INTERVIEW WITH

General Robert Cushman

by

Dr. Thomas Soapes
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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Robert E. Cushman
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This interview is being conducted with General Robert Cushman at his home in Tantallon, Maryland on March 4, 1977. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are General Cushman and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: Would you tell me where and when you were born and your formal education.

GEN. CUSHMAN: Yes, I'd be happy to do that. The place of my birth was St. Paul, Minnesota, the day before Christmas, 1914. I went to the public schools there; I never finished high school because I managed to win by competitive examination an appointment to the naval academy when I was sixteen. So I went to the naval academy and was commissioned a second lieutenant at the age of twenty in 1935 and spent the next forty years as a Marine officer and then retired in 1975 as Commandant of the Marine Corps.

The duties that I had before going with Mr. [Richard] Nixon were somewhat varied. I spent two years in Shanghai, China as a young lieutenant, primarily an infantry platoon leader and sometimes company commander. Then I did duty in two navy yards, Brooklyn and Portsmith, Virginia as a first lieutenant. I had some duty at the New York Worlds Fair for

two years with the demonstration parade troops there, which was very interesting and a rather unusual tour of duty. Following that, since war clouds were gathering, the Marine Corps formed a reserve training center at Quantico and put all reserves through training, and I was a member of the staff there, the operations and training staff. I was then assigned as a captain to command the Marine detachment on the USS Pennsylvania, and I was there in that capacity aboard the ship when Pearl Harbor was attacked and lost quite a few Marines in that battle. The ship, as soon as possible, sailed for the West Coast and began to install anti-aircraft guns and other armament to prepare for the war that had started and was to come in the Pacific. I was transferred, however, from the ship to the Marines ashore on the west coast, down in San Diego, who were then in the business of expanding and getting ready to go overseas. I joined the newly-formed Third Marine Division. We trained in the San Diego area for a while, then marched up the coast some fifty, sixty miles to put Camp Pendleton into operation. I was then a major, and shortly thereafter I went overseas with the division

to New Zealand where they trained and then went up into the Solomons and eventually took part in the Bougainville [Solomon Islands] operation. By this time I was a lieutenant colonel and in command of an infantry battalion. Our next campaign following Bougainville was the campaign for Guam and the Marianas and we landed there--I still had my battalion. We stayed there after the battle and trained for the Iwo Jima operation in which I also participated. This was a very bloody series of battles. I recall that I landed with some eight hundred men and had eight hundred and fifty casualties, receiving in the interim about a hundred and fifty replacements. I was very happy indeed to walk off of that place with the survivors of my battalion.

The war was over for me at that point. Iwo Jima had finished and I'd been overseas two and a half years, so I was sent to Quantico to become an instructor in the Marine Corps schools there. I stayed there for some three years. It was a most interesting period as we were codifying all the lessons we'd learned during World War II. I recall I was writing the complete manual, for example, on the rifle battalion

and the amphibious operation. We were putting it all down on paper, the lessons we had learned, and it was a very interesting time. We also had to cope with developing new tactics for the atomic bomb, which, of course, had come in at the end of the war, and there were sounds of grief that the amphibious operation was over forever, including one by General Omar Bradley at the time as I recall. But we perservered. There was this new-fangled machine, the helicopter, and we developed the tactics and the control measures required. Even back then when it would only carry about four or five people we began making landing operations with it. So it was interesting.

Then I was transferred to Washington and had another very interesting job. I was the head of the Amphibious Warfare Branch in the Office of Naval Research and controlled and let out contracts for research in various things that pertained to amphibious operations: soil stabilization in the beach area was one I recall; and design of hulls for landing craft and this sort of thing.

So that was quite interesting, and I was getting along

fine when I suddenly got orders to go and see the Commandant and he informed me that I was about to go to duty with the Central Intelligence Agency which had just been formed. This was 1949. So I went to the Central Intelligence Agency. This was a period of much organization and reorganization as they felt their way into being, trying to decide whether to be functional or geographical and trying both ways. So I ended up in several places. To start, I was in the guerrilla warfare business writing books and manuals on the subject, particularly how to counter guerrilla warfare. On the other hand, though, we were interested in being able to train guerrillas so I had to get on that side of it, too. Then a reorganization occurred, as I mentioned, and they went geographical and I ended up in the Far East Division.

After about two years I was transferred to England where I joined the naval staff in London, the U.S. naval staff in London as their amphibious warfare planning officer. At this point NATO was established. The admiral who had charge of the U.S. forces received a double hat as the commander of

NATO forces, southern Europe--this was Admiral [Robert B.] Carney who later became CNO [Chief of Naval Operations]. So he took the U.S. staff with him and went down to Naples, Italy and set up the NATO South Command. First we operated from a flag ship and then from a rented office building in downtown Naples, and this again was interesting. But after not quite a year it was decided that it was not too workable trying to doublehat the admiral, particularly with the international aspects of one of the commands. So the U.S. staff packed up and went back to London where Admiral Jerry [Jerauld] Wright became the new commander on the U.S. side, and I worked at this job for two years, and then I came back home.

I had the misfortune to have to go to the hospital with a ruptured vertebra, slipped disc, and have that operated on and I spent almost a year in the hospital. But in early 1954 I came out of the hospital and in January went to the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, where after going through the course I spent two years as the head operations

instructor with about fifteen officers of all services under me in the operations branch, and I was a school teacher again as I had been at Quantico.

The time was getting on for me though, I felt, when I should get back with the troops. It'd been quite a long time in these varied and rather unusual staff jobs that I had, and the commandant at the time, General Shephard, was a friend of mind and I asked him if I could get back with the troops. So he sent me, at the conclusion of my tour of duty in Norfolk, he sent me to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina to the Second Marine Division where I was given command of the Second Maring Regiment. During 1956, war broke out in the Middle East and we had the job of loading out our regiment. We started to head across the Atlantic not knowing at whom we could shoot if anybody, or what we were going to do. But the powers that be turned us around after a day or two out of the United States, and we came back into Norfolk and kind of sat around for a bit till things cooled down. Such evacuation of Americans as had to be done, for example,

was done by the Marines that were already over there in the Meditteranean. Even in those days we kept a battalion over there all the time.

One night at dinner while I was at Camp Lejeune, early 1957, I was called up from headquarters and told to be in the commandant's office the next morning. I'm going to have to catch a train and get there somehow. The commandant informed me that each service had been asked to provide a nominee for the job of assistant to Mr. Nixon, the vice-president. The commandant's words as he dismissed me were, "You better win or go over the hill." Which, I didn't know just how I was supposed to handle that. In any event, the next step was to go over and be interviewed by Admiral [Arthur] Radford, who was then chairman of the Joint Chiefs. After all this was over, I was sent over to see Mr. Nixon, be interviewed there, and apparently all was acceptable and I immediately started work, didn't even go back to Lejeune and get my wife or baggage or anything.

In two weeks we were to set off on a trip of Africa, and these were really hectic days. We got ready and went. My job

wasn't exactly clear at that time. I functioned on that trip as an aide. And Air Force officer who went through the same process as I did, has become a very good friend, he was then a major, Don Hughes. He was also an aide, but on that trip he was put in charge of the press plane. So we made this trip and came back and things then reshuffled.

The major became the aide and stayed in that position for the next four years; he was both aide and appointments secretary. I had all kinds of titles from time to time. One was executive assistant, that phased me in with the executive assistants to Cabinet officers all over town, and we had a little protective association going. We could really get things done by knowing each other, and by having that title I became sort of a member of the group. I was also just plain in charge of the office. I can recall one of the instructions that I got early on was, "You do the hiring and firing," said the vice-president, "just don't make anybody unhappy." [Laughter] The politician speaking. He did not like to have confrontations with people over goof-ups on the job, much less firing a secretary. He was a kindhearted man; he just didn't like to get into that sort of situation

if he could avoid it; so I did that.

SOAPES: When you first went there, did you meet him immediately and did he give you your charter?

CUSHMAN: Yes, I did meet him. However, things were in such a formative stage in terms of enlarging his staff that he let me sort of carve out my own area of responsibility. Let me describe that staff when I arrived. He had his long-trusted secretary, Rose Mary Woods was there, and she worked very closely with him all the time. There was a man in the office, a former FBI man, he was later relieved by another fellow, and they were to handle the political side of things as a staff. And then I came in primarily because the President had given Mr. Nixon a seat on the National Security Council, I guess back in '52 when the administration came in. And as a consequence a large body of papers began to flow into his office, all highly classified. Well there wasn't anybody in the office really cleared; I think Rose Mary Woods got clearance and took on the job of keeping all these papers straight and trying to keep them in a safe and one thing and another.

Anyway, it was something else. Nobody in the office had any training in handling classified material and yet he had to have it if he was to prepare himself for these NSC meetings. So apparently, as I got the story, Radford talked him into not enlarging his payroll, but getting help by borrowing from the Pentagon where you get people experienced in this field and the Pentagon would pay them and it wouldn't raise his payroll which was a consideration, and would give him the help he needed. Well generally Mr. Nixon wasn't very keen on the idea, but Radford talked him into it, persuaded him. So Hughes and I showed up on the scene. And in terms of running the office I set up a safe, a log which I kept myself, on all documents in and out, the usual handling of classified material, I instituted that. I also, as being in charge of the office, checked out all the letters and eventually wrote letters myself for his signature.

SOAPES: You were checking them for--

CUSHMAN: Well, for everything from grammar and appearance to content. For example, you'd get some kind of issue that hit the

papers, one thing and another, and a lot of them are nonpolitical of course, dealing with national security, one thing and another. And a flood of mail would come in, and I would separate it out as to pros and cons and so on and prepare the answers for the letters and then get them okayed, or in some cases I'd just shoot them out myself. And then the office would type them up and so on--and you know how the Hill operates there, machines and so on, help out in these matters, so that the number one man doesn't have to sign his name ten million times a day. So I had those kind of duties, and they were interesting. They were time-consuming though.

Every morning I wrote out a briefing of intelligence. I'd get down to the office early and the CIA people would come over with the CIA daily summaries and I'd brief them down. Luckily I can typewrite, type it out, and then by the time he got there I had it on his desk. I represented the vice-president on all of these various boards that related to the National Security Council that President Eisenhower set up. It was a very formalized, military type organization as I'm sure your research has told you under Bobby Cutler, the NSC staff, who

was in one sense the [Henry] Kissinger of that day, helping him or Ev [S. Everett] Gleason I recall. And they had a planning board and innumerable committees and whatnot stemming off from that. I used to attend all these things in the name of the vice-president and sort of keep up to date and brief him on anything that was important that would later appear at the National Security Council where he'd get to hear it.

Then the President had made him the chairman of the President's Committee on Government Contracts, which was actually a civil rights piece of machinery, in those days. Its purpose was to assure that equal opportunity hiring took place in every outfit that had a contract with the government. And it was a very high-powered committee; had Walter Reuther on it, George Meany, various others--and then a millionaire merchants--[Ralph] Lazarus was his name, ran the department store chain. Various people of very high qualifications were on that committee. Well as usual there was a small executive staff and the work was carried on at the staff level in between the monthly meetings. So I had to represent him on all the staff meetings that occurred, and I

used to accompany him to the meetings of the committee itself. Then he got appointed by the President to another committee; the President's Committee on Physical Fitness, and the same situation applied there; I had to work with the staff. So I had these jobs that kept me busy.

One interesting thing I occasionally did was to get advice from Cabinet members on some important speech that the vice-president had written. If it dealt with foreign affairs he liked to have Mr. Dulles look it over, Secretary of State Dulles. And so I, in that fashion, had conversations with just about every Cabinet member in town. So that was an interesting deal.

Then I maintained liaison with [Army General Andrew] Andy Goodpaster who had somewhat the same job I did only in the White House. It was comparable, as I recall, though it was primarily the writing of briefings for the President of intelligence materials, this sort of thing, since he already had a Bobby Cutler and a Cabinet and so forth to brief him on other matters. I got to know Andy pretty well and later, of course, we served together in Vietnam and I considered him a good friend.

The office, as I say, started out small. It did not get

big until the vice-president began his campaign to be President. Then the staff was enlarged by the addition of Bob Finch and Herb Klein, who handled press matters, and various other experts.

SOAPES: This would have been about 1959?

CUSHMAN: Yes, that's right, the 1960--or maybe, I've forgotten when they came exactly, but late '59 or early '60. At this time, advance men, so-called, came through the office and I met quite a number of them. As I recall some of them were named [H.R.] Haldeman and [John D.] Erlichman and John Warner, later secretary of the navy, and some others. The campaign took the vice-president out of the office to a considerable extent and life was somewhat changed, of course, because all efforts were bent toward that. I was nonpolitical, so I stayed home and minded the store. That's what it amounted to. Everybody else was off making speeches and so on.

Another task that I had that took quite a bit of time doing--whenever a speech was being written in particular or whenever an interview--I remember when the vice-president interviewed

Castro for example--he would shoot out a lot of questions that he wanted answered or requests for material or requests for a department position, and I was the guy that had to lay on the lash on all these people to get the thing in on deadline, to make sure it was responsive to the question or the request. I functioned there as a regular secretary of the staff you might say--he's the guy that has to get the work done on time, make sure it's responsive, and get it in to the boss. So this was very interesting, too.

Sometimes it got a little frustrating. You know, people worked hard in Washington and when I had to lay on another requirement they sometimes got a little chafed. And of course the vice-president had no power. The power that he had rested mainly in the odds that he would become President. So that people didn't want to offend him but at the same time they, you know, sometimes gave him a little trouble, problems that had to be worked out. So all in all it came off all right. I like to feel I did the job without making enemies as far as I know.

That's the tale of how I worked there. Of course I was

without a job all of a sudden on the 20th of January, 1961. By this time I was a brigadier general and I went to Okinawa where I became the assistant division commander of the Third Marine Division, in which I had fought in World War II.

SOAPES: Had you been promoted to brigadier while you were on the vice president's staff?

CUSHMAN: Yes, I came up for selection and was selected.

SOAPES: You were a full colonel at the time of the appointment?

CUSHMAN: Right. Yes, I'd been a full colonel since about 1950 I think it was. I was made a major general while I was in Okinawa, selected for that, and became division commander. Then I came back to Marine Corps headquarters for a couple of years tour of duty as the operations officer and the intelligence officer for the Marine Corps headquarters, G-3 and G-2. Then I commanded Camp Pendleton, California for three years. The first time I'd been there I'd marched up from San Diego as a young major, and the next time I saw the place, I took over

and commanded it. Then came my two-year stint in Vietnam, being promoted to three-stars at the time. I was then appointed by, by now, President Nixon to be the deputy director of CIA, which I was for almost three years. Then he appointed me as Commandant of the Marine Corps where I stayed until I retired on forty years.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: As you were preparing letters that the vice-president was to have his name affixed to or preparing to represent him on these various boards, were you getting guidance directly from him or from his other aides?

CUSHMAN: The way he liked to operate was, on important matters, talk with me, but he didn't like people running in and out of his office. As a consequence, Rose Mary Woods would take dictation in which he would point out his position, his views, ask questions, a substitute for talking to you in other words. She would whip that out and the various staff members would get the memo and have to respond to it. You could either do that by going in to see him or writing a memo back. I would say that we got to talk with each other a

lot more the first two years, and then politics began to crowd his schedule so much that the staff almost had to get an appointment to see him because he was gone quite a bit making speeches--he had to huddle with the campaign man, and so forth. These other jobs that were nonpolitical--time became very precious to him--and it was done more and more by memo, and more and more it was requests for data which could be handled that way very easily.

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SOAPES: So you were very much on your own then in handling--

CUSHMAN: Quite a bit, yes, quite a bit. But I knew his thinking; I knew his policies; I pretty much knew his positions on the major issues of the day that related to my area. And while I'm nonpolitical, I was a registered Republican so it worked out. Nobody knew it, you know, but I was. In addition, the partition between myself and the political guy didn't extend to the ceiling; so he'd be talking to a guy and you could hear everything he said, and I'd be talking to somebody and he could hear everything I was saying. It wasn't all that insular as far as the political and nonpolitical aspects.

It helped a little sometimes to have the political background of what was going on, but it wasn't really essential. As I say, I knew where he stood on the items that came up before the NSC and that sort of thing. And I would often make suggestions as to what his position ought to be, and usually I did that in writing. Then if he'd buy it, a little squibble in the margin, and we did it.

SOAPES: How responsive was he to the initiative of the staff?

CUSHMAN: Well he was a man of great clarity of thought. He was also innovative and had a lot of ideas himself that he would bounce on me for example. He was receiptive to anything that smacked of common sense and let's-get-on-with-it type of thing. Occasionally he would be innovative in a slightly impractical way in the defense field because he wasn't up on the technicalities of it when I first got there, you know. And he wasn't oriented to the military; he's had wartime service, but he was not oriented to the military way of life nor was he enchanted with it.

So that I would say in all--I'll put it this way, I greatly

admired his mental capacities. He had a lawyer's approach to a problem; he'd cut right through to the nub and could marshal the pros and cons and could make a decision. And I'd say he also was innovative, as shown later when he was President and in his foreign policy, and creative. And a tremendous worker; worked all the time. His diversions were very few and they were the sort of diversions he could enjoy while still working, like playing classical music, listening to the baseball game on the radio, and he ordinarily would be working right along too.

SOAPES: Did you ever see signs that this passion for work was taking a toll in terms of his efficiency or capacity to do the job?

CUSHMAN: Oh, on the foreign trips--it never took a toll of his capacity, but it sure took a toll on him physically. I mean he got tired and among his close staff he'd get snappish, which we didn't pay any attention to because he was a politician. So if he snapped at you you knew you were in the "in-group." He wouldn't snap at anybody that wasn't--because he always had control of himself, of course--and he wasn't about

to bite off anybody's head that might come back to haunt him. He would get snappish and sometimes he'd get a cold. On the foreign trips pressure was on him. He'd always talk with the heads of state, and you know you don't do that lightly. It was a great responsibility. He often had tasks he'd been assigned by the President to get done and this sort of thing. And of course he was always really running for President--that meant he'd better do it right or he'd be blasted all over the papers. So the foreign trips put a tremendous toll on him because they were just whirlwind. He's working all the time, the staff working all the time. For example, one of his rules was that every thank-you letter would be written and posted before he got to the next country. Well, that meant writing them all night long in the plane for us poor guys. Well it wasn't that he wasn't working, he was busy with his great big back-up books, you know, reading those things, studying them for the next stop. And it was just literally you'd go eight, nine days practically without sleep on these deals. So that would take its toll of everybody and the staff would get pretty tired and the vice-president and

the staff would get tired, and yet they had to be cheerful and smiling. And gee, when we were up in La Paz, Bolivia, you know, it'd be cheerful and smiling with no oxygen. That's terrible, this sort of thing. Well the South American trip was very tense. Of course by the time we got to Caracas, Venezuela it all really unravelled with the mob scene.

SOAPES: Were you there in that Caracas situation?

CUSHMAN: Yes. I always joke it's the only time I had a red-head in my lap and my wife approved of it. I was riding with Rose Mary Woods and some clown cracked a window with a rock or something and the glass showered all over the back of the car. I put her on my lap and about that time the Secret Service kept things moving. Very interesting, you know. That attack took place as we went to the Plaza of the Martyrs to lay a wreath, and we never got there. Years later, as Commandant of the Marine Corps, I went to Caracas, as a guest of their military, and I laid a wreath a Plaza of Martyrs, had no trouble at all. But on the vice-president's trip, of course, the first tenative communist protests started in the first city as I

recall, and then they just gained in strength and intensity as the trip went on from country to country. By the time we got to Peru it was getting kind of bad, had trouble in Peru, in Lima, and then of course Caracas. Didn't have trouble in Quito [Ecuador] as I recall.

SOAPES: Had you had any advance warning?

CUSHMAN: Yes. Yes, we had advance warning and the vice-president said, "These people were wringing their hands; they've got to withdraw the invitation if they can't provide protection; otherwise, it's an insult to the United States if I quit and call it off and then let those guys off the hook." He said, "No. We'll go on unless the country withdraws it's invitation and says they can't protect me." Well they wouldn't do that; so we knew we were in for trouble.

SOAPES: The Caracas situation, of course, is the one that got the most publicity.

CUSHMAN: Yes, that was bad because the police sat on their hands; the government sat on its hands; and the thing just got

out of control. I think if they'd been tough about it they could have stopped it but they were--it was a junta led by Admiral Larrazabal, and they sat on their hands. They were pretty left-wing and took the position it was just poor folks out of the slums just going to demonstrate a little bit. Actually they were out to do murder. The vice-president was quite displeased with the performance of the government. But he wasn't able to do much. The communists controlled, at least at that time, the television industry, they controlled the press--through the unions, they were all communistic or communist controlled--so he couldn't go on the TV, couldn't get much in the press. He was alittle bit disgusted about the whole thing and he couldn't quite figure how to get back in, get a public opinion--not a reversal, but to get his story across.

SOAPES: What we hear so much about that was the physical danger that you were in. Did you and others in the party feel that you were in serious danger?

CUSHMAN: Yes, it's--I mean as a military man--it's a frightening thing to be faced by a mob, to see it operate and be unable to mount a defense or counter attack. This was

very carefully planned. We drove up that long winding road up the mountain from the airport where V.P. Nixon had been spit upon from a balcony--police didn't even stop that. Began to walk into the airport and up above on the second floor was a sort of a patio or a porch where people watched the airplanes come and go. You know, they could observe the airport--have a place for spectators. This place was just lined with people that spit on Pat and the vice-president as they went underneath them. And so we knew there was going to be trouble. We went up this winding road up the mountain, the highway to Caracas, and a bunch of cars went screaming in and out of the parade, shouting epithets. And then we got up into town and I've forgotten the exact timing--I guess it was the next morning perhaps--we were supposed to go lay this wreath. It could have been the same day, later on. In any event, a truck was driven out of a side street right in front of the convoy with the vice-president in it and stopped. I think the driver ran away. And then out of the side streets came pouring this mob with bricks, guns, clubs, and they went to work on the automobiles with the people in them. I was about the seventh in line so we didn't get it as heavy; we did have the

windows broken as I mentioned. So up where the vice-president and--Pat I guess was in a separate car--up where they were riding, they were beginning to bounce the car, they were going to overturn it and they were going to kill them. Might have happened anyway, gasoline---. And the screaming and yelling and hatred on the faces, and your utter helplessnes is what's frightening.

SOAPES: How did it eventually get broken up? Did some of the police finally--?

CUSHMAN: The U.S. Secret Service, without pulling their guns, pushed the truck out of the way and held off the people as best they could, and some of the police, I think, began to help a little up front. They had motorcycle police along the sides of this convoy and they just kind of sat there, you know. In any event they got that truck out of the way and then we got started. We were able to pull away from the mob. One little stop and you were just sitting ducks.

SOAPES: One of the questions that some of the manuscript material raises at the Library is the extent to which the

vice-president was actually involved in the administration. There's that famous comment of Eisenhower's in 1960 of, "Give me a few minutes, I'll think of something he did." Was it your impression that Nixon had a major role to play in the administration?

CUSHMAN: Well I think he did, but I was not privy to his conversations with the President. As I recall, he saw the President fairly frequently; he saw John Foster Dulles and other policy makers also. He was a very clear thinker and very articulate, so I'm sure that he, you know, pushed his views on important matters. I don't whether they were accepted or to what extent they were accepted, so it's hard for me to say. But I know that he had positions and he had ideas on these issues. Now they didn't always go the way he thought they should. I can recall him thinking mistakes had been made sometimes on decisions. But he was the first ever, as I recall, in the history of the office to be the fulltime member of the NSC, so he had the forum. The President sent him on all these missions around the world and gave him plenty to do on them. Now the day-to-day running of the government, not so much I'd say because he didn't

have a--well he was in on the Cabinet meetings at that, so--. And the Cabinet was used; there were formal secretaries, formal papers, and everything. I recall that. But again, I was not permitted nor asked to attend those meetings of the NSC and the Cabinet. Frankly I think the NSC then, as now, doesn't want a bunch of people sitting around the back wall. And the Cabinet the same. So I got into things on the second level and sometimes he'd ask me to make a view of his known--I was sitting along the wall, I wasn't around the table in most of these--But I would when he asked me to. They gave weight to what he said, I know. Now how Ike actually felt, I don't know, because I certainly wasn't on any kind of terms with the President. My business was in the other end of town. I think I got to meet him once or twice and that was about it.

But I will say this: That in every administration--and that one I know because I was part of it, and certainly as an observer of the Washington scene--it's always true there is a rivalry between the White House staff and the vice-presidential staff. It stems from the fact, I think, that the vice-president

doesn't have any power base and the White House is it, so they tend to think of the vice-president's staff as a bunch of damned busybodies and they don't really have any power nor any effect on things and so "you staffers get out of my way, I'm busy working with the President," is the White House attitude. The two principals may not feel that way and probably don't in recent years--not like when they didn't use to even speak to each other because they were political rivals. In recent years there's been compatibility and discussion because the President and vice-president. I guess maybe Lyndon [Johnson] and [Hubert] Humphrey didn't have such a good time, but the others haven't been at loggerheads. Whereas the staffs, I think, practically always are. Does this agree with the feeling you've had from your research?

SOAPES: That was going to be my next question, to raise that point. I was going to say, in terms of the Eisenhower and Nixon staffs' relationship, who would you say on Eisenhower's staff were the worst offenders?

CUSHMAN: Oh, the--Sherman--

SOAPES: Sherm Adams?

CUSHMAN: Yes, Sherm Adams, yes. He was just an abrasive guy and believing in conserving the President's time and taking the heat himself and he just, you know, cut people off in one or two words and he didn't have any time for the vice-president's staff. That's what I got from those who had to--I never had to deal with him, some did.

SOAPES: Were there any on the President's staff who were of the opposite view?

CUSHMAN: Oh, yes, yes. For example I got along just great with that, sort of counterpart, but again he was military and so was I so we had a common bond. Oh, I got along fine with the--let's see, [Max] Rabb who was the secretary of the Cabinet, trying to think now. The secretary of the planning board, Karl Harr. I was on good terms with him, and I still run into him occasionally downtown and, you know, have a big hello for each other. In general the people on the staff of the NSC, Ev Gleason, Jimmy--

SOAPES: Lay.

CUSHMAN: --Lay, who later with the CIA when I was the deputy director, served a long time in this town. All those people were very friendly, had a lot of fun with them. The FBI and the CIA, I always got along with them. We didn't have too much with the FBI, but occasionally. Secret Service, I got along fine with them, and the Capitol--running the White House police--can't think of the guy that was the head of it--[James J.] Rowley I think was the head of it. [Ed. note: James J. Rowley was Special Agent in Charge, White House Detail, USSS.] But I had no trouble with them. Then, I can't think of the ones except maybe Sherm Adams that I heard mentioned as a sort of roadblock around our office, the vice-president's office, who were hostile, come to think of it. I just didn't know any but the ones I dealt with.

SOAPES: Did you ever hear of any change in terms of that roadblock situation when Adams left and Jerry Persons moved in?

CUSHMAN: Yes, I think he was much more tactful and diplomatic.

SOAPES: Yes. They are very different personalities?

CUSHMAN: When I say the White House staff were the "ins" and the vice-president's crowd were the kids begging for the crumbs attitude, I think it's just natural. It's not a policy, and certainly would differ with personalities of different people. But they have their priorities in the White House and everybody's overworked and that sort of thing leads to differences of opinions and difficulties. If you try to get someone to do something and they're already too busy to do it, too busy to want to do it or be able to, that makes for friction.

SOAPES: You said earlier that you developed a sort of protective association with other administrative assistants around town.

CUSHMAN: Yes. I had one with one of the executive assistants to the Secretary of Labor, there was one to the director of the CIA. The Pentagon wasn't quite the same--as I recall I operated with George Brown, who was then a brigadier general in the Air Force and there was also a Marine brigadier over there who was sitting outside of the Secretary's door. All these people were

people, if I needed something for the vice-president, I could get a hold of them, seven, eight o'clock at night, usually still in the office just like I was. They could get to the boss, there's no damned wishy-washy "I can't decide" and all this. You get your answer, you know, as soon as they could get in touch with their boss. And it just was a producers sort of an association. Instead of going to the bowels of the state department or the Pentagon to get something done, they would give it the necessary heat to get it done for you. Good arrangement. And the same when they needed something from the vice-president's office, I could provide it. It was very handy and all these people, and I made an effort, you know, to get to see them face-to-face and that sort of thing. We never any, you know, everybody let's go to lunch together--nobody had time to eat lunch--but we got to know each other anyhow, over the phone and then face-to-face when we, as I say I went to practically every office building in Washington at some time during the course of my career.

SOAPES: Where were you physically located most of the time?

CUSHMAN: I think the number was Room 301, Senate Office Building

the old one. At that time the one and only. They were working on the new one as I recall, building it. My God I think it was during that period they tore up the front lawn, they were building a new subway to the Capitol, I think from the new Senate office building.

SOAPES: Did you have much contact there with the congressional people, the Senate leadership?

CUSHMAN: I didn't, no. The vice-president did, but it was political, so I didn't have anything to do with that.

SOAPES: You said that most of your communication with the vice-president was by memo. Were there ever occasions where, especially on some of the trips, that you would sit down with him and he'd sort of let his hair down and--.

CUSHMAN: Yes, sure. And it was on the trips--I organized and ran the trip in terms of the itinerary, working with the state department, this sort of thing--where we're going to go, present all this stuff to the vice-president. He, of course, had the final say. But then it was more or less up

to me as I recall to get the thing organized and get it moving and get it done properly. Now the occasion of the trip where you're in the same airplane was, of course, condusive to conversation, questions about the back-up book and all this sort of thing, so I got to talk to him quite a bit on the trips. And there were always day-to-day problems you get, of course, to solve, and I sort of ran his headquarters. I remember going to Russia, I had five briefcases of classified documents, and I had to set up the office in this dacha and get messages back and forth to Washington and so on. And if I had to go to the bathroom I had to carry all these five briefcases into the john with me, because here I am in a Russian dacha, I can't leave all these classified documents around, even a locked briefcase is no good. So it had its amusing features.

I don't want to leave the impression that the vice-president didn't talk with members of his staff because he did, but what he was against--which came out I think rather strongly when he became President--he liked to have time to think, he wrote his own speeches--and he made a lot of them because, as

I say, essentially he was running for President even before he organized a formal staff and so on to do it, to campaign, it was in the back of his mind that he wanted to run so he shaped a lot of the things he did that way. He didn't like people running in and out with a silly question everytime it popped into their head. He expected people to get general guidance from him and then carry on and do what they thought would be right in accordance with his policies. And as much as he had time for, when the staff was small, he'd talk to us and go out to lunch with us. I had a couple of lunches with him and Rose would come along and the other guy, the political fellow. No, he was not accessible in terms of just walking in the door to anybody except, I would say, Rose Mary Woods in those days. But he was perfectly happy to see you about anything, you know, if he was in the office. I could knock and go in. But see, when the political part of this term of office started--'59, early '60, whenever it was--the staff enlarged and he had to move across to the Capitol where he had offices. He only had something like three people over there, I think: Rose Mary; and the aide, an appointment secretary, Don Hughes;

and maybe a couple other secretaries that helped Rose Mary Woods. That's a little jaunt over there, so that got to be even more of a dividing period, you might say, when it was more difficult to see him. You know, he was busier and was busy with politics, but it was quite a trick to go and see him.

[Interruption]

CUSHMAN: The way it was in the early days was like most of the people, the Senators have, they have an office and then just outside of that are the, probably the private secretary and the administrative assistant, and then an outer office with typists, all one little enclave of several offices. And that's the way it was when I started working for him; so he could send for me and I'd be right there, or if I had something really hot I could knock on the door and see if I could see him.

SOAPES: Do you remember any of these opportunities that you did have to converse with him on a more informal basis; particular subjects that he was most interested in?

CUSHMAN: No, I can't. He was interested in everything, really, that had to do with government. He was always, of course, greatly interested in foreign policy. He was interested in the military, particularly the questions over the profusion of missiles that was a big argument in those days. Everybody was running off in all directions with five or six different missiles they were trying to develop, and he took a dim view of that. He was very keen on domestic economic policies, and something I knew nothing about--farm policy--I never discussed it with him, these sorts of things, labor problems. He had a lot of discussions. Talked over the phone to everybody all the time, kept in touch that way with the various Secretaries, particularly Labor and State and, as I recall, he had a lot of dealings on Labor with the Secretary of Labor. So he had just, really, an interest in all the major problems and issues that were around. He had to have if he was going to run and he was; so he really studied and worked hard and kept up-to-date. I used to listen with the greatest of admiration--I got to hear him appear before the National Association of Editors, I believe it was, and he fielded all the questions with--I just

never heard anything like it. Dealing with every question with humor and knowledge and in most cases with a position, although he had to pretty much side with the administration, didn't go out and criticize Ike's policy, for example, in broad terms, tough terms. But he really, really knew his subjects, knew the issues.

SOAPES: One of the ways in which his advice to the President and the Cabinet has been characterized by those who heard him in Cabinet sessions has been that he had a strong interest in the practical political impact of certain decisions. Did you get that sense from when he talked with you?

CUSHMAN: It sort of went without saying. He was a professional politician and he took pride in the fact, and so obviously he always would have one ear tuned to the political impact of any course of action.

SOAPES: Did you ever hear him in moments when he was critical of the President?

CUSHMAN: No, no. No, I never did. And I've heard from those

in the office how careful he was when the first health crisis took place--I think that happened before I got there.

SOAPES: Right.

CUSHMAN: Then I think there was another one after I got there.

SOAPES: Right, the stroke would have come when you were there.

CUSHMAN: Yes, I think so. And he was scrupulous in never overstepping the bounds and appearing to try to take charge. I never heard him say anything against the President or anybody in the White House, Adams or anybody. I don't know whether he ever did with Rose Mary, I don't know. You interviewed Rose Mary?

The Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

SOAPES: No, we haven't.

CUSHMAN: Well if you want to find out about the vice-presidential years, as well as many of the other years, there's your source.

SOAPES: I was going to ask you about additional people that you think should be contacted in regard to the vice-president. Rose Mary Woods is an obvious source.

CUSHMAN: Yes, right. I'm a great admirer of hers and she has a great memory and very loyal to Mr. Nixon. And as I say, I'm a great admirer of hers. But she really was constantly with him when he was vice-president. And when he was senator and--I think that's when she started, when he was a senator. And, of course, the White House years, you'd have to ask her about those.

SOAPES: Yes. I was going to say, are there other people--

CUSHMAN: Well, Don [J.D.] Hughes who is now a lieutenant general in the Air Force. And I don't know just where he's stationed. I think it's a training command down in Texas, Lieutenant General John D. Hughes, who was the aide who went on every trip with him, including the campaign trips, in a nonpolitical way, and was his appointment secretary. He was very close to the vice-president and got to talk to him a lot more than I did in fact, because he was with him all the time, as aide, on all the trips he made in the United States and so on. I didn't make that many trips in the United States with him; I made the ones abroad. Charley McWorter who was the political man for

most of the time I was there, and then of course Bob Finch, Herb Klein. I was trying to think of the guy that was there when I was there--Bob, from California. He retired from the office about, oh, after I'd been there about a year I think--Bob King. He was a former FBI agent and got into the political scene early on with Mr. Nixon, he was sort of administrative assistant, I think. Anyway, he left to go into business for himself after I'd been there about a year, and Charley McWorter, who was then President of the Young Republicans, became the honcho for political affairs in the office. And then in another year or so he was joined by all kinds of people, primarily Bob Finch and Herb Klein, but there were some others whose names are on the list. There was all kinds of political characters running around.

SOAPES: Did you have much contact with Mrs. Nixon?

CUSHMAN: No, not much except that on the trips I would get to see a lot of her. They would usually have a big party after a trip over at their house for both the press and the

staff and various people involved with the thing. And, of course, she'd come in the office every now and then. So I got to know her, yes. And I sure had great admiration for her.

SOAPES: What personal traits about her stand out most in your mind?

CUSHMAN: Well, she was very poised and a great help to the vice-president on his trips. They really went as partners. She didn't, as far as I know, study up on the back-up books as much as he did but I think she did enough so she could contribute if asked, you know, on issues. Hard worker. They both, I thought, were good parents, you know, considering the public spotlight they were in and the tough job that they had, they raised two lovely daughters, in my opinion. I thought they handled it tremendously.

SOAPES: Is there anything that I haven't gotten into that you think might be of interest to scholars in the future in regard to the vice-president?

CUSHMAN: No, I think that I've indicated that perhaps you could see the shaping of his own administration from some of the qualities I've described. In other words, that he didn't want to be kissing watermelon queens when he could be thinking and creating policy, that the innovations in foreign policy--and monetary and economic affairs, too--that he undertook were quite revolutionary, really. At the same time, I think that the isolation tendency, in order to do this thinking, showed up as vice-president and perhaps was carried too far when he was President, I don't know. I really don't know. But as I say, there were several people that had access to him and I think he tried to cut it down, get past that, and maybe too much so, I don't know. But to me the achievements of his administration as President were foreshadowed by his capabilities and his great qualities of clear thought and creativity that I saw when I was working for him. As you can see, I'm a great admirer of his, and I was just heartsick when what happened, happened.

SOAPES: Thank you very much.