancy was critical to the process.

As time went on I simply, particularly in times of crisis, didn't have time to take all her calls. With her okay and the Governor's too, I turned Nancy's inquiries over to my assistant, Mike Deaver, so in the division of labor Mike and Nancy grew very close and that continued on into the Washington days, obviously.

Knott: So you were responsible for bringing Mike Deaver into the Governor's—

Clark: Yes, in the transition in November 1966. As the Governor-elect we had offices in the IBM building on Capitol Mall. It was a five-story building, I recall. We had a mailroom and when I got up there as part of the small advance team, looking at government and what we were confronted with, Mike Deaver was operating the mailroom and Helene Von Damm was a secretary. She'd been part of the campaign as Mike had been. I asked Mike to become my assistant and Helene von Damm my secretary. Helene was from Austria. She worked night and day in the Capitol, and when I left after two years to go on the bench as a Superior Court judge, Helene became the Governor's primary secretary, the longest-serving member of his staff over the years until he appointed her U.S. Ambassador back to her native Austria.

Mike Deaver became number two to Ed Meese, who succeeded me as executive secretary and chief of staff.

Knott: You've mentioned Cap Weinberger, Mike Deaver, now Ed Meese. Could you tell us a little about Ed Meese in terms of his role in the Governor's office?

Clark: Yes. Ed came into the office a few months after we got established up there, as clemency and extradition secretary, which was a traditional role studying those two areas and considering pardons, extradition, and clemency. Ed's ability far outshone those particular duties, and I asked him to become legal affairs secretary, expanding those traditional roles. Ed would therefore sit in Cabinet meetings and consider all legal matters beyond those narrow issues and became liaison to the attorney general's office, which was new in the structure after we completed the restructuring of the executive branch.

When I left the Governor's office Ed was my choice and recommendation to the Governor to succeed me. Ed was a great analyst, took notes like no one else I've ever known. We kid that the reason the Meeses had to leave Sacramento was that their garage wouldn't hold any more paper. Ed doesn't appreciate that, but his wife Ursula does. Ed has a great analytical ability, of course he really is the flag carrier of the Reagan story. An amazing guy, very loyal and certainly, by reason of his hard work and loyalty they've thrown spears at him over the years, and he's always been able to either deflect or catch them in midair.

Knott: You left the Governor's office I believe in 1969 to serve as a judge on the California Superior Court.

Clark: Yes, that's the trial court, county court, in this county, San Luis Obispo.

Knott: Right. And this is an appointment that comes from Governor Reagan?

Clark: Yes.

Knott: Did you talk to him about this? How did it come about?

Clark: He first asked that I consider accepting appointment to the position of Lieutenant Governor when Robert Finch left to join the new [Richard] Nixon administration in '68. I just felt that I would not fulfill the criteria for political office where I'd have to run for election. I just didn't have the fire in the tummy. He didn't accept that answer, asked me to think about it for two weeks, which I did.

I felt in a way I was letting him down in not accepting the appointment, but felt there were people better qualified. Ed Reinecke was chosen as Lieutenant Governor. I felt that that point was kind of a crossroads, two years as chief of staff and long hours. I wanted to spend more time with my wife and five children back in the county. So there was a newly created Superior Court position. He asked if I would like to consider that. Not having a full, formal legal education, I'd never considered the judiciary as a possibility. Normally those positions are reserved more for

the academic minded, but I had been a lawyer for ten years, had an active and successful law practice, which is the only requirement for Superior Court. So he appointed me to Superior Court here for two years and then elevated me to the intermediate Court of Appeal, which is in the Southern District of California. I commuted between the ranch and there. Then after two years on the Court of Appeal he elevated me to the state Supreme Court.

Knott: In 1976 when he makes his first serious bid for the Presidency and challenges President [Gerald] Ford, you're on the bench in California so you're not active in that campaign.

Clark: That's right. Certainly I was in communication with him but recognizing the necessity of separation of powers and branches of government, I did not participate in the campaign, though I spoke often with Tom Reed and Ed Meese and the Governor himself about the progress. But I didn't make recommendations. By reason of friendship and hope for better government, I did stay abreast of the issues.

Knott: When he lost that very close race to President Ford, do you recall any personal feelings on your part? Did you assume that that might be it, or did you think he would probably have another chance? I realize I'm asking you to—

Clark: Well, I'm sure we all speculated at that time and hoped that there would be another day in the field, and of course there was.

Knott: Do you recall him giving you any indication as to whether he would run? When did you first learn that he was going to make another serious attempt in 1980? Again, you're still on the bench at this point.

Clark: I wouldn't be able to pin that down, Steve. That would be better coming from a Deaver or Reed or Meese.

Knott: Okay. Did he ask you at all in that '80 campaign to leave the bench and play any sort of official role?

Clark: Yes. [Abraham] Lincoln's birthday of 1980, there'd been some disarray in the political team, and Nancy phoned and asked that I come to the ranch on Lincoln's birthday. The three of us would be alone. We spent the day talking about the personalities and people and [John] Sears' departure, and Governor Reagan asked me to consider the position of chairman of the campaign. After long discussion of what was happening on the state Supreme Court where I had served since 1973, there was real disarray there too, important pending decisions, I felt I should remain there and the Reagans agreed.

We phoned Bill Casey in the late hours of the evening and asked him to consider the position. He agreed to consider it and would meet with the Governor in New York later that week. The Governor said that if he did become President, he would be calling upon me to help him in Washington.

Knott: What was your reaction to that?

Clark: Certainly I would assist him wherever.

Knott: So Governor Reagan wins in the fall against President [Jimmy] Carter, a very dramatic victory. You mentioned that when he approached you in February there were some issues brewing in California and on the court. I think you used the word disarray. Would you be willing to tell us a little bit more about the situation?

Clark: Yes. Rose Bird, now deceased, was the Chief Justice. The philosophic splits, particularly in the criminal area, and those who believe that judges should be interpreting and enforcing the law rather than writing or rewriting the law, I was considered somewhat their champion and I wrote my share plus of dissents to the more liberal wing of that court.

Knott: You were in the minority more often than not?

Clark: Oh, yes, over and over again. There were two of us, Justice [Frank K.] Richardson and myself, who maintained the more traditional role of the court, so I stayed. However, he'd indicated that he did want me to join the administration. It was revealed that I was under consideration for Secretary of Agriculture and for Attorney General, but he had mysteriously drawn an X on the table of organization under Al Haig's name. It was the only X that he had placed on the table of organization proposed by the kitchen cabinet. Helene Von Damm reported on all this. She was secretary of that appointments process. So a great game of the committee was guessing who Mr. X was. The President-elect didn't know Al Haig, had some questions about the appointment, but he was too nice to question the name. But the X turned out to be me.

I can't recall whether the first call was made by him or by Ed Meese asking that I come back to consider appointment, primarily Deputy Secretary of State. I told him he'd called the wrong man, I had no experience in foreign policy, foreign affairs, defense, or the other things that would be required in that position. The President said, "Bill, that's exactly why I need you back here." I went back.

Knott: So in other words, he wanted somebody, a fresh face, completely—what did he mean by that?

Clark: Well, he had always been concerned, as long as I knew him, about the State Department process. At times when no one else was around, he'd refer to them as "these people in striped pants," as being not sufficiently in touch with the American public or the national needs and particularly as related to the Taiwan, Red China relationship, and so he, as the press called it, wanted a set of eyes and ears in the State Department. The Congressmen termed it a different way, not my words but [Robert] Lagomarsino said Ronald Reagan wanted to create an American desk at the State Department.

Knott: Secretary Haig writes in his memoirs that he heard that right up until the last minute you were very hesitant about taking this position and in fact, if you could have—he tells some story about actually trying to intercept the person carrying the message that you had agreed, your letter of resignation I guess it was. Is there anything to that?

Clark: I read that. That's incorrect. Now Uncle Al, as I call him, and I was Uncle Bill to him, we enjoyed a good relationship, but at times fantasy suddenly appears under the door, over the transom, and that was one of the fantasies. No, no, listen. I couldn't say no to the President. I found it very interesting. I had a health problem at the time and was told by Stanford doctors I shouldn't increase the stress, but that didn't stop me either.

Knott: You've done it a little already, but could you give us just a bit of an assessment of Al Haig?

Clark: Clare Boothe Luce, who was a good friend and law client, I had known Clare from the 1950s, I guess just after her daughter was killed near the Stanford campus in an auto accident. She said, "Bill, not for the money but just for our entertainment, you've got to write a book called *My One Year of the Care and Feeding of Al Haig in the State Department*." But Al shared, really, many of the President's ideas and views of international relations, particularly on the Soviet Union. The times Al didn't really realize the sensitivity and the relationship or the nexus between State and the White House, he had the feeling, sometimes legitimately, that some of the senior staff at the White House simply did not accept his presence. They feared that "Al is going to start World War III here very soon if we're not careful." So there was a real dichotomy at times and of course that's been written.

But no, I had to help write his resignation letter and he wasn't sure he wanted to turn it in that Friday afternoon in June, 1982. I said, "Al, there's going to be a press conference at 3 o'clock announcing that your resignation has been accepted. Prudence suggests that we've just got to follow through." He'd threatened to resign on several occasions and Ronald Reagan, starting in the first gubernatorial days, if a resignation was threatened he just felt in principle he should always accept it. The only exception I can recall is George Shultz due to the intervention of [James] Baker, Deaver, and Mrs. Reagan. The President was precluded from accepting those. I know he did not ever appreciate the threat to resign if someone could not have his or her way. That was red-letter law.

Knott: There were reports in the press at the time about your confirmation as Deputy Secretary of State. Was that an uncomfortable process for you? I know that some of them would kind of zing you with, "What's the capital of Zimbabwe?" or whatever.

Clark: No. Frankly I rather enjoyed it. I think one of my first questions from a Senator was, "Tell us what has been your experience in foreign policy or foreign affairs." My answer was, "Senator, 36 hours in Santiago, Chile, in 1967," which was the truth. He thought I was kidding but I was not. I had to go to Santiago at the Governor's request on our first day to see a Sargent Shriver, Lyndon Johnson program between California and Chile and a Great Society program I found to be untenable and corrupt and had to be canceled. Spent a weekend down there.

No, I was not uncomfortable. Senator [Joe] Biden later pulled me aside and said, "Judge Clark, I didn't know the answers to most of my questions myself, but the staff felt that we should go through this routine." No, I appreciated the fact that after all, it's much better to get into a new position of responsibility on the ground floor or below, as there's only one way you can go and

that's up. But I had some good tutors again. Al Haig said that he had had two people, [Walter] Stoessel and someone else briefing me. That was not the case. [Lawrence] Eagleburger tried to give me a 72-hour crash course in foreign policy, foreign affairs.

Knott: How did that go?

Clark: Well, obviously, not very well. We were in the wrong ballpark most of the time, and he knew it and I knew it. It was an interesting process. I had to go before the Senate and the House on many occasions thereafter, both as Acting Secretary of State and later as Secretary of the Interior. After a while the routine became very routine, and we were briefed and I would spend all night the night before in anticipation of certain key questions from certain Senators that were predictable. I would always start my answer by saying, "Senator, I'm certainly glad you asked that question. It's bothered me for a long time and we've all discussed it and thought about it," and then give a fairly well-prepared statement in answer, which wouldn't necessarily satisfy the Senator but also gave our position on policy and made his or her day because their involvement would be shown on their hometown TV station that night. I'm not belittling the hearing process on the one hand, but often they're not very productive.

Knott: Could you give us some sense of the role that you played as Deputy Secretary? Much was made in the press that you were sort of Haig's go-between between himself and the White House and the White House staff. Was that the lion's share of your responsibilities?

Clark: No, not really. That was actually a very little part of my daily activities. He was wonderful to work with. Interestingly enough, for having been a four-star general and NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] commander, he didn't particularly enjoy or even request staff meetings. While he would be talking to Bob Woodward or the press or someone over breakfast, I always led the staff meetings across the hall. I encouraged him over and again to come in and at least make an appearance, so they could see that he was alive and well and in command.

Each morning, I had the room with maybe 30 people and staff, assistant secretaries and above and two undersecretaries. I rather enjoyed it. I learned more from the questions in the morning than they learned from my answers, but it created a collegial atmosphere that worked very well. Al always wanted me to know that his door was open to me at any time and any meeting, and he wanted me to be part of any meeting except Woodward and a few other people, press people, with whom he had developed relationships over the years.

He liked to do one-on-one meetings upstairs over breakfast, but otherwise he wanted me in every one of his meetings, which was unusual for a Cabinet member, particularly where you're dealing with highly sensitive things. Very often those would be more valid, word got around in the State Department rather quickly, all eight floors. He effectively made me his alter ego and he liked to travel, in the European theater particularly. So I think the record will show I was Acting Secretary of State on some 25 occasions. As I said, it was Uncle Al and Uncle Bill and still is.

Knott: You still keep in touch?

Clark: We were on a seminar together not too long ago. I know he was disappointed that in the final analysis I had to enter at the President's request and obtain the resignation. He wasn't convinced for a while that President Reagan really meant he was accepting the resignation, but after several dry runs Al would frequently call me and say, "Why does he allow me to twist in the wind?" I said, "He's not. You can walk into his office anytime you want subject to prior scheduling any particular morning." But he was never really comfortable with either the press or the President.

Remember now, those who may be reading this 50 years from now, in the Nixon administration Al Haig was effectively the acting President. At times I had the feeling that Al felt he could do a better job of President than the President himself, not just during the Reagan times but at other times as well. He's certainly a great American and had our interests at heart, but he would come up with some strong ideas sometimes that hadn't really been thought out and of course, those would shake the White House—particularly Mr. Baker—that Al wanted to invade Cuba this day or that, whereas Shultz was far more cautious and reserved in his expression of ideas.

Knott: Did you ever get the impression—I mean he felt that there were certain members of the White House staff who were constantly trying to undermine him.

Clark: Deaver and Baker particularly, yes, and [Richard] Darman, of course.

Knott: So there was something to that.

Clark: Yes, I think so. There were some games being played at the White House from day one regarding State.

Knott: Could I ask you to comment on an event that occurred very early in the Reagan Presidency and that was the assassination attempt on President Reagan in March 1981. Of course Secretary Haig played a major role in terms of the scene in the White House Press Room where he said that he was in control for the time being, or words to that effect. What are your memories of that day?

Clark: Well, when we received word, in fact it reminded me of the first time I ever met him, upon my arrival. By the way, that's another little fantasy, he didn't choose me as deputy. He had Stoessel or [Robert] McFarlane in mind as deputy, in my opinion. That's why I had a little trepidation when I first met him as to whether I would be acceptable. He didn't choose me. But when I first met him he said, "Judge, I want you to run this building because I'm going to run the world." [laughter]

When he left the office the day the President was shot, when we received word of the attempt on the President's life, he said, "I'll go over there and you man the ship here." I'm satisfied that he did not go over to "take over" the government. This has been very unfair on the part of some of those who were there and later said he had bigger ideas. I'm satisfied from what he told me, and what others said within hours, that he was merely trying to get some order in the situation room itself, and particularly control press statements as they would affect our allies and the Soviet Union with whom we were at Cold War and not always so cold.

He had been through more crises than anyone else in that room and he knew the Vice President was on his way back from Texas, I think. But to suggest he was going to take over the White House or the government or other statements that were later made, press and otherwise, I think is highly unfair and inaccurate.

Knott: How soon after the assassination attempt did you see President Reagan again and did you notice any change? Obviously there was an immediate short-term change in his condition, but there have been some reports that he never quite recovered from that assassination attempt. Was that your impression?

Clark: No. Needless to say, that was speculated, but I'm confident there was no change in the man's outlook or attitude other than—well, one example. I was with him when he was with the Holy Father in Rome for the first time. Remember the two of them were shot four or five weeks apart, and somewhat jokingly but maybe not really, they said that they interpreted that as God's wake-up call that they had to work faster to get more done in the time allotted to each on earth.

I don't think mentally or physically he changed at all. We've all, not all but certainly I've had my share of close-to-death experiences, winding up in intensive care, looking at the ceiling for 72 hours. You do weigh things out, but I don't think that it really changes a person. We discussed this, just as when Al Haig had his triple or quadruple heart bypass, there was a theory running around, in fact, someone had a medical analysis done to show that personalities change after major heart surgery. So there was all that speculation, but I saw no evidence at all of any change in his outlook. He was the same man to me.

I knew he was tired. After all he was 70 when he became President. I'm 72 as we sit here. Priorities change and fatigue is a factor for all of us. In fact, I think some book revealed that toward the end of his first term, I seriously discussed whether he should go for another term or return to the green pastures of California. I guess I was the only one brave enough to approach that at that time and that was just in one-on-one conversation. I could see that question tracing its way. I reached the conclusion that he had thought about that before I even brought it up. It was not based on any lack of faith in his ability to do his job. I know that I was running out of steam myself, 20 years younger than he, and longed for California.

I think I made the point with him: your policies are in place, the Soviet empire is less of a tiger, and they were superior to us in both conventional and nuclear ability when we arrived. While we couldn't trumpet that, that was the situation and then having doubled the Defense budget I felt that the reins could be handed over to President [George H. W.] Bush. He didn't ask for that opinion, but we knew each other well enough that I felt I could state the case.

Knott: Do you have a vague sense of when this conversation occurred? This is before he formally announced that he was going to run again?

Clark: Oh, yes.

Knott: And you raised it because? Why did you raise it?

Clark: I don't know, kind of a "what if." We often had those kinds of conversations. See that picture over there, that's at Williamsburg. We didn't know there was a cameraman in there and we were waiting for Mrs. [Margaret] Thatcher to arrive. She was late, in a chopper for a conference. The reason I thought that was kind of a typical pose is that we would be sitting, not too worried about anything, and kind of a "what if" situation.

[BREAK]

Knott: We've been talking about your career in your position as Deputy Secretary of State, and I think we were talking about the assassination attempt and the President's health and outlook after that. Could you talk a little now about the transition from being Deputy Secretary of State to becoming National Security Advisor to the President and how that came about?

Clark: Yes. Richard Allen, who served during the campaign as advisor on foreign policy—I don't know whether he had been asked to resign or whether he felt he should resign over somewhat of a minor incident, but I think it was larger than that. There were real communication problems between Haig and Allen. They rarely spoke. Again, I had to carry the ball there. But not a lot of vital information. He was receiving that by machine, and personal communication was not really necessary. But there was also an impediment felt by both State and the White House that Allen could not access the President directly. He had to go through Ed Meese. Ed was so busy in other matters that the NSC [National Security Council] was really not working to its traditional role.

These different elements converged at the end of 1981. So in Palm Springs during the Christmas holidays, the President asked me to take that duty and also wished to change the method of communication. I was to have direct access at any time I felt it necessary or he at any time felt it necessary to call me in on national security issues, that the emphasis the first year had been on the economy and domestic issues. He felt that things were falling behind in foreign policy, foreign affairs, defense, intelligence, and wanted me to restructure the National Security Council, the decision-making process and recommendations, study groups.

So that was the mandate. I inherited the Allen staff, which I restructured, elevated the major principals in the NSC, principal staff members to Special Assistant to the President, and began a 9:30 briefing of the President if it had not been necessary to reach him beforehand. He would have studied the President's daily brief produced by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] before coming down from the residence. So he'd be ready for the briefing, have questions from the daily brief booklet, which would have been brought down to me about five in the morning with a very limited distribution. In that briefing would be the Vice President if he were available, Meese, and Baker. I would frequently take in one or more members of my own staff who might have been working the particular issue for the night, so he or she could give greater detail or answer questions from the President or from the Vice President. The others did not join in this conversation.

I attended the Baker briefings earlier in the morning and he my own, but we had kind of an arrangement that we wouldn't burden the system by becoming involved in the discussion itself. It was more for informational purposes, but I always invited them. Deaver would sometimes come in and out but never stay for very long.

Knott: So did I hear correctly, your day would begin at 5:30 in the morning?

Clark: Oh, sometimes earlier depending on the issues. I'd get to the situation room to read the traffic, realizing that at that time State Department would receive some 4,500 communications a day and [L. Paul] Jerry Bremer was running, Jerry who is now in Iraq, a young foreign-service officer, ran the line for me. Needless to say, we didn't go over those 4,500, they would be attenuated to plenty of paper to read and some from the agency and often from Cap in the Defense Department. So we would sort that out to be able to brief the President in half an hour, sometimes 45 minutes, on the current issues of the day and the night.

Knott: So you would meet with President Reagan usually at 9:30 each morning.

Clark: That's right, and then during the day, as things might develop, we'd work ourselves in, or at least myself. If he had a particular interest in a particular issue, whether it be Poland or Taiwan, the Ambassador and I, sometimes visiting Ambassadors, particularly if he had met them and knew them, I'd take them in for a few minutes to say hello and give an update on their post and the country they were situated in. He enjoyed that.

If Bill Casey were in the area, hadn't seen the President for a while, I'd take Bill in just to show that he was alive and well.

Knott: Judge Clark, do you recall if there were certain issues or certain areas of the world that particularly captured President Reagan's attention, that he showed a greater interest in than others?

Clark: Clearly, because remember we're at the height of the Cold War, the [Leonid] Brezhnev period and touch and go. Some of it has been written, some of it not yet. His interest was in the Soviet empire, 300 million enslaved people behind the walls. His total confidence that the wall, the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain, would come apart in time.

I used to kid him, "If you're so smart, when is it going to happen?" And he said, "You just wait, watch." No one else was as hopeful and sure of that happening as Ronald Reagan, certainly not people like [Henry] Kissinger who felt that the Cold War would be a thing of long duration, much longer than occurred. So the Soviet empire was the key in his mind. He jumped to that almost every briefing, particularly Poland. He had a great interest in Poland, the hub of the empire, realizing that the Iron Curtain countries, Soviet bloc surrounded that hub. His feeling was once we were able to assist in the unraveling with Poland that the entirety would come apart. And of course, that's exactly what has happened.

So that was of high interest. The two Chinas, always of interest. Those were primary, but that didn't mean he blocked off the others. The PDB [President's Daily Brief] would show the hot spots each morning.

Knott: Conventional wisdom has it that President Reagan was a somewhat detached executive. I was wondering if you would give us your reflections on that observation. Accurate? Inaccurate?

Clark: He could read at age five, read newspapers at the age of six, which showed that he was a pretty wise little boy. He was also wise enough to know that the smartest kid in class was usually the least popular. So, unlike a certain unnamed President who followed him, he would not get up in the morning and go before the public and say, "Guess what I've done for you people today." President Reagan was far more humble as President. I'd say, "Now, as your first press opportunity, why don't you announce that we've just done this, or that the Secretary of that has just done that." He'd say, "No, let the Secretary announce that."

See over there in the window, a piece of that etched crystal, which he gave each Cabinet member I think on the first Christmas. It says, "We can accomplish anything if we don't worry about who gets the credit."

He gave the impression of detachment, I guess, to certain people who didn't know him, or he'd give what I'd call a parable or vignette that may have sounded as if it was out of left field and didn't really relate to the issue at hand, but it always did. There was a nexus between his comment or little story of the past and the issue that happened to be confronting us at the moment. So people who didn't know him felt that that was detachment or cover for not knowing the facts of a particular case, but they were wrong.

Knott: One of the other bits of conventional wisdom, both at the time and that persists to this day, is that the President was somewhat unable or unwilling to discipline his staff, that you would have these personnel situations that he found very difficult to deal with. Is that an accurate perception?

Clark: He may not have dealt directly, but he kept it in mind when someone misbehaved and waited for the opportunity, usually for me when I was chief of staff in the gubernatorial days or later in the Cabinet, he would expect one of us to take the necessary step. Other Presidents, in my study, have done the same. Nixon never fired anyone. When he wanted to get rid of the Secretary of the Interior, Walter Hickel, he sent Cap Weinberger, head of OMB [Office of Management and Budget], down the street to take care of it. But I think this is an executive privilege, an executive ability. Certainly he had no hesitation to acknowledge and deal with error committed by Cabinet members or staff.

In the gubernatorial days, we used the old Marine rule: make as many mistakes as you want but never make the same one twice or that would be the end of the job. Things were just too sensitive and too fast moving and there had to be the guy who would carry that out. Some of my best friends I had to separate from service. But we're still friends because they realized that it had to be, and I wouldn't have done it had it not had the approval of the President or the Governor himself.

The give and take among staff members, between Baker and myself, was far overplayed, over-read, over-written, but there has to be that give and take among Cabinet members as far as arriving at the truth and arriving at the right decision. The Governor/President appreciated that fact. That's why, at the roundtable he liked to hear not just personal views but those personal views not attacked, on the one hand, but questioned by others as we did in a courtroom. There was a lot more lawyer in Ronald Reagan than people realize.

Knott: Could you elaborate on that? I've never heard anyone—

Clark: Well, he appreciated debate. It's true he did not enjoy contentiousness, but I don't know many people who do, frankly, particularly people in positions of trust and confidence. That's why, in gubernatorial days and the first term in Washington, he just didn't allow certain people, including his own wife, to get into the critical stages of appointments, personnel appointments. He would listen to their questions, but if it got contentious or bitter he'd cut it off. No, he was a disciplinarian but not in overt or direct ways. He knew the moment would come when someone would have to step aside or give in, but he was always willing to listen, particularly when it came time to elevate, or—the Attorney General appointment is an example.

He told me one morning from his desk that Jim Baker wanted the Attorney General spot when William French Smith resigned, and that he was going to give Jim that position. I said, "Mr. President, have you thought about others in the process such as Ed Meese, who has been with you loyally for many years?" And he hadn't really thought that one through. After a three- or four-minute conversation he said, "Well, you're right, Bill, it should probably go to Ed, shouldn't it?" Same thing with my replacement as National Security Advisor. Jim Baker and Mike Deaver had been to him and arranged and even prepared the press conference at a certain hour that same afternoon to announce that Jim Baker would be the new National Security Advisor and Mike Deaver would be the new Chief of Staff. He told me this walking down a hall when I was pulling him out of the Oval Office to go down to a National Security meeting. He was late, members were all seated. He was going to announce that to the NSC. Going down the hall I said, "Mr. President, you know this is a major appointment, have you talked to—" and I named them off. The only one of the NSC principals he had talked to was George Shultz, who thought it was a good idea.

I simply said that before announcing it he had to talk to other principals, Casey, [Jeane] Kirkpatrick, Weinberger, Meese. And he didn't appreciate that because he felt that that was not necessarily the thing to do but to get it behind him, because there was a lot of speculation at that time as to who would succeed me. Walking down the hall, I felt there would be some pain over that and at least he owed it in courtesy to "roundtable." Roundtable was his term, in so many cases, but sometimes there were exceptions. So at the end of the NSC meeting he pulled the principals into my little office to discuss it. I think Bud McFarlane was chosen in compromise in this case, but—another example of where he would effectively be programmed on a certain course and skipped over the roundtabling in the hope of getting it done in a hurry.

The same thing occurred with the Shultz appointment. There was no press leakage on that at all. Mr. [David] Gergen was very upset with me in not having been able to get that information a little earlier, which would have been in the newspapers within hours.

Knott: Could you comment on the so-called troika arrangement of Baker as Chief of Staff, Deaver as Deputy Chief of Staff, and Ed Meese as Counsellor to the President? How did that work?

Clark: The press termed them a troika because based on their backgrounds and positions—I had expected Ed Meese to be Chief of Staff, but there's been a lot written on that. Baker and Deaver were very close and they had a very good, very close relationship with Mrs. Reagan. Ed was always too busy to cultivate what you would call a close or heartfelt type of relationship. So they didn't, in my opinion, really work as a team or troika. There was a division of labor, but they did not act in concert at any time.

In fact, I always felt that Ed was one, underestimated, and two, mistreated by the other two. So it was not a matter of the three musketeers by any means.

Knott: Would you say the main difference between Baker and Deaver versus Meese, to put it in blunt language like that, was an ideological difference?

Clark: In part. I think Deaver and Baker had the attitude that they had to protect the President from himself. Meese had the attitude, "Let's let Reagan be Reagan number one, and secondly let's advance what we know to be his vision and his innermost philosophy and thoughts." That was apparent over and over again.

Knott: You were often lumped together with the so-called hardliners or ideologues in the media. Would you comment on that?

Clark: I don't know, labels—When I was on the Supreme Court people would say, "Well, you're conservative, aren't you?" I'd say, "I dislike labels." Ronald Reagan dislikes labels, and if you look at one definition of a conservative, which is "defender of the status quo," I'm not a conservative because I'm not happy with status quo. These labels are misleading. I don't know whether I was a hardliner or not, I never worried about press activity. I know Al Haig did. In fact, I convinced Al Haig once to stop reading all newspapers for 30 days and see what life would be like. He said, "Bill, that's a good idea, I think I'll try it." It lasted 24 hours.

I've always tried to reflect the views of my boss. Rarely did we have a difference of opinion. I can think of only one as we sit here and that is on compulsory military training. Watching Switzerland and my own military experience, I always felt that the draft or some type of compulsory training, whether it's civil training or military, for a certain age youth in the teens would be particularly good for the country and good for youth. The President felt it should all be voluntary. I still feel the same way. But that was not a big issue, we didn't have to decide if we were going to go voluntary or draft.

I think that every other issue, we took his vision, created the staff and Cabinet, the underlying policy, and then the implementation. I felt that vision. I think now, more and more—several books are coming out in the next month or two including a book on his letters—his correspondence shows that vision was very good. In hindsight we're able to review that now. Looking back, I don't know that I would have urged an opinion contrary to the decisions that he did make on major issues.

Knott: Did you see your role as National Security Advisor—are you somebody who is simply an honest broker, making sure that all opinions are being sent to the President, or are you somebody who occasionally has to take a policy advocacy role?

Clark: The broker position should be the primary one, as it is in the case of Condoleezza Rice now and particularly where you have pretty good division, philosophic and otherwise, among the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and CIA, Director of Intelligence. You would expect them to have different views and recommendations on a given issue. With a staff of roughly 100 at the NSC, Henry Kissinger called the National Security Advisor the most dangerous office in Washington for the reason that you don't have a safety net around you like the Secretary of State or other Cabinet members. You're hanging out there to referee this game among these major agencies, in what is really an inverted funnel in which this material flows. You've got to take the options, synthesize them, and present them to the Chief Executive, the Commander-in-Chief, the President himself. But he also expects you to make a recommendation, which he may or may not follow. So that's kind of a brokerage deal to the point of getting information into your offices, but then you have to take a position.

I would try to anticipate what he would want to do, giving him all options and often using the same memo that I used in Sacramento, four paragraphs: the issue, the facts, the alternatives, and the recommendation. So you come as National Security Advisor to a policy role once you realize what the President has decided, and then you've got to try to enforce it downward through that same inverted funnel. Often that's interpreted as being the bad guy, the cop, the enforcer.

Then you get these contentions, though Condoleezza has gotten off very nicely so far, very effective National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice. Particularly from those whose option was not chosen within those principles. "He's running the show." Or, "Did he present our position objectively, as he should?" So it's tough, a tough shot. That probably explains in part why not many of us serve for more than two years. We kind of wear out finally. In my case, in the national interest I felt that with the division increasing on the Baker side, the domestic side as they approached the national election, the pressure was on and it might be better if someone else stepped into the role of National Security Advisor, just change for change's sake. The President finally agreed to that.

So broker yes, policy no, though Kissinger certainly was a policy man when he held the position, rightly or wrongly. I leaned on him many times for his opinion. In humility he would tell me mistakes he made, what to avoid. It's an unusual position.

Knott: Did you have any contact with Zbigniew Brzezinski at all?

Clark: Yes, on the Poland question I did. I also started the custom of briefing the three former Presidents, Carter, Nixon, and Ford, tried to get to them sometimes every month, every other month with my briefing book. I'd do it at night after my own duties were complete. I'd fly up to Teterboro, New Jersey, to brief President Nixon, which was really the most fascinating of the briefings. I, as briefer, usually became briefee as he took over the conversation, but it was helpful.

I got to know Mr. Carter very well, in Plains. I would carry a lot of interesting ideas back to the President along with any personal messages from these men. In fact, Carter and I became good friends. When he read that I was going from NSC to Interior he phoned and said that he'd like to fill in some of his conservation friends who might otherwise be shooting at me after the Jim Watt experience, but he didn't want to do so without checking with me. I said, "Certainly, Mr. President, I'd love that kind of help." He said, "Now, I want you to come down and shoot quail with me. You're the only member of the administration who has gone out of his way to be nice." I thought he was just being nice on the quail thought. He did phone a lot of his friends saying, "Support Clark for Interior."

When I'd been in office maybe a month he called again and said, "Now get down here and let's shoot quail," which I did. It was a great experience. He asked me to consider joining his dispute resolution group after I left government, but I felt that that wouldn't fit. So I leaned on a lot of good people, and I was very privileged to be a part of all that.

Knott: How often would you go and visit these ex-Presidents?

Clark: Twenty years later it's hard to recall, but I'd have my staff prepare a briefing book on current issues, including classified material. I knew their interests. With President Carter it would be, of course, Middle East, for President Nixon East-West issues, President Ford usually economic ones. So I kind of focused the briefing on what I knew they were interested in. They appreciated it very much.

Knott: I was wondering if you might be willing to comment on your relationship with other key foreign policy figures in the Reagan administration and also if you could just give us an assessment of these individuals, starting with George Shultz.

Clark: George and I had a very good relationship. I came up with his name when it was clear that Secretary Haig would, from his own volition sooner or later and even for health reasons, step aside. My first choice was Cap Weinberger as Secretary of State and that was vetoed—not vetoed, because he didn't have veto power, but it was such a close call, we were conferring with Baker, Deaver, and Nancy and of course the President. Kissinger and Bud McFarlane were put into the hat as well.

So we were really concentrating on three people. Of course Jeane Kirkpatrick's name came in. They just felt that it was not the time for Jeane. My first choice was Cap, with whom I've felt since 1980 really a very close friend, and I thought he'd make the perfect Secretary of State. Shultz had held Cabinet roles but very little foreign policy, foreign affairs, so there was a void there, but a good diplomat. So by consensus it finally came down to Shultz. I phoned him and

said in confidence, “There may be a change in Secretary of State. Would you be interested, George? I hope you are.”

He said, “Yes, but I have to wait for Steve Bechtel to come out of Alaska from a fishing trip and talk to him about it.” I said, “George, you have 36 hours.” He said, “Do you mind if I run it by my wife?” I said, “No, I’m sure we’d understand that.” He was in London, I got him on a secure phone. We were certainly close from the beginning and throughout. Then some unfortunate publicity came out that somehow I’d taken over the field of foreign policy, foreign affairs. That’s when I recall Al Haig’s admonition. He said, “Once you appear in this town on the cover of *Time* or *Newsweek*, count your days in the shop.” But even before that there was the statement that I was becoming the dominant player in this field. That was the last thing I wanted.

So I said, “George, come over and start meetings with the President one on one, you’ve always had that ability.” He said okay and did. I’d stay down in my office. He’d take notes with the President and then his first stop after that he’d come down and tell me exactly what was said on both sides. That way they gave the appearance that he had a closer relationship with the President.

I know his wife was smarting under this publicity that he was losing position and I was kind of taking over. I did other things to try to reduce that image. We had a good relationship. Shortly after his appointment, President Nixon called me and said, “Bill, I want you to tell President Reagan one problem with your new Secretary of State.” I said, “What’s that?” He said, “My experience was, and I’m sure you’re going to experience the same thing, a wonderful ability to, when things look iffy or are going wrong, he’ll contend he never heard about the issue and was never briefed and was not a part.” I said, “I’ll tell the President,” and I wish I had. Certainly that occurred, like the Bud McFarlane thing in the middle. I would never have sent Bud anywhere without clearing it with George. Or the Suriname situation or the fleet off of Nicaragua. That was all programmed very carefully, yet the contention was that Clark was starting World War III.

So that burned me a few times, but it didn’t really bother me that much. That all played a part in my decision that it would be in the national interest and the President’s interest if I stepped aside at a certain point, which I did. I thought that he would be, if not elated, pleased that that was opening up. But Shultz kept asking me, “Why did you resign? You’re leaving a void.”

I’d say, “Come on, George, you know the answer to all that.” Then his book came out. My staff really got upset over that. They wanted to do a rejoinder because there were things in George’s book that are clearly inaccurate in the same issue—I had no reason for going through them. I don’t know. Everything was fine until I left and then in rewriting history a bit he was less than gentle on many of us, Cap as well. A very negative, almost bitter book in some ways. I could never determine why. But we had a good working relationship. We were on the phone together four, five, six times a day. So does that answer about Shultz?

Knott: Absolutely.

Clark: I kept pushing that he was the premier foreign policy person, and yet as Kissinger said, “No one has ever been more overtaken by the department and the bureaucracy than George

Shultz." I thought he gave the impression of being tough but he was, in my opinion, and certainly Kissinger and Brzezinski as well, pretty much the tail wagging the dog at State. I think the President, while not commenting frequently, realized that as well. As I say, George Shultz is the only person who has ever, in my knowledge or recall, threatened a resignation that wasn't actually picked up. I think it happened a couple of times.

Knott: This so-called feud between Shultz and Weinberger, overstated in the press or—?

Clark: I think they—

Knott: I think that Shultz in his memoirs pretty much confirms it.

Clark: I think that began at Bechtel, they were both executives there, and I had to step in on that several times, but I think it was overwritten too. It's the Washington press again. We see it now between [Donald] Rumsfeld and Colin Powell. Overwritten and overemphasized, I think. There has to be give and take between the two departments, for the health of the system. It wasn't so personal between Cap and George. They recognized the national interest and the common good and were working for that. Neither one was power hungry in my opinion. As much for the departments, there was far more debate at lower levels of those two departments than between the two principals. They have their professional jealousies, but again, it's for the most part healthy in my opinion.

Then, of course, Cap and I have always been very close in mind and thought and heart, on issues small and large. Jeane Kirkpatrick, very close, still are. I just received some photos from her on the commissioning of the USS *Ronald Reagan*, which we attended recently. I had to take her role or part in contentions between the Secretary of State, first Haig and then later Shultz, and then Jeane, who was our UN [United Nations] representative. Had a whole fistful of resignations from her that I would never deliver to the President. Jeane gave me her latest resignation, I filed it. He said, "Good." He liked Jeane very much and vice versa. She did a good job at the UN, but there's always that professional tension between Secretary of State and the UN representative.

Finally I said, "Mr. President." This was before going into an enlarged Cabinet meeting of maybe 35 sitting at the roundtable. I said, "We've got to do something about the Jeane–Haig situation or we're going to lose Jeane." He smiled, and I knew he had the answer. He did. I opened the door, the whole Cabinet Room stood up. Jeane was at the far end through protocol. He'd never go down there, he'd go halfway and be seated, and everyone else would sit down. He sat between Weinberger and Haig.

But this particular day, he walked right past his own chair and everyone turned around to see where in the world he was going. He walked clear to the end of the table, kissed Jeane on the cheek, went back and sat down, and that ended that. People were wondering, *What was that all about?* That was typical Ronald Reagan. He didn't like to get between contending staff or disciplining staff, but he would have these little barbs at times or in this case a kiss on the cheek. Haig got the word right away. I think he really expected to be talked to about the Jeane relationship that day, but that was the Reagan scolding.

Knott: Interesting. I think one of the issues that came up that caused some tension between you and Secretary Shultz involved the use of lie detectors in terms of tracking down leaks. Would you care to comment on that?

Clark: Yes. Again, that was overblown. The President was so exasperated, as was I, over the Baker-Gergen leakage that was occurring from some of these "sensitive positives." One particular morning Bud McFarlane—and we knew that the information that was on the front page of the *Post* was known to about five people. It put McFarlane's life in jeopardy in Beirut, literally, giving his location and what he was doing. I talked to Bill Smith about it, who was Attorney General at the time, and I said, "Bill, our intelligence agencies use the polygraph in certain situations. I think this is so serious, there's been a series of such events that I talked to the President and suggested that we should at least threaten the use of a polygraph. He's given us all his lines about this and he's expressed anger and it hasn't worked. We have an idea who leaked this. Can we use the polygraph or at least threaten it?" Bill said yes.

We had a closed session, including Shultz, Baker, Deaver, Meese, and Smith I believe, in the Oval Office, called by the President. Told that we were considering the use of a polygraph, and that story leaked. Shultz reacted by saying, "I'll resign if I have to do a polygraph." Jim Baker sat there and for a change said nothing. There was silence. Of course the polygraph wasn't used, nor did I expect it to be, but we were so exasperated we didn't know what else to do. After the polygraph story was leaked, things did dry up. So they finally got the message.

Knott: You've mentioned Jim Baker a few times, I wonder if you might elaborate a little more on your assessment of Baker as Chief of Staff.

Clark: Oh, yes. Jim had the domestic side and the political side of the White House responsibilities; I had the foreign policy, intelligence, defense side, so there shouldn't have been tension. Yet Jim was a competitor, at times a combative one, using Darman and Gergen somewhat as soldiers at times. I was told over and again that they started their inner staff meetings in the mornings by saying, "How do we roll Clark today?" Someone had to explain to me what roll meant. I didn't know whether it meant exercise in the gym or what. I just felt I didn't have time with all of our hot-button issues to get into gamesmanship with them, but some of my staff did, out of protection or loyalty, I guess.

On a personal basis Jim and I had no problems, except that I guess there's one occasion where they had a falling out with one of their own people. Faith Whittlesey, who was Ambassador to Switzerland, was recalled to handle part of Jim's domestic outreach, I guess it was called. They didn't like her conservative views on some of these issues and decided to do a little campaign against her in the press, hoping that she might go away.

We liked what Faith was doing on the other side. So in one of my sessions, in front of the President, I said, "Jim, someone on your staff"—we knew who it was, it was Gergen—"is brutalizing poor Faith Whittlesey unfairly in the press." I'd already brought it up once or twice. So the President merely said, "I want it to stop."

I got back to my office and Jim just couldn't contain his rage—that I shouldn't be interfering with his group. But I felt I had to. So from that point on things did not go well. They had an arrangement with the press that we did not have on our side of the White House that Jim gave an automatic hour per week to preferred press people, and Darman did too. These were closed sessions and we could always expect the next day to see something taking us apart. Lou Cannon wrote an article on the front page of the *Post* revealing some very sensitive stuff about the NSC. It was so bad that Nancy got upset and saw me and said, "How can you people release this?"

I said, "Nancy, I can assure you that we did not." She was really angry with me to the point that I thought I'd get my marching orders on that one article. I knew Cannon well enough to phone him and say, "Lou, I know you don't reveal sources, but I'm in trouble and I know you didn't get that from any of us. We have an idea where you did get it. Would you at least phone Nancy," and he had that relationship, "and tell her that it did not come out of the NSC?" Which he did.

That's an example of some of the gamesmanship that was beginning to get to me and I think affect our national interests and that's what prompted me finally—But the personal relationship with Jim, we see each other from time to time. We corresponded when he lost his little granddaughter this past year. Jim had to worry about the political side and the next presidential and did things out of that concern at times, which we had to question on the national security side. For instance, with [Richard] Pipes' contention when we came into office, the Soviets were superior in both nuclear and conventional weaponry and wanted to point that out to support the defense budget and other things. That was severely vetoed by the political side as causing undue fear within the country. So that was an example of the debate that would go on.

Knott: Would it be fair to say that Jim Baker was one of the people who thought that President Reagan had to be protected, had a certain lack of confidence in him?

Clark: Both Deaver and Darman and again, Jim Baker, that came out over and again. Because as many have said, Ronald Reagan, even by some of his own staff and Cabinet, was the most underestimated person in public life because he just didn't play it out. He kept a lot of people guessing as to whether he did or did not have the facts and the stamina to do the right thing. But in hindsight, obviously, he did, on many counts. So there was the old "Let Reagan be Reagan" school and the other, "Let's protect him from himself." That was in constant tension.

This latest book by Peter Robinson, *How Ronald Reagan Changed My Life,* I just received my copy and it goes into that rather nicely. The speechwriters who had great faith in the Reagan vision and visceral ability on the one hand and how they had to constantly fight the Baker/Darman side to let them express themselves. In the "evil empire" speech, the Berlin Wall speech—

Knott: You mention the "evil empire" speech. Could you tell us a little bit about that? Was there some inner turmoil around the White House as to whether that line should be included or not included?

Clark: Well, the abortion issue. I knew where the President stood on the sanctity and dignity of all human life from conception and how he felt his greatest mistake in his government activities

was signing the Therapeutic Abortion Act in 1967 when we were new. He always said it was misrepresented to him by many on his staff and in the medical community. He said he'd make up for it. He did get into that in the evil empire speech, but barely. At times Ed Meese and I had to bootleg some of the speechwriter stuff in directly to the President and around the Darman machinery. Otherwise we were certain that the President would never even get the opportunity to consider it.

Another example of that, Ronald Reagan I think was the only sitting President ever to have written an essay or small book, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation.* In '83, on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Again there was a tremendous attempt on the part of the same group to not have that published. The President's view was, "Well, I may not be reelected anyway, and then I'll never have an opportunity of getting it out." In fact, I have a copy of a reissue. They asked me to do the prefatory remarks, the preface to that. I can give you a copy in case you don't have it for the archives. [Included with transcript.]

Another example of Ronald Reagan wanting to be his own visionary and having that time been thwarted, but he knew what was going on. He might appear a little naïve in some of these things, but there was no naïveté there. He could read the chemistry in any given room, whether it be the defense budget or speechwriting.

Knott: It's interesting to me that Michael Deaver was part of this Baker/Darman/Gergen group since he goes back to the old days in a sense. I don't know how far you want to comment on that, but how do you explain the defection of one of the old California hands?

Clark: It was not only defection, but some people called it "Potomac fever." When he got back there—Mike was born in Bakersfield, which is a farm town just over the mountain from where we're sitting. He certainly was efficient and loyal to me throughout the Sacramento days. He couldn't have been greater, innovative. But once we got to Washington, the mystery among the Sacramento group, from Helene Von Damm to Nofziger to Meese and many others who were asked to come back with the Governor, President—something happened. I don't know whether it was the water or what. A real breach there. I tried to bridge, restore the relationship, life being the blink of an eye, but I haven't been successful in that regard. I think he worried that not only the President but others of us would embarrass ourselves sooner or later. I hope I've not yet embarrassed our President. Meese certainly hasn't, either in—rather self-serving statements, but let the record stand where it is.

Knott: Another somewhat awkward question. It appears at least from the outside that there were plenty of occasions when Nancy Reagan accepted the Baker/Deaver perspective. Is that an accurate statement?

Clark: Oh, yes, it's been written certainly many times. The real troika, frankly, in the White House, in the opinion of many, would be Nancy, Baker, and Deaver. Whether it was the Don Regan matter or—the litany of incidents involving personnel or attempted policy. But they were so anxious that Ronald Reagan be shown as the Peace President, the Nobel Peace Prize and anything else under that heading. They felt therefore that people like me had to, we used the term earlier, hard-line on the Soviets. Yet I was reflecting Ronald Reagan who said, "I will not go to a

summit unless there is at least one major issue resolved in advance. I want to be able to see the agenda, but we're not going to negotiate for negotiation's sake. Détente has never worked. The only way that we're going to do this is peace through strength, moral strength and military strength." But the three of them, God love them, Nancy, Jim, and Mike, just felt that that was not the way to go into office or to come out of office and be remembered.

Of course in hindsight, the so-called hard-line as Mrs. [Margaret] Thatcher has said of Ronald Reagan, "He brought the wall down and opened the Iron Curtain through strength, not weakness, and without a shot being fired." Well, there were a few shots fired, but not fatal. A clear division there, so I felt we had that all set in motion and it was trying to hand the reins over, maybe not only at my level but a year later at the President's level.

Knott: I've been asking you to comment on some of the other major foreign policy figures, and I was wondering if you might share your reflections on William Casey?

Clark: Oh, Bill. Yes, we loved Bill and in fact, I was just awarded that silver tray here a couple of weeks ago at the Reagan Ranch from the Casey Institute, a medal of honor. He, of course, was a great chairman of the campaign in '80. It was clear that he would be part of the administration. He had a background in intelligence and was a key player in the demise of the Soviet Union through both overt and covert action. He traveled a lot, he was a loner. Of course, I've been accused of that myself. He was a tough individual who knew right from wrong and again had his own vision.

There wasn't a lot of communication, interestingly, between President Reagan and Bill. He passed material to me to take to the President outside the normal channel of communication. I'd say, "Bill, come on in and sit down with him. Put your feet under his desk." He'd say, "No, Bill, you do it." But toward the end I got him more and more—because he had an office right across Executive Avenue in the old office building. The President had great confidence in him, and of course I would attribute the daily brief to Bill personally as having overseen it and suggest that there be more one-on-one communication.

He'd come to the sit [situation] room council meetings, not say much. At times he was inaudible in his speech, but he got kidded about that. I'd say, "Bill, is it the fact that you don't want us to analyze what you're saying, because we can't hear it?" I was at the end of the table, I wouldn't say that in front of others, but we knew each other well enough that we could dig at each other in that regard. He was a very colorful man and well read. He would read one or two books a day, at night. I'm sure you know all that. It was written extensively too. Bobby Inman was not a good fit, Bobby felt he should have that position, it was felt among the others. I finally had to separate that arrangement as well.

But once Bobby went on—I sit next to him in a board meeting, we're good friends—but I had to, again with President Reagan's approval, I got that resignation.

Knott: How much of a role did your faith play in your own view of the Soviet Union and toward communism?

Clark: Well, the fact that it was atheistic had its effect. We knew it would fail. It was a question of how many people it would take down before it did fall. I had very strong feelings from very early readings, the Cardinal [Stefan] Wyszynski experience. I thought he was and still is an unsung hero. But it was more the secular than the theological sense that I knew it was wrong. I'd seen the early Reagan series on communism—on movie or video, probably before video. But like Mr. Reagan himself, I knew it would come down because it lived an untruth. It had to fail. It was an aberration, just one of many. I was very pleased to be able to play a role in advancing that.

At times, when things would get a little wishy-washy within our group, I'd play the old Reagan film series. Not a movie so much as a documentary I should say, on communism. One time I threatened to play it for the President himself and he said, "What, do you think I'm getting soft on the subject, Bill?" No, but it's good to remind ourselves of the treachery of the beginnings and the middle ground of Soviet communism.

Knott: I'm sorry. I'm not sure what series you're referring to. He did a series on—

Clark: Yes, an early series, probably during the 1950s, on—I don't even know who sponsored it. I probably still have a copy of it. It was very well done.

Knott: On the threat of communism?

Clark: The history of communism. A documentary. Now recreated in *The Face of Evil* documentary (attached). He loved movies so much that I would have the agency prepare things, particularly biographical things that we could show on the screen to him. One that comes to mind is Mrs. [Indira] Gandhi. He'd never met her. I asked the agency to do a documentary on her that we could run and that was an interesting meeting.

I offended State. The President asked me, "Do you think it would be all right if, now that I know so much about her, I met with her alone?" I said to the President, "You are the Commander-in-Chief. If you want to meet with her alone, we don't need State Department," which would normally have been present in the conference in the Oval Office. I told them, "We don't need your briefing at the moment and there will be no one else present." They went, "What, no note taker?" I said, "No note taker."

They hit it off very well. He could do that. He got her trust and confidence at a very critical time.

Knott: There was a lot written after the administration about the so-called "holy alliance" between—I'm borrowing a book title from Carl Bernstein—I believe this relationship between the United States government, the Reagan administration, and the Pope, particularly regarding Poland. I'd be interested in any reflections you have on that, the extent to which there was either a formal or informal alliance between the Vatican and the United States.

Clark: For a while there was a suggestion that there was some type of conspiracy or collusion between the two entities, and there was none. There was common mission, common purpose. The President's view was that if Poland started to unravel, the whole Soviet Empire would come

down. We swapped intelligence, and as I recall the Bernstein article, or I guess *Catholic World Report,* interviewed me as well on the subject between the two—in fact, I think you put that in your syllabus, didn't you?

Knott: It's in there somewhere.

Clark: Bernstein was close. I think part of it was a little overdramatic. But factually—and I've not reread it in years—it was not far off. I know that the Vatican denied some of it but I think they had to, Cardinal [Pio] Laghi did. But Casey and I would go up Connecticut Avenue to meet with Cardinal Laghi on Central America and the Soviets and the Poles. We had kind of a code word, "Could we stop in for cappuccino?" That would mean that we had to see him right away. He came to the White House a few times to give us intelligence.

Knott: Was there a difference of opinion regarding Central America? The whole liberation theology—I know the Pope wasn't particularly fond of that.

Clark: That's right. No, I think we and certainly Laghi, who'd been posted in Argentina in the past, was following that closely and we weren't so interested in liberation, church, priests, Maryknollers, and all, except for those of course who were in danger physically and some murdered. But certainly, the Vatican at the upper levels recognized the Cuban and Nicaraguan proxy situation with the Soviet Union. So we had common interests on that as well.

Knott: One last personality to get you to comment on, although you've already dealt with her to some extent, and that's Jeane Kirkpatrick. I'm wondering if there's anything else you might add. She's often portrayed as somebody who was in your camp in press accounts.

Clark: I didn't have a camp.

Knott: That's what we're here for—

Clark: She appreciated my intervention over and again with the President—she appreciated the protection she was getting against State Department, particularly in the Haig days. I called Latin America, Mexico—of course, they don't like to be referred to as Latin America—but everything south of our southern border, our front door. When I was at State for the year as deputy, acting at times as Secretary, I had to remind our people that in some ways the most important bilateral relationship we had was less than a meter away (Mexico).

People would look up and say, "What are you talking about?" I'd remind them of Mexico and on southward, and she felt the same way, particularly during the Falklands crisis. There was a very interesting exercise dealing with [Leopoldo] Galtieri, and she felt that we shouldn't be taking the Brits' side to the extent that we were. She was in constant conflict with Al Haig on this. Al was shuttling back and forth to London to the point that Mrs. Thatcher finally said, "Would you please keep this man at home?"

Al once said that his political future and hers too depended upon the outcome of the Falklands. By the way, I have the highest regard for her as does and has President Reagan from day one. On

the Falklands situation I had to balance things out or try to between Haig and Jeane, almost on a daily if not an hourly basis at times. Jeane felt that we'd lose a continent if we weren't careful in handling that. It came out, in my opinion, very well. The President tried to talk Galtieri out of the war the day before. I was trying to interpret on the same telephone conversation. Galtieri was obviously inebriated. He had a reputation for the bottle, but Jeane played devil's advocate to our support of our primary and principal ally, Great Britain.

Knott: Why don't we take a break here?

[BREAK]

Knott: We're talking about President Reagan and abortion.

Clark: Yes, he never missed an opportunity to talk about the dignity and sanctity of all human life, which put him at odds at times with the "political advisors" in the office and outside consultants who felt that this was a political liability for him. He never felt that way and when you look at the number of elections he won versus those he lost, obviously this did not hurt him that much. But as I mentioned earlier, he wrote *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (attached) on the tenth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. That caused quite a stir in the 1983 White House for fear that publishing it at that time would be a political liability. He responded by stating, "I may not be elected again anyway, and then I wouldn't be able to get this published." He had it published. It's just come out again. I was asked to do the preface for it, talking about the spiritual Ronald Reagan.

I distinguish his spirituality from his religiosity. He was not a denominational Christian even though he attended church whenever he could without causing a stir. Some criticized him for not attending church during the Presidency, but his position was that he did not want to disturb the worship service by walking in with a dozen Secret Service people. So he did his praying alone. But he was a very spiritual person, in my opinion. I've expressed before, he's a prayerful person. He didn't require going into a church for his prayer. He prayed frequently. One of his favorite quotes was, "I'm driven to my knees today in the overwhelming conviction that I don't have anyplace else to go." Of course, that's Lincoln.

But his silent prayer I saw on many occasions, such as the day that we were flying to Washington on TWA [Trans World Airlines] and the pilot came back to tell me that Martin Luther King had just been shot and killed. I went to the next seat to tell the Governor, expecting him to react by saying something and he didn't. He just looked down at his feet, and I looked around a moment later and he was obviously in prayer.

There was the occasion when I was called by [Anatoly] Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador, at about 4 in the morning, to tell me that Brezhnev had died and that they expected him to come to the funeral in Moscow. So I awakened the President to tell him this and his reaction was, "Bill, I never met the man. It would be hypocritical to fly to Moscow for this funeral, never having been

there before. I think the Vice President should go to represent our government, but go ahead and roundtable it," which I did.

Interestingly, Shultz, Weinberger, and Kirkpatrick said he should probably go. I told him that at the 9:30 briefing. He said, "No, I've thought about it. When I meet my first Soviet leader, I want it to be for something other than death. We'll send George. Let's walk up to the Soviet Embassy and sign the condolence book, you, Nancy, and me," which we did. It was a tomb, but maybe it was tomblike most of the time anyway. Each of us signed the condolence book. Then he leaned over to Nancy and me and said, "Do you think these people in here would mind if we just said a little prayer for the man?" He said it with a slight smile or grin, but he was serious. He did deliver a little prayer for this leader of the atheist world.

There are other instances of prayerfulness—He called his ranch an open cathedral. That was the spiritual Ronald Reagan. He truly believed in the divine Creator and the dignity of all human life.

Knott: Would you ever have discussions with him about, for instance, your faith or about religious matters in general?

Clark: Oh, yes. He was proud of his mother's Protestantism and his father's Catholicism. He knew a lot more about the Catholic Church than many of our Catholic friends. His brother Neil [Reagan] was very much a practicing Catholic who carried his rosary proudly. But surely we would discuss spiritual and religious matters. He was very close to Billy Graham, and Donn Moomaw was his pastor in West LA, and he conversed with them as he did with Cardinal [Terrance] Cook when Cardinal Cook was alive and Cardinal [John] Kroll in Philadelphia. He was very devoted to the Jewish faith and his Jewish friends as well, many of them in the film industry, overwhelmed by the Holocaust in many ways and he was quite well versed in both Old and New Testaments.

Knott: One of the criticisms at the time directed at President Reagan was regarding civil rights for African-Americans, just the place of African-Americans in American society. There was criticism from the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and groups such as that, that the Reagan administration was insensitive. I'm taking you way out of your foreign policy area, but I was wondering if you could comment on whether you ever saw how those criticisms affected President Reagan, this allegation that he was insensitive to the needs of minorities. Did you ever see or witness anything where he responded to this?

Clark: Not really. Certainly he didn't believe in quotas, but in gubernatorial days we had heavy representation of minority races, both on the personal staff and—but we didn't keep statistics on it because he felt that that was hypocritical. But he took criticism rather well, as time went on, whether it came from special interest groups or from the press. He felt about the criticism the way he felt about political polls. They come and go, they're a measurement, not always accurate, but if you do the right thing people will understand ultimately. It may take time, truth takes time to rise to the surface, and we're certainly seeing that now in 2003, a flurry of books on the President including new gubernatorial-period revelations such as from Lou Cannon, which will be out this fall. It's been slow in coming but it's accurate and it gives great truth to the vision of this man.

Knott: Did you ever witness any instances of anger on President Reagan's part? We're always told he's a fairly even-keeled, happy person.

Clark: Yes. He used anger effectively; felt that anger could be a virtue at times for emphasis. My first experience with his anger—always controlled anger, I might add—is when he wore glasses. He had a little habit occasionally when things were not going well, not to his staff and never expressed toward staff but usually a legislator had done something backwards or had gone back on his word. He'd take his glasses off and throw them on top of the desk but not hard enough to break them. That was a signal to the rest of us that he was upset with this particular person or event. But it was always controlled, as I say. At times, we noted it well and usually acted as a result to let someone know that he or she had met the displeasure of our boss.

Knott: But you never saw any anger directed at you, for instance?

Clark: No, no, though I'm sure there was good cause for anger toward me and toward all of us at times. Maybe not, but things always—when we would be concerned or angered by someone's action or inaction, it was usually the Governor and later the President who would say, "Well, it'll work out." You always had that note of hope and confidence that the right thing would be done.

Knott: Could I ask you about some specific events during your tenure as National Security Advisor and see if they conjure up some memories? Just before we broke for lunch we were talking about Ambassador Kirkpatrick and you mentioned the Falklands crisis. I was wondering if you could share with us any of your recollections from the Falklands War, if anything in particular stands out in your mind.

Clark: Yes, I remember the confidence that the President had in Lady Thatcher's decision to proceed 8,000 miles to meet the needs, the invasion, in the face of all of the senior military people saying it couldn't be done. She certainly placed her political future in possible peril or jeopardy in going forward, and we learned an awful lot about her resoluteness and determination. The President did tell Secretary Weinberger that we should support her in every possible way. She has always felt that that support from the President and Cap made the difference between prevailing and failure. In fact, Cap was given the highest medal and lordship that can be given to an American as a result of success.

I accompanied Cap to number 10 Downing Street to receive that at a special dinner. Again, it was President Reagan's decision that we assist even over the concern and objections of some, including Jeane Kirkpatrick, that we would infuriate our Latin friends, not just Argentina but their neighbors as well. But as far as I can recall, it simply didn't happen that we lost any credit down there in assisting the U.K. Certainly they knew we did everything within our diplomatic ability to avoid the war, including personal telephone calls between President Reagan and President Galtieri of Argentina.

Secretary Haig did a good job too in trying to avoid the conflict. I'll never forget one conference. Galtieri was going on and on about the bravery of their young men to fight for this cause, including his own son, who was newly an officer in the Navy, I believe. After listening to this

monologue for a while, Al Haig, who knew all about combat and casualties, leaned across the table and said, "Tell me something, Mr. President. Have you ever seen a body bag?" That ended the conversation.

It was a conflict that we watched very closely, but again one of many. There were many hot spots at that time. It was the height of the Cold War.

Knott: Much has been written about the relationship between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, what an historic friendship it was. You had occasion to witness this firsthand. What was it about the two that worked so well?

Clark: They were so much of the same vision and philosophy and the same policy of peace through strength, Great Britain being our primary ally in both war and peace. There were costs to that. What was termed the Irish Mafia in the Congress resented that and many of them were not even Irish, they were of Italian descent but had Irish constituencies. Considering there are 40 million Americans who contend that they have some Irish background or connection, President Reagan had to remind Mrs. Thatcher a time or two to treat her counterpart in Dublin with more dignity, because each time that she did not we'd hear about it from congressional members.

She responded. She did pay more attention to Mr. [Charles] Haughey, the Prime Minister of Ireland. She had a wonderful way with the President. When we'd meet in the Oval Office, we'd know the agendas, we'd know what was on her mind, disturbing her, and the main bilateral issues. We'd have our agenda. The staffs would compare these items. She had a wonderful way. She'd sit next to the President and if she was upset with something we'd done, she'd never turn to him. She'd point to me or other Cabinet or staff and say, "Mr. Clark, how could you have done this or done that?"

The President would sit there and smile at me as if to say, "Yeah, Bill, how could you have done such a dastardly thing?" She'd chew on the Secretary of State for this or that, or the Secretary of Commerce or Treasury in front of the President, but never once suggest that the President had done a thing wrong in the world. She'd come down on us instead, which I thought was a wonderful little trick on her part. The President loved every minute of it.

Knott: I think you were about to leave the NSC and go to the Interior Department at the time of the Grenada events, but there was some tension between the U.S. government and the British government. Mrs. Thatcher was upset about the American attack. Did you have occasion to witness any of this?

Clark: Yes, I met with Mr. [Maurice] Bishop just a week or two before his death. I knew the issues. It's been so long ago, but as I recall her concern was over insufficient consultation in advance of what took place. Of course, that was a frequent concern. If things did not go well there was—not always, but frequently—the contention, whether it be from the State Department or one of the other departments of government, "Why weren't we told more, consulted more?" The answer was usually they were consulted and given an opportunity to respond, but may have responded and not had it noted or not had the decision go their way. But I think that was the case with her.

Knott: Another issue that caused some stress between the United States and the European powers at that time was the Soviet pipeline that was being built.

Clark: Yes, the trans-Siberian gas line. Again, there was division within our own administration, first from Haig and later from Shultz, that we were harming our allies by challenging Siberian gas from going to Western Europe as a prime source of energy. At least some of us, including the President, felt that in our new policy of, as Dobrynin called it, economic warfare against the Soviet Union, which in hindsight ultimately brought them to their knees, we realized that Siberian gas was one of their prime elements in obtaining hard currency to build a bigger and better military establishment. We had to sanction not only our own manufacturers and suppliers of parts for that line, but the subsidiaries in Europe as well as some prime European firms.

Mrs. Thatcher was upset by this and we ultimately compromised, but in hindsight it had a tremendous effect in slowing down the Soviet economy and bringing them ultimately to a real cash crunch. Furthermore, thanks to Bill Casey, we had a plan that in the event of greater conflict with the Soviets we could bring that line to a halt rather surreptitiously. I'll say no more on that subject by reason of its sensitive classification.

Knott: That's intriguing. There's some dispute amongst historians as to this whole question of the Reagan doctrine, the idea of applying economic and covert and rhetorical pressure against the evil empire. Was there such a doctrine? Did President Reagan have this sort of grand vision in mind where we could bring, as he said, the Soviet Union to their knees?

Clark: Yes, the turning of the Soviets inward to get not only its leadership but the people themselves through our radio networks and other forms of communication, to reflect their own evil to themselves and the futility of communism itself. I don't think that we ever called it the Reagan doctrine. I think that came from the media. I've never bothered to check that. But it included many elements. It included helping other people help themselves, the Angola situation, Nicaragua, El Salvador, avoiding sending in our own men and women in uniform but rather equipping them with communications as we did in Poland, with cash, and through many channels. Again, helping them to help themselves rather than with direct U.S. military action.

Suriname was an example of that. It has never really been fully written, but I expect it to be in the near term, but it was definitely a change through our own early studies and later news that the decision directives resulting from these studies did turn our U.S. policy around. Dobrynin once approached me at an embassy function and said, "Mr. Clark, you've declared war on us." I said, "Did that happen since I've been out of the office this afternoon?" He said, "You know what I'm talking about. You declared economic war on us, but we will prevail." Well, they didn't prevail. But that I think can be termed the Reagan doctrine. It was fairly well set out in a recent book by [Derek] Leebaert, *The Fifty-Year Wound,* a dispassionate review of the Cold War and how we did make the turn from détente and accommodation to turning them inside themselves and for the world as well to see.

Knott: You mentioned Suriname in your answer. Are you willing to talk a little more about what happened in Suriname?

Clark: Yes. We had intelligence requiring, we felt, some immediate action regarding this little Caribbean country on the north shore of South America of 250,000 people as I recall. [Desi] Bouterse, a treacherous person, who like Sergeant [Samuel] Doe liked to line up his Cabinet and shoot them occasionally, was in direct communication with [Muammar] Gaddafi and Cuban intelligence directorates. It was once known as Dutch Guiana. The Netherlands had an interest in it, a paternal and economic one, even though they'd pulled out, leaving Bouterse to his own ends. But we had intelligence that planes were actually loaded in Libya with arms and communications gear prepared to go to Paramaribo and set it up as a new Cuba.

The Soviets had planned and were prepared to open an embassy, the only embassy as far as I can recall, on the South American continent. The President determined among a very small group—Shultz, Weinberger, Clark, and Don Regan, the latter who happened in accidentally to one of our conferences—a daring plan. It was a war plan, a false one but looking very real on paper, by which, as the President said, "the great colossus of the north" would invade Suriname to stop all of this, including a parachute drop and Weinberger's ships sailing in. So with that information, John Poindexter, General [Paul] Gorman, I forget who from the agency, and I got into a plane at Andrews Air Force Base in the hangar, late at night, having made appointments with the Presidents of Venezuela and of Brazil to ask to meet with them or their representatives three days hence. We considered this an emergency situation to stop a new Soviet foothold in our front yard, giving the Soviets a chokehold on the mouth of the Caribbean.

So we flew into Venezuela and met with the President. Our message was, "Look, either you take care of the situation, of the Soviet foothold, the Cuban foothold—" Cuba was behind it. [Fidel] Castro's number one intelligence director had orchestrated all of this. "Either you take care of it down here or we'll have no alternative but to do so ourselves," and then laid out our war plans in front of them. He turned pale, and before I left his office said, "Talk to Brazil, they're closer. I don't want anything to do with it right now, I'm in enough political trouble."

So we flew into Brasilia, not to meet with the President but his Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and military leaders. We parked at the end of the runway, it was after dark. As John Poindexter reminded me, upon perceiving the air drop and the Navy coming in, the Chairman ran to the men's room and threw up, he was so frightened. But the long and the short of it, our approach worked and Brazil moved in with a carrot and stick to Bouterse with social programs and stopped the Soviet incursion into Paramaribo. As far as I know, they still don't have a Soviet representative there. So our plan worked. If it hadn't succeeded, I'm sure we would have been called up before some Senate committee to explain why we would have attempted such a foolish thing.

Knott: So this was one instance where secrecy was maintained.

Clark: Absolutely and necessarily at the President's order.

Knott: I don't think it's ever been—

Clark: Absolutely. Secrecy was maintained—from the Netherlands press there were several stories touching on it, but no one has really pressed it. When I returned to Washington, my staff met me saying, "Where in the world have you been? You're in trouble." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "Well, the Baker group feels that you're off starting World War III and you took Air Force One." The President insisted that we take not number two or three but the plane that we took. I'd forgotten which one it was, but in any case Jim was in charge of all White house aircraft. We hadn't asked his permission because the President told us that we weren't to discuss this project, if it could be called that, with anyone other than those in the room. Oh, by the way, I missed mentioning Casey earlier. He was obviously involved in this.

Knott: Was he on this trip that you referred to?

Clark: No, Dewey Claridge came along, that being his region for the agency. Anyway, the networks had that Sunday aired the fact that I was away on a mission without authority, that the White House had lost confidence in the National Security Advisor for doing things out on his own. Lesley Stahl, I recall, let it out early, I saw a rerun of it. So I had to assure our own staff people, who didn't know about the project, that as far as I knew I still had a job. It all died down and went away in a day or two. But it was an interesting little project. We were gone actually just two and a half days on the weekend.

Knott: President Reagan faced some fairly intense opposition both at home and abroad in the so-called nuclear freeze movement, which obviously was a response to the presence of nuclear weapons in the world, but specifically the plan to put I think it was the Pershing II missiles in Europe to counter the Soviet SS20 threat. Do you have any recollections of his attitude toward the freeze movement and the steps he took to counter that?

Clark: Well, his primary theme was, "Find a freeze, let's go to my zero option. But first of all let's get equality before freezing." He didn't say, "No freeze." He said, "I'd love a freeze, and I'd love a world without nuclear weapons, but right now we are in an inferior position and until we modernize and catch up we can't safely go to zero." He repeated, "Nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."

I recalled our Ambassador, an old classmate of mine, Peter Dailey, Ambassador to Ireland, to leave his post there and take over the information activity with Jim Buckley, using the radios to explain our position. The bishops and the NCCB, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops—they're so much against what they thought we were doing in arms control and modernization—issued a condemnation paper they later retracted. They didn't have to retract it, but they voluntarily recalled it after understanding the modernization program, and backed away from the nuclear freeze movement, as did many. Again, it was explication and that's when we relied upon our great communicator to explain what modernization really meant, which would result in greater safety in weaponry and system support.

Knott: Was Charles Wick in the USIA [United States Information Agency] involved in this? Is this what you were referring to earlier with the radio?

Clark: Yes, Charlie was involved and primarily Gil Robinson, his deputy, rather than Charlie himself. We had a special grouping that I chaired at the time, Project Democracy, and that was a part of it, explaining where we were headed, ultimately to the zero option, eliminating one whole class of weapons.

Knott: Another area that generated a lot of controversy at home and abroad was the American assistance to the Contras and the whole attempt to interdict arms shipments from Nicaragua to the El Salvadoran rebels. I'm not sure if there's anything that can be added to the record, but I wonder if you might just share with us both your perception and the President's of the Sandinistas and why this was given such priority.

Clark: Again, a little like my explanation of Suriname. We knew the arms were moving from the Soviet Union and its proxies to Cuba, Cuba through Belize into Nicaragua and beyond. The President just wouldn't countenance that in our front yard, a threat to all Central Americans and Mexicans. The buildup and the priorities we knew about, on the Soviet part, using Cuba to do the supply and re-supply. We just felt that certainly the President was adamant, and Al Haig too and his cry of "Let's go to the source," the source being the Soviet Union itself through Cuba. The extension of that runway in Nicaragua that we had to face upon our first months in Washington. It was certainly not for Pan American Airways. It was for the Soviet MIG 23s.

I recall the President stating to Haig, "Tell Dobrynin that we know those MIGs are being loaded," (I forget at which Soviet port,) "for shipment to Nicaragua. Tell him that if we see those on the ground down there, we will take them out within 24 hours." We put a couple of fighter-bombers in Honduras so the Soviets could see that we meant business. Those MIGs didn't arrive. It was the full plan that we were fairly well apprised of, the Communist buildup down there, we felt committed to move on it before it went further. Trying to explain that to anyone other than the intelligence committees on the Hill was very difficult, as the decision being brought and ultimately resulting in the Boland Act, but Casey was determined, one way or another, and Haig too, that we just couldn't allow the arms supply to continue.

Knott: Was Shultz as hawkish toward Nicaragua as Haig?

Clark: No. Nor [Tom] Anders, who felt we could negotiate it out or let Mexico negotiate it for us. I just felt that that was a nonstarter; President Reagan concurred.

Knott: Speaker [Thomas] O'Neill was a fairly fierce opponent of the President's Central America policy. Were there aspects of your job that involved trying to present the case to members of Congress, to people like Speaker O'Neill, saying this is the breadth?

Clark: Yes, a combination of State and NSC. Bud McFarlane appeared over and over again up there. So many of them were set in their ways, believing that everything would work out by friendly negotiation. Ultimately it did, but not by negotiation alone.

Knott: I guess this is probably an impossible question for you to answer, but was there a sense of guilt that America had been intervening too long in Central American affairs?

Clark: That was primarily it, that we should let them handle their own issues and problems. We did it, again it was this idea of helping them help themselves by supplying arms and financial aid, direct financial aid when we could, which we did through—We had help from other countries too, even little Taiwan did some training. So it wasn't quite what you could call a coalition. I think it was more philosophic than anything. The Democrats drew a line and made much more of a battle out of it than I think was justified.

Knott: Did you ever have any interaction personally with Speaker O'Neill on this issue or other foreign policy issues?

Clark: No. Certainly we gave them as much information as we could. I had good relations with Speaker O'Neill. He used to kid me about my family roots in Ireland, leaving in the famine and not stopping in Boston or New York for at least a year. He kept reminding me that anyone who was on the run without stopping in one of those two cities and going all the way to California in its earliest days had to be of one profession. I said, "What's that?" He said, "Horse thievery."

Knott: Is that true?

Clark: I'm afraid to ask. [laughter]

Knott: Another major issue during your tenure as National Security Advisor was in the Middle East but particularly Lebanon. I'm just calling upon you to see if you have any recollections regarding putting the Marines in Lebanon and, of course, the tragic bombing of the barracks.

Clark: Yes, very unfortunate. Cap had been urging in our meetings and review that those Marines should be out of harm's way 1,000 yards offshore, which the NSC staff concurred in. However, our two former Marines, Shultz and McFarlane, said that would be retreating if we moved them. Certainly we had no idea of the potential leading to the actuality, or we would all have concurred, "Get them out of there." That was a sad day, 23 October, I think.

Knott: I believe you were about to make the transition from NSC to Interior?

Clark: About that time, probably a few weeks before. When that happened, one of my sons phoned to say—he was merely informing, he was not asking permission—that he had just enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. The tragedy affected a lot of people.

Knott: Could I ask you if you saw how President Reagan reacted to the news of the Beirut barracks bombing?

Clark: You know, I don't recall as a percipient witness how he reacted, but—

Knott: Were you the one who informed him, do you recall?

Clark: No, that would have been Bud McFarlane at the time. I think I was preparing for my Senate confirmation hearings for the Department of Interior.

Knott: You've mentioned Bud McFarlane a number of times and earlier I was asking you to comment on various personalities. I was wondering if you would do that now for Bud McFarlane.

Clark: Of course. I met Bud in the first instance as Deputy Secretary of State and relied heavily upon him based on his own work with Kissinger and his military activity, White House fellow—he had a marvelous background in that regard. The novice that I was I leaned on people like Eagleburger and McFarlane and Bremer, all familiar names, and dealt directly with them. When I went to State, Warren Christopher had occupied that same office, same secretary, and by custom had five young foreign-service officers based on regional situations and responsibilities. I dismissed them but kept their five secretaries, who had been there longer than the five men. They were quickly tabbed by somebody as "Clark's angels," and they gave them the responsibilities that their young men bosses had had up to that point. This gave me the ability to communicate directly with McFarlane and all the Assistant Secretaries of State without going through another staff layer.

I was always impressed with Bud and when it came time to go from State Department to NSC at the White House, Al Haig and I decided I should really take somebody with me for continuum. I suggested Bud and he immediately concurred, "Take Bud as a deputy," and he was great. He was quiet and very serious, the most serious member of our staff, a lot of introspection in Bud. He felt inadequate at times for the spot. I said, "Join the crowd, but we have to keep going." He wanted to leave a couple of times. I said, "No, no, you have to stay on the ship, you're doing just fine." He required a lot of CBM. You know what CBM is? Confidence-building measures. That was a State Department term.

I'd take him into the Oval Office on my presidential briefings frequently, as I would Poindexter, depending on what had happened in the night, who was the percipient witness to, whether it would be the Gulf of Sidra type operation or just Beirut as usual, because they were reading the traffic by the moment. Bud clearly, when it couldn't be Baker or Kirkpatrick or a number of other names, was the logical one to succeed me because of the proximity to all the issues.

Knott: He of course later becomes embroiled in the Iran-Contra affair. I know this is long after you've left that post, but I'm wondering, just for the historical record if you could comment on what you think happened there. Where was the failure?

Clark: I think both Bud and John Poindexter, after I went on to Interior, at times would corner me and say, "Bill, he doesn't seem to be listening to us the same way he used to listen to you."

Knott: "He" being the President.

Clark: "He isn't asking the questions that he used to ask of you. Do you have any suggestions on how to get greater attention?" Well, it's tone of voice, it's proximity, it's frequency, priorities. Don't overwhelm him with too many small things. Be very certain that things you are doing have his full understanding and initials, his "OK, RR," which I used to get on memoranda. I just feel that Bud got out on a limb because he was trying to emulate Henry, whom he had always hoped

to equal, and in many ways probably exceeded Henry in analysis and in judgment at times. But I think this was to be Bud's big breakthrough and it didn't work out that way.

I don't think they conferred with the agency to the degree they should have or with Bill Casey himself. There was not a closeness between Bill and Bud. Nor was there the closeness that I had with Weinberger. Bud and Shultz were much closer in approach to issues. I just feel the President was never really given the opportunity of saying, "This is a good deal," or "Not so good." He was not fully informed and did not fully consent. I don't think it was a lapse of memory or other things that have been suggested. One unfortunate part of it, as someone said, John Poindexter wound up taking the heat as a good trouper, and I think took a lot more criticism than he should have, which is just a judgment. As you said, I wasn't there but I knew the players.

Knott: One more bit of conjecture, and again, if you don't feel comfortable with this that's fine. Had there been somebody in that national security position who was perhaps from the old team or somebody the President had some roots with, might this have been averted?

Clark: That is frequent speculation. Even Jim Baker said, I don't know if he wanted me to feel a little guilt or not, he said, "Bill, this would not have occurred on your watch." I didn't comment.

Knott: You talked a little bit earlier about why you left the NSC. It was your decision to leave, is that correct?

Clark: Yes.

Knott: You felt that things were just getting too contentious between your office and the Chief of Staff's office, is that an accurate—

Clark: Not between the offices but between some individuals and me personally. There existed undercutting and so-called power plays. I think I mentioned a few examples of that, press leaks that were highly inaccurate. So I approached the President several times saying, "I really think my presence is creating counter-productivity for you and the national interests. I've become somewhat of a lightning rod and I think it's time to get back to the ranch." He said that he understood if I felt that way because he was cognizant of the personality activity going on, but always reassured me of his trust and confidence in me and our staff, beginning as his Chief of Staff in California. Nancy, of course, while not active in any of that was aware of it and believed a lot of the things—I gave you the Lou Cannon article situation. I just felt, and I ultimately expressed it to the President, that I should cease the lightning rod position and resign in favor of new NSC leadership.

It concurred in point of time with Jim Watt's resignation, and Bill Casey had a funny remark. He said, "Well, Bill Clark is a rancher. President Reagan loves him so he gave him the biggest ranch in the world, the Department of Interior." It didn't quite go that way but that was typical Bill Casey. So I went over and performed other duties that took me out of the White House for the most part. There was a lot to do after Jim Watt left Interior. As Reagan once said, put oil on those waters.

Knott: Before we leave your NSC tenure, one last program, the Strategic Defense Initiative [SDI], which I think was announced in March of '83, while you were National Security Advisor. Can you tell us about what went into that decision and the President's thinking about strategic defense?

Clark: An awful lot, going way back to gubernatorial days. Edward Teller's concepts, the President had always been disturbed by the long policy of mutually assured destruction, known as MAD for short, the reciprocal threat situation. Again, it gets back to his concern for human life. He remarked more than once that if we had to respond, some 30 to 60 million people would be killed in the first 24 hours, and he asked, "Why should Ivan the farmer in the Ukraine have to die for our sins and mistakes?" So he leaned back in a December Joint Chiefs meeting—I set up a situation where the Joint Chiefs could meet on a regular basis in the Roosevelt Room with the President, with or without Cap. Cap was always invited. Sometimes he came, sometimes he didn't. It gave them that feeling of direct communication with the Commander-in-Chief.

So toward the conclusion of the meeting the President effectively said, "What if?" stating the issue of a nuclear defense that we would share with the Soviets and get away from the MAD concept. I got a call when they went back to the Pentagon, I think it was from Admiral Jim Watkins, saying, "Is he serious?" And I said, "He's darn serious." Then they went to work, came back to a January or February meeting and they'd done a lot of work on the SDI thought. It wasn't vetted in the usual bureaucratic way but as a concept. The President thought about it so long, he wanted to get it out on the table and 23 March of '83 did announce it. As I recall, that's one part of the Shultz book that is accurate, saying who did what and then why. Weinberger also covers it well. Martin Anderson covers it well, and I'd refer anyone to those renditions as being very accurate. In hindsight, particularly looking at Reykjavik, where everyone including George Shultz, who I understand shed tears because our President wouldn't give in on SDI, in hindsight that's what began the unraveling. The Soviets realized we were serious and no give.

So [Mikhail] Gorbachev, if I may use another metaphor, somewhat threw in the towel after that and says that that's what wound it up. Again it's that timely vision and tremendous judgment of this man we're talking about.

Knott: I think Edmund Morris and some other people who have written about President Reagan have referred to his interest in, if that's the correct term, the apocalypse and particularly when talking about nuclear weapons. The President would occasionally refer to that biblical passage. Did you ever hear this from him?

Clark: Not really. I know it's been stated, Armageddon, and just as with Nancy's stargazing, I think totally overblown. Certainly he believes in the Bible. But in discussions—I can't recall that. He may have referred to it from time to time, but it was just a basic love for life and recognition of our divine Creator in charge and what will be will be, a day at a time. There were no predictions or prognostications in that regard that I can recall.

Knott: When you make the transition to the Department of the Interior, first of all, was this an assignment that you were looking forward to, or would you really have preferred to come back to the ranch?

Clark: That's hard to tell. No, when that came about, I looked forward to the opportunity. It was a great department and did, of course, take us to the outdoors, though I stayed very close to the flagpole, unlike most of my predecessors who toured the parks and so on. We had so many issues from the Vietnam Memorial to the Beach Boys on the Mall to letting the Indians come in and talk to us. No, I found it a very interesting challenge, trying to maintain the fairly well-set Reagan policy regarding balancing development of resources while minding the good stewardship and yet trying to do it in a diplomatic way by conferring and staying close to my desk in that big beautiful office down the street from the White House.

Knott: Would you say that was the key difference between yourself and your predecessor in terms of just attempting to work, perhaps more quietly, in a more diplomatic fashion?

Clark: I opened the doors. There were ten bureaus, one of the most difficult in the department being the BIA, Bureau of Indian Affairs. They'd been locked out. Of course, there'd been one incident where, if you recall, I forget which administration, possibly Carter, they tried to burn down their own BIA building back there. The fact that they, along with the environmentalists, could come in and sit by my fireplace and talk, without necessarily expecting to carry out any new decisions or policies, meant a lot to them. I enjoyed that. I carried forward the old custom of morning staff meetings, which had not been the case at Interior, into the process at 8 o'clock every morning after riding a stallion on Interior grounds at 6 in the morning. It was an entirely different regimen.

Yet I stayed in touch with the President. With Iran-Contra, once there appeared to have been some error made on the part of McFarlane, Poindexter and [Oliver] North, long before any Senate hearings, I urged that he grant them a blanket pardon and get the entire matter behind him. Jack Vessey joined me, Kissinger signed the bottom of my letter showing the rationale and even the suggested press release or announcement that he would make to get the thing behind him. He was inclined to do it, but Nancy said "No, they can't get off. They have to be censured or somehow disciplined." They certainly were before it was over.

Knott: Before you went over to Interior, did you receive any instructions from President Reagan as to what he would like to see you do? One of the things I'm wondering, was there a sense that you needed to kind of lower the temperature over there, that the department had become a lightning rod?

Clark: Yes, oil on the water, the Vietnam Memorial, Jim felt that that shouldn't go forward to opening old wounds and contentiousness. I took it to the President and he agreed that it should go forward. That was one immediate issue. No instructions, no directions, he just wanted to be kept informed of any hot-button issues. He knew there were some based on the Mall and other activity. "Put the Beach Boys back on the Mall," with a wink. They're still around, aren't they?

Knott: Most of them.

Clark: I don't know whether they still perform or not. That was a wonderful experience. This interview gives me occasion to flash back on these issues. I'm afraid I've probably forgotten most of it, but I hope it's been helpful.

Knott: Absolutely.

Clark: President Reagan had a great love for the west. He just wanted us to take it issue by issue. I kept him informed on the Park Service, the paramount entity of the ten Interior bureaus, and we didn't make many changes in policy. We tweaked a lot of things like obtaining some additional parkland from in-holders, that is, private property within the different park holdings. We'd exchange land with them or buy them out. We did a lot of that.

We started the Bureau of Indian Affairs' accounting of their trust. We had a couple of thousand lawsuits that had been filed against Jim Watt and the department and they were all pending, so I appointed a new general counsel. Frank Richardson, my colleague, the other so-called conservative on the California Supreme Court, had just retired and come back as our general counsel and he settled most legal actions without battle. So we got rid of all the backlog of litigation, as I recall. Otherwise a fairly quiet period.

Knott: Did you enjoy your tenure at Interior?

Clark: Oh, very much. Mr. [Walter] Mondale accused me of bringing about his failure to become President. I thought he was kidding and said, "What do you mean?" I met him at President [Roman] Herzog's small dinner in Tel Aviv after I left government. He really got the attention of the others at the dinner table when he said that. "Clark, you're responsible for my not being President of the United States."

Knott: He took the issues off the—

Clark: Well, yes, he explained. He said, "I found President Carter to give him my strategy in running for the Presidency and that I was going to take the Department of Interior on as a primary issue, there were enough issues under the Department." Even though I had taken over, it was so soon that he could continue attacking James Watt's policies. "But Jimmy said, 'You leave Bill Clark alone. He's the only one who really treated me well in the Reagan administration.' He was quite serious about that." Not that that would have made a difference. We took every precinct, didn't we?

Knott: Darn close. Were you impressed by the permanent Interior bureaucracy generally or were you—

Clark: Yes, because in many ways it was still the 19th century approach. I'll never forget Jackie Hill, who was my secretary at the State Department. Al Haig finally arrived, gave me six personnel files, and said, "You need the best secretary you can find other than my Muriel [Hartley]." And he said, "Here are six of the best, go interview them." So I took the files down the hall, opened the first one, just the top page and I said, "Mrs. Hill, come in. I see you worked for Dr. Kissinger. Tell me, what was he like to work with?" She said, "I'm sorry, Judge Clark, I

can't tell you that." I said, "Fine, you're hired." She's still my secretary on some things. She went from the State Department to the White House and then to Interior.

When I say the 19th century, the first day she came in my office with dirty fingers and she said, "I can't believe this department." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "They still use carbon paper here." We were in the 19th century, and it was in many ways the old school, very dedicated employees, particularly the Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation. Between Watt and me, we reduced employees from 91,000 to 73,000 just through attrition over the course of our two terms. We cut the budget by $250 million. Congress put it all back in, fish hatcheries and all. Went back to the Cabinet meeting and told the President, "Your budget has just been increased by the Congress." He said, "What happens if you don't spend it?" I said, "Mr. President, you know the answer. I go to jail." He said, "Good, I'll go to jail with you." So we got most of what we wanted but not everything.

Knott: An event unrelated to your tenure at Interior. Early in the second term there was this swap where James Baker went over to Treasury and Don Regan became Chief of Staff. What was your impression of that, your reaction to that swap?

Clark: No real reaction. We didn't know about it until we heard it the next morning. It was a midnight situation. Found it interesting. The President again didn't blink. It sounded good to him, a little like the Attorney General situation. He didn't pay a lot of attention, as long as it was within the family. If it had been a matter of bringing someone from the outside, there would have been a real survey and discussion. Interesting switch. I think it worked to a degree. I wasn't in the White House when the swap was made, or for the departure of Don Regan.

Knott: Do you have any reflections on Don Regan? I don't know how much contact you had with him during that first term especially.

Clark: Well, quite a bit, because I created at NSC an interagency process and would bring—and in these interagency studies we'd bring Commerce, Treasury, Agriculture in on an issue-by-issue basis to be sure we had that dimension. This was a new idea under Roger Robinson. So, yes, Don was a good friend and I think he did better at Treasury than at the White House from the standpoint of really understanding the operations. I think he had difficulty really understanding all of the facets of Chief of Staff or the demands of the job.

Knott: During that whole Iran-Contra period, I believe you are either about to leave or you've actually left, I think once it breaks, you're already back in California. But were you ever called upon to give advice or did you ever offer advice as to how the situation should be dealt with?

Clark: No, not until I made a forceful try on the pardon once it began to unravel. I could anticipate real problems on the Hill for everyone if it got into hearings. But I kept apprised of it from the principals and certainly from Meese and Poindexter, McFarlane. I think no one anticipated the magnitude. And yet I don't think the public ever understood it. I think if you ask someone today, "What was Iran-Contra about?" you'd find maybe one in a thousand who knew even the issue, because it was not a major issue. The issue was lack of credibility and do we believe him or not. I'm confident that the President told the truth.

Knott: Was the President upset or down about this event, or were you too far removed at this point?

Clark: I couldn't make that judgment, but I know he was inclined to grant pardon at one early point. And I don't know who gave the order, certainly not the President, but the Secretary was told that nothing further was to be taken to the President from me or from my colleagues, Vessey and Kissinger, on the pardon. It wasn't to be brought up. I have my ideas. No speculation. Twelve years on the bench, I shouldn't be speculating. Evidence only.

Knott: Did you help later on in the Bush administration as far as the pardons that ultimately were granted to Caspar Weinberger and others?

Clark: Yes, I represented Cap.

Knott: Oh, you did?

Clark: Yes, with [Robert S.] Bennett. I handled what was termed the political side. Yes, I was involved, and assisted counsel for North and Poindexter.

Knott: President Bush ultimately pardons, I think, six or seven individuals.

Clark: Elliot Abrams—

Knott: I don't know if you feel comfortable doing this or not, but do you have an assessment of Lawrence Walsh and what he was up to?

Clark: I have a strong assessment.

Knott: Do you care to share it?

Clark: Well, he was very clear. If I can summarize it, he definitely wanted to get the President himself in any way that he could, including offering a nefarious and dishonest arrangement, a proposed deal, to Weinberger. And of course Cap being a man of great integrity, ten feet tall, like the President himself, wouldn't buy it. So they stayed on Cap, but Cap wouldn't budge. No, I met with Walsh a number of times, including at his office in Oklahoma, with different ideas on behalf of Cap, which would have poured over to the benefit of the others, and he took a very unsatisfactory position. I'll never understand his motive. The time, the money spent, personal things that he did, discussing the case openly in the press, judicial ethics or bar ethics would have dictated against it.

Knott: Did he have people on his staff who you believed were motivated by partisan concerns?

Clark: I don't know, it was suggested—

Knott: The Weinberger indictment I believe came out four or five days prior to the '92 election.

Clark: That's right.

Knott: Bush–Clinton.

Clark: I don't know what the motivation might have been, but you've got to wonder. He called himself a Republican, but Lincoln and Reagan would have been disappointed in his Republicanism.

Knott: I'm wondering if I could just ask you some broad closing questions, just about your assessment of your friend President Reagan and his place in history. If you were trying to speak to generations yet unborn here, is there something about Ronald Reagan that you would like future generations to know about him that maybe, as we speak in the year 2003, hasn't quite taken hold yet?

Clark: Just the individual that he was, the loyalty, the integrity, the discretion on minor and major issues—these things were totally impressive to me. His constant seeking of the truth in arriving at his decisions. He was a visionary. As Dinesh D'Souza says, there are certain people in history, such as [Mahatma] Gandhi and Mother Theresa, Ronald Reagan—looking out over the terrain, we ordinary individuals see the mountains, the ridge in front of us, but they seem to see the valleys and the ridges and the mountains far beyond. President Reagan was definitely in that category in my opinion. He was a true visionary who was always looking for the common good, but looking not en masse but as individuals. As Mother Theresa said, "One person at a time."

Tremendous faith in himself and self-confidence that sustained him. When the rest of us were at times in disarray and doubt, he always saw the positive side of an issue. I never heard him say an unkind word about another individual. He was a fighter but he would fight ideas, particularly false ones, but never a mean word about another person. So that's generally it. I feel that history, as they say, will be very kind to him.

I mentioned Leebaert and his *Fifty-Year Wound.* In fact he didn't know the man, had no particular political philosophy, a Georgetown professor. I forget his exact words but effectively the two great Presidents of the 20th century were Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan. The primary reason for that is that they had no self-agenda, they were not on a power kick. The power to them was at times anathema, but they were trying always to do the correct thing for the common good.

Knott: We talked before about Margaret Thatcher and the close relationship that the President had with her. Were there any other foreign leaders that the President seemed to get along well with, enjoyed being around?

Clark: Well [Brian] Mulroney from Canada, but that was not a long-term situation. He liked him. Let's see, let me think about that for just a second. He ultimately got along with [François] Mitterrand in a nice way, although he had to send me on a mission to meet Mitterrand at the Elysée to tell them to stop attacking us in personal ways, which he did do. [Helmut] Schmidt,

there was no warmth there at all. Schmidt had totally underestimated him and was less than charitable toward him. Let me go around the block here for a moment.

Knott: There were reports that [Pierre] Trudeau and Reagan did not necessarily—

Clark: No, no, Trudeau is too far to the left for most any American Presidents. Miguel de la Madrid of Mexico he liked very much. We got to know him at La Paz predictably. Let me think, Latin America, no one in particular. The President of Brazil, the two of them hit it off beautifully, can't remember his name. We made a mistake of admiring the horse that he rode on a trail ride down there, which meant that we had to take the horse home.

Knott: How was that accomplished?

Clark: The horse arrived on a later plane. That was one of my personal problems in the Reagan story. Everyone knew that he loved horses, so every head of state tried to give him a horse. That was not always comfortable. Mike Deaver kept deflecting them, but some horses we had to take. King Fahd wanted to bring him two horses out of the royal stable, a mare and a stallion. A week before he was to arrive with his horses, the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] said, "Sorry, these horses are all infected. We cannot allow them in the country."

So I came up with the idea that we have an artist paint both horses and put it on an easel with a shade over it and a drape to be lifted by the King when he entered the White House, which happened. Then everyone forgot about the two actual horses until [Prince] Bandar called in the middle of the night a year or two later, after I left government. He said, "Bill, Bill, the horses are here!" I said, "What horses?" "In New York, they've been cured and Deaver wants to put them in the Washington zoo with the China panda bear, and the King will go straight up the roof if they go to the zoo, will you keep them?"

I said, "Okay, if you pay for the hay, Bandar," kidding of course, and then the horses arrive and they're more like ponies. You can't use them out here. NBC got word and thought they'd get out a special-interest story, investigative report that Clark was hiding the President's horses.

Well, we got an appraisal on them. They're actually below the gift appraisal. They're going to be useless as horses, one is still alive. How many years later? Keep waiting for the funeral.

Knott: At your ranch?

Clark: Yes. We named him Bandar. So of course his horse, El Alamein from Mexico—

Knott: You would occasionally ride with the President?

Clark: We'd go down to Quantico or out at Bill Marriott's ranch and to the West and rode with King Hussein. In Interior I rode every morning at 6.

Knott: Where did you ride?

Clark: Under Rock Creek Park Bridge, they have the park police. The Lipizzan stallion that the Austrians gave him, Amadeus. The Secret Service and Nancy didn't want him riding the stallion. At great inconvenience and sacrifice I would ride him every morning at 6 for half an hour, which is a wonderful way to start the day in Washington, with the Park Police surveying our federal properties for high crime. We rode frequently. There was always a chance to ride with an Ambassador, someone who appreciated horses. You sometimes got more business done out there on the trail than in the normal channels of communication, or in embassies.

I disliked the embassy after-hours functions. You work all day and then have to throw on a black tie, but sometimes in a corner with this or that Ambassador or foreign leader, you could do unusual and productive business. Different atmosphere.

Knott: When the two of you would ride together, would you be chatting with each other or just tend to be taking in the scenery?

Clark: It would vary. There was a chance just to enjoy things in quietude. He loved his quietude. Some article said we never had a conversation exceeding ten minutes or something. That's wrong, but there goes the press again. There was a saying of his, "There's nothing better for the inside of a man than the outside of a horse." He loved his horses and his dogs.

Knott: You don't like labels but you're from the conservative side of the perspective, I think we can safely say, and you had some skepticism about the federal government. Did your service in the federal government alter your view of Washington and the people who work there?

Clark: No, I don't think so. Those of us who think smaller is better, I certainly tried to apply it. Bureau of Land Management, we cut the employee numbers way down, and we're told that men behind desks were getting out in the field and for the public, results were going much better. Those were actual applications of trying to reduce the size and cost of government, as we did in the state government.

When we got to Sacramento, we introduced efficiency and cost control, froze hires, froze all out-of-state travel. Bureaucrats love to travel out of state. So there was not a suspicion, it was just a strong feeling that was proven out, that we just didn't need the manpower, the number of people we had. I got on the elevator the first day at Interior and four well-dressed men got on with me. They were obviously law enforcement. I said, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" They said, "We're your security." They were Jim Watt's security. I said, "I feel rather secure. Why don't you go back to your Park Service jobs?" There are so many examples, where if you concentrate, as the Governor did particularly, more so than in Washington. He didn't have time to worry about how many people were standing in the hallway.

You can reduce the costs and size of government, it isn't that hard. Whoever the new Governor is in California out of 200 running, I hope we get a Governor, but they're going to have to go into the same routine, I think, if government is going to work at all. Right now it's paralyzed at all levels in California. You're from Massachusetts?

Knott: Yes.

Clark: Well, maybe no different there.

Knott: Believe it or not, Massachusetts is the only state that has now elected Republican Governors in four consecutive elections, which for a rock-solid Democratic state is saying something.

Clark: Well, California has been much that way. The voters have usually divided the legislature and the executive between separate parties, sort of a check and balance, but no more, it's all Democratic.

Knott: Can I ask just two final questions? How often did you see the President in the post-presidential years?

Clark: When we were building the library, frequently. We would get together and plan the architectural and the financial. He was still at Century City. That was pre-illness. Post-illness we were discouraged from seeing him for the reason that he would recognize the face or the voice and try to put things together and couldn't. And he'd get frustrated. So that was a sad day. I felt we probably wouldn't see each other again. Frequency I can't recall really, it's been a long time. I sent him uncirculated silver dollars on certain days, always on his birthday. I had very nice notes back from Nancy that remind me very much of the Sacramento days. Which didn't always occur in the Washington days.

Al Haig used to say, "Bill, I've got to tell you, we were pretty close in these kinds of matters. Anyone who goes into that White House, including myself, always comes out a different person. So you be careful." I think he's probably right.

Knott: Did you come out a different person?

Clark: I don't know. But there was something about that ambiance, something in the water back there. Nancy is much more her old self now as far as the commissioning of the aircraft carrier. It's a different era. I'm being pushed now to do a book, but I'm reluctant to. I ask myself, *Would Ronald Reagan really want me to sit down and go into some of the things we discussed today in first-person approach?* Some of them were sufficiently confidential. I don't know, maybe it's the lawyer in me that says I shouldn't. But I am pushed by my closest colleagues and former colleagues in government to do some of the one-on-one conversations that they know occurred but have not really been written. So we will see.

This is an interesting syllabus you've given me, may I keep that?

Knott: Absolutely, that's for you. Can I ask you one last question?

Clark: Sure.

Knott: Is there any one particular event or memory that stands out when you think of Ronald Reagan?

Clark: Oh, there are so many, all fond memories, I really can't. I mean there are so many little instances where he'd want to help someone help themselves. No, I can't think of any that would be above or below others. It covers quite a span of time. I might write it in as a postscript when you send me the manuscript, because I imagine your question will be in the printout.

Knott: Thank you.

Clark: I didn't know whether I could help you or not. I hope it has.

Knott: You have.

Clark: You're doing a great public service in doing this. I don't know that anyone else has done an oral history.

Knott: We're the only ones doing this and all of these transcripts will be in the Reagan Library someday. We're doing this in concert with the Reagan Library. Thank you very much.