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NICHOLS

**Nichols, Kenneth D. (OH-262) 100 pages**

**PRCQ**

Engineering instructor at West Point; Deputy District Engineer for the Manhattan Project, 1942-1943; District Engineer for the Manhattan Project, 1942-1947; Chief of the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project, 1948-1950; Deputy Director of Guided Missiles, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1950-1953; Chief of Research and Development for the U.S. Army, 1952-1953; General Manager of the Atomic Energy Commission, 1953-1955.

DESCRIPTION: Interview #1. Personal background: received A.B. from West Point in 1929; received M.S. from Cornell University; received Ph.D. from Iowa State University; commissioned in the Corps of Engineers; instructor at West Point; account of career in atomic community. First meeting with Eisenhower in late 1945 to brief him on the nuclear stockpile; contacts with Eisenhower sought because of Nichols' conflict with David Lilienthal; Eisenhower's role in allowing Nichols to leave the atomic program in favor of assuming a professorship at West Point in April, 1947; Nichols' promotion to Major General and recall to Washington; differences of opinion concerning weapons custody between Nichols and Lilienthal; Eisenhower's important influence at security meetings during the Berlin crisis; Nichols' meeting with Eisenhower, in his capacity as an advisor to Secretary of Defense Forrestal, concerning the "no use" policy then governing atomic weapons; Eisenhower's vital role in increasing budget for atomic weapons as informal chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Lilienthal's preference for atomic energy research and his unhappiness as an atomic munitions maker; Lilienthal's opposition to the Hydrogen bomb; Nichols' appointment to the Atomic Energy Commission; civilian/military weapons custody battle within the Atomic Energy Commission; Lilienthal's success in slowing the Hydrogen bomb's progress through the support of sympathetic scientists; Joint Chiefs' support of the Hydrogen bomb puts Lilienthal out of a job. Creation of the Guided Missiles Project and Nichols' selection as Deputy Director; specific missiles emphasized; Wilson's appointment as Secretary of Defense in 1953 brings the elimination of the office; limited attention given to long-range missiles; Von Braun's role in getting research and development started on long range missiles; prevalent attitude is one of peace in the late 1940's; Berlin Crisis and the Korean War spark national interest in developing atomic weapons and missiles; ballistic missiles delayed by Army/Air Force rivalry; briefing with Eisenhower concerning NATO missiles shows development of the nuclear posture he would have as president; Eisenhower's feelings towards the press and political life; Eisenhower's belief in the need for massive retaliation; commitment to use nuclear weapons essential to strengthen the NATO alliance; French departure from NATO; world-wide belief that Eisenhower would use nuclear weapons; military preparations for atomic use in Korea; military satellite program initiation under Aristide Von Grosau; Wilson's termination of the satellite program; American capability to launch satellite prior to Sputnik; Nichols' criticisms of the space race; delivery vehicles for nuclear warheads when Eisenhower came into office; Polaris development and its need for smaller warheads and missiles; Russian explosion of an atomic weapon in 1949 provides impetus for the Hydrogen bomb; changing attitude among scientists regarding the Hydrogen bomb. Oppenheimer denied security clearance until 1943 due to communist record; Oppenheimer's contributions to the war effort; Oppenheimer's disapproval of the Hydrogen bomb makes his extreme influence inappropriate; Borden alleges that Oppenheimer is a

Soviet agent; necessity for Eisenhower to restrict Oppenheimer's clearance in order to avoid attack from McCarthy; fairness of Oppenheimer's hearing; Oppenheimer considers resigning; lack of credibility demonstrated by Chevalier case; antagonism created by security case among the scientific community; assessment of Eisenhower's fairness; Strauss' desire to purge government of Communist influence; "missile gap"; Charles Wilson as Secretary of Defense; Atomic Energy Commission's growing militarism; Atoms for Peace; impossibility of nuclear non-proliferation; defensive missiles; extensive comments on the Dixon-Yates contract; Eisenhower's approach to Vietnam conflict would have involved nuclear weapons; military-industrial complex; need for pollution control in rivers.

[Columbia University Oral History Project, interview by John Luter, Oct. 5, 1967]