



INTERVIEW WITH
Richard M. Bissell, Jr.

by

Dr. Thomas Soapes
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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Richard M. Bissell, Jr.

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Richard M. Russell Jr.
Donor

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This interview is being conducted with Mr. Richard Bissell in his office in Farmington, Connecticut, on November 9, 1976. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Mr. Bissell and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: At the beginning of the Eisenhower administration you came into the Mutual Security Administration. Is that correct?

MR. BISSELL: That's correct, yes.



DR. SOAPES: Under Harold Stassen.

MR. BISSELL: Right.

DR. SOAPES: Was there anything new in terms of policy or approaches to the subject that was obvious with the new administration?

MR. BISSELL: That's a hard question for me to answer, partly of course because of the passage of time. The new administration came in very much as a new broom in all departments. And I think my difficulty in answering your question reflects, in part, the difficulty of separating the rhetoric of drastic, promised change after so many terms of a Democratic administration and what actually happened. I would say that in the Mutual Security Administration there was not a major change and

certainly not one immediately apparent. The changes that were quickly apparent were in Stassen's relationships with a lot of the staff that he inherited. Also, of course, with any change of administration, new men come in as the senior decision makers-- in this case not only in the Mutual Security Administration but also in the State Department--who are inexperienced, who simply don't know, haven't lived through, the background of current situations and current problems. So for a time they have to subject themselves or be subjected to a lot of, in effect, education, briefing, and indoctrination. Decisions that would have been made almost as a matter of course by an experienced administration take more time with a new one.. To summarize, the changes that I remember as being immediately difficult were more in personalities and styles of working together than in policies.

SOAPES: I believe you went to CIA in about 1954?



BISSELL: Yes, I think, January of '54 as I remember it.

SOAPES: And I believe, from reading the Columbia interview, your first major project was involved with the U-2.

BISSELL: Yes, in a sense that's true. I was somewhat involved in the Guatemala operation which I discussed a bit in the Columbia interview, but the first major activity that I had charge of was the development of the U-2.

SOAPES: What were the major problems in that project that you had to overcome?



BISSELL: Well, they need to be divided at the outset into two series. One included the technical problems of getting an aircraft designed, developed, built, getting its equipment to work, learning how to use it. The other set of problems had to do with organization, personnel, and training. I think the nature of the technical problems is pretty self-evident when you consider that we were trying to achieve performance in certain dimensions exceeding any that had been achieved before. And we were trying to do it very fast indeed, and in deep secrecy.

SOAPES: In terms of speed, was there a target date for completion?

BISSELL: Well, very early in the game, I would say within two weeks of the authorization, the go-ahead, which was at the



beginning of December of '54, [Clarence L.] Kelly Johnson had established a date in August 1955 for the first flight of the aircraft. So he was allowing himself less than eight months to first flight, from a time when he had not yet finished his engineering drawings, which I think is very nearly unprecedented. I believe there were one or two new aircraft built that quickly during World War II, but I'm not sure that there were any done faster.

I had no technical background for this task and had to learn as I went along. The technical decisions were pretty largely left to the contractor, primarily Johnson, and to a degree, to Pratt & Whitney Aircraft up here. I think the problems that took up most of my time, energy, and attention were those in the areas of organization, organizational relationships, and personnel. I found myself running an organization in which, broadly, there was about one-third Air Force personnel on active duty, (but assigned to the Agency so that I was actually their commander for this purpose); about one-third Agency personnel (including people in the fields of finance, procurement, and also security and communications); and then in the field units about one-third contractor

employees (mainly Lockheed, but also some from Perkin-Elmer and a few from Hycon, another camera firm on the West Coast). I received a very liberal education in the difference with respect to their terms of employment, privileges, prerogatives, rights, and duties as between government civilians, military personnel, and civilian industrial employees. Forming harmonious teams of these groups took a surprising amount of time and attention. I think it was successfully accomplished, but one had to be very sure of equity in matters like rest and recreation leave, trips from Adan [Turkey] back to West Germany, and this kind of thing.

SOAPES: Basically personnel administration matters.

BISSELL: A lot of that, yes.



SOAPES: As opposed to the concept of the mission and that sort of thing. That wasn't--

BISSELL: Yes, there was no problem of that sort. First, a relationship had to be hammered out with the Air Force and then to be maintained. The hammering out was bureaucratically, a moderately bloody affair, but that was accomplished by mid-'55.

After that, the relationship with the Air Force really was very smooth.

SOAPES: Who was your major contact at the Air Force?



BISSELL: Well, there were a series. There was a Colonel Leo Geary, who was there really throughout the entire time. He was, for most of the period, the senior member of a very small group-- just two or three or four Air Force officers--who were both the liaison and the support office for the U-2 project. My first contact point before Geary came on the scene was [Major General O. J.] Os Ritland, who finally retired as a two-star general; he was a full colonel when he was working with me. He was the first liaison officer. Then he moved over and became my deputy in the project organization when it was formed, and another able colonel took his place in the Air Force liaison organization. About two years later Leo Geary became head of the Liaison Office. Meanwhile, Ritland had been promoted out of the program. He was succeeded by a series of outstanding officers. In hammering out the relationship, I dealt quite a lot with the Chief of Staff for Operations and on occasion with General [Nathan] Twining who was Chief of the Air Staff. On the civilian side I maintained

a close relationship, of course, with one of the fathers of the project, Trevor Gardner, who was Assistant Secretary for R and D [Research and Development], and with his successors--Richard E. Horner and Joseph Cheryk. But these two, the Assistant Secretaries for R and D, were always helpful. And in some ways, I suppose, my closest continuing contact above the project level was with them.

SOAPES: The bloodiness of the relationship that you referred to was personnel management problems, or was it empires?

BISSELL: Empires, very definitely. The truth of the matter is that Curtis LeMay would liked to have taken over control of this project as soon as it became operational. But that got settled, and after that, no problem.

SOAPES: In terms of the origin of the project, were you involved in developing the concept from the beginning, or is this something just thrust upon you?

BISSELL: Definitely the latter.



SOAPES: So you are not in a position to give insight into the origins of the idea of the U-2?



BISSELL: Well, not very much, no. I think it's probably a matter of record in this earlier interview--and I know it is in others that I've given--but early in '54, nearly a year before the authorization to proceed with the U-2 project, the Air Force, on its own, had solicited proposals from four air frame builders for very high altitude reconnaissance aircraft. The proposals were simply in sketch form. They were design concepts, not what later came to be fullblown proposals. One of the submissions was by Lockheed and it presented the technical concept of the U-2. Another one was a stripped down, Canberra-type bomber. There were four although but I don't remember the other two. The U-2 concept was one of the ones turned down by the Air Force. They did have a few of the lightweight Canberra configuration built and flown, and they did use them occasionally for high altitude reconnaissance. So, the technical concepts originated, really, in the Air Force and in the industry, whether identifiably for overflights or just as an invulnerable high altitude reconnaissance aircraft. I have no idea. Of course,

the idea of the project as a major intelligence operation (and I'm sure this has all been documented) originated with the so-called Surprise Attack study undertaken at the direction of President Eisenhower and under the chairmanship of James Killian by the so-called Technological Capabilities Panel of the President's Science Advisory Committee*. Specifically, it grew out of the work of the T.C.P.'s Intelligence Subcommittee such was chaired by Edwin H. Land, and had Ed Purcell and James Baker (the prominent astronomer) as members, as well as someone from A. D. Little and someone from Vanderbilt University. In any case, it's this group that I really credit with boring in on the concept of overflight as a means of obtaining intelligence. They got hold of these conceptual designs that had been submitted to the Air Force, decided that they were very interested in the U-2, and finally crystallized this into a specific proposal.

SOAPES: In the Columbia interview you indicated that Eisenhower kept very tight control over where the flights went, frequently disapproving certain proposals, approving others. As you were

* Editor's Note: The report of this group was titled "Meeting the Threat of Surprise Attack."



frequently present when he made those decisions, could you discern what his priorities and objectives were in approving and disapproving certain flights?



BISSELL: The approval and disapproval of proposed missions I think had to do very largely with time-dependent circumstances--more with that than with any details of the proposed mission plan. There would be periods--well, for instance, shortly after a mission had been flown, when he would be reluctant to authorize another. I think he would want to let the whole provocation cool off before risking it again. He would be influenced by whether there had been a diplomatic protest--as you probably know there were at least two of those that I remember and there may have been a third--and by whether the mission had gone in part undetected or had been accurately tracked, and things of this kind. I think lots of other circumstances also influenced him and influenced Foster Dulles to feel at one point that they could afford to allow a mission to be run at another point or that they couldn't. I suppose that the apparent sensitivity of the mission target or of the

area to be covered by the flight may have influenced them a little, but I don't really think it did much. As I've said, Eisenhower's first authorization to me was simply for a certain number of days, without specifying any number of missions authorized or anything to do with their geography. And I don't really believe that throughout the life of the project he was greatly influenced in the go, no-go decision about where a flight would be flown. I think he was influenced favorably in several cases by the possibility that we, hopefully, could fly missions from a Pakistan base with a much lower chance of being tracked by the Russians. But it was the possibility of greater anonymity rather than the geography covered that I think would have weighed in his decision. As to corrections in flight plans, when he had approved the mission for a particular date we would bring in the flight plan and show it to him. I don't know quite what influenced him. He would sometimes cut out particular legs or say, "Well, don't go from A to B to C, go from A to C." And I think probably it was a quick layman's effort to cut down exposure and risk more than anything else. Don't take in unnecessary targets. Don't expose yourself any more than you need to.



SOAPES: Of course one question that was frequently raised about the Powers' flight was that it was so close to the Summit. Do you recall any concern at that time about being so close to the Summit?



BISSELL: You perhaps remember better than I do now, that when the authorization for that flight was given, it was going to expire a certain number of days before the Summit. That obviously reflected a concern--I think really probably as much as anything on Foster Dulles' part--that there should not be a provocative act just before the Summit occurred. With hindsight, I've often wondered why that date wasn't put further in advance of the Summit meeting. But at the time the fact that a date had been set made it clear to me that the desire to avoid provocation during such a meeting had been recognized and had been weighed and taken into account and competent authority had fixed what they thought was an adequate safety margin. I certainly didn't question it.

SOAPES: You don't remember any one else raising the issue?

BISSELL: I really don't no. Before the fact, no.

SOAPES: In regard to Guatemala, I believe in the Columbia interview you discussed in some detail the factors for the success and failure of that and I don't want to go over that ground again. The question that is left, I think, is what were the concerns of the time that made Guatemala such an important country for such an important mission?



BISSELL: I think really nothing more than the fear that it would become the first rather definitely communist-influenced foothold in the Western Hemisphere. After all, it was years before Castro. But there was a great sensitivity about communism in all of Latin America. I think, really, the fact that this appeared to be the first country where the communists might be able to achieve effective control is what focused the spotlight.

SOAPES: So there wasn't anything in particular about Guatemala that was important, it was just that any country in that situation might well have received the same attention.

BISSELL: I think so. I think perhaps in those days, the U.S.

government's sensitivity was greater about the whole Caribbean basin than about southern South America. But that's the only possible qualification.

SOAPES: Were you acquainted or involved with the Lansdale mission to southeast Asia?

BISSELL: No, I was not to any great extent. I think I wasn't at all, as a matter of fact. I think I did know of it at the time, but that's the extent of any connection.

SOAPES: What about in Indoensia? In '57, I believe, that there was some activity in regard to Sukarno.



BISSELL: Well, I got quite involved in the Agency's support of the rebellion on Celebes and on Sumatra against Sukarno's central government. I did so, really, working with General [Charles P.] Cabell, who was the Deputy Director at that time. I don't know how much you've read about the Agency's involvement in that whole affair.

SOAPES: I've really not read too much at all.

BISSELL: It was, in effect, an uprising by small outlying garrisons. Certainly, no large number of regular Indonesian army units was involved. Only small groups in those two completely separated areas. My most recent refresher on that comes from having read a draft of a biography of Allen Dulles which goes into it at a good deal of length. In that draft it is emphasized that Foster Dulles, among others, vigorously approved and urged Agency support of the rebels against Sukarno, and from the nature of the geography and everything else, the support had to be almost entirely by air although there may have been a couple of small boat operations. The form it took was the infiltration of communicators and of arms and ammunition and other equipment. All of this, however, on quite a modest scale. The reason for my personal involvement was that the U-2 operation was fully operational at this point, and one thing that we did was to fly quite a lot of reconnaissance missions over that whole area of the world. But also with that organization and with the experience I had, Cabell relied on me to participate in some of the planning of the operation. Desmond Fitzgerald was, I think, most actively in charge, and I suppose my involvement



essentially would take the form of attending planning sessions in Cabell's office. The operation was, of course, a complete failure. The regular army landed on the south coast of Sumatra and moved inland with very little resistance. And also there was the embarrassment of a plane being shot down with, I think, one or two Agency or Air American air crew who were then held for a number of years. But that's the nature of my involvement.



SOAPES: The assistance there was, then, military as opposed to political or economic type of activity.

BISSELL: Yes. Correct. The rebellion didn't last long enough for economic measures. Insofar as the assistance was political, it consisted really of the fostering of contacts. At least two years before the rebellion the Agency had been approached by representatives of some of the political parties in Indonesia, had given them some financial support and had, thus, made contact with a number of political figures in the country. Almost all the people--I think it's fair to say all the people the Agency had dealt with--eventually ended up as opponents of Sukarno.

So the background of the paramilitary activity was an essentially political action kind of operation, through which some of the contacts had been developed, that then carried over to the military.

SOAPES: The charter for covert operations was the 54-12 memorandum.

BISSELL: Correct.

SOAPES: Were you involved in the origins of that?



BISSELL: Not at all. I think it probably preceded my appearance in the Agency and it certainly preceded my subsequent direct activity in the clandestine service.

SOAPES: One mechanical question I'd like to explore is where did the ideas for clandestine operations begin?

BISSELL: Hmm. Well, I suppose one could say that they would come from a number of different sources. On occasion, individuals in the Agency would be asked by State Department officers if they could accomplish a certain type of operation or accomplish some result by a clandestine operation. I'm inclined to think

that some of the operations if they involved the support of political parties (essentially the financial support of political parties) and sometimes covertly organized propaganda or information activities, originated in the State Department. Typically, however, the sequence of events would be that a CIA branch chief, country desk officer, division chief, or station chief overseas (or their colleagues) would conceive of the idea of a project or we would perhaps encounter an opportunity. I would call it an encounter if someone in another country approached a representative of the Agency deliberately to solicit help in some kind of an operation. In short, I suspect that most ideas were generated from Agency personnel or from foreigners who were in contact with them, were then refined, and then of course brought in almost every case to the attention of State Department people.

[Interruption]



SOAPES: The Church Committee in its report said it was undecided whether or not Eisenhower really wanted Lumumba assassinated. What's your reaction to that conclusion?

BISSELL: I am not undecided at all. I think that's probably the one perfectly clear case. Though I don't know whether the President ever said that in as many words. If he did, he presumably said it to Gordon Gray. Gordon Gray would have been the communication link here. But when Gordon Gray comes into the committee meeting and says that his "associate" is very eager indeed that Lumumba be got rid of--and no doubt who the associate is, no doubt at all--the only ambiguity in my view might be in a phrase like "got rid of." Because, after all, nobody wanted to commit an assassination or to plan an assassination if there was some other way of getting rid of the individual. My own belief, about which as I said there isn't any doubt in my mind, is that the President did want a man whom he regarded (as did lots of others, myself included) as a thorough scoundrel and a very dangerous one, got rid of. He would have preferred if it could be done in the nicest possible way, but he wanted it done and wasn't prepared to be too fussy about how it was done. I would really place heavy odds that that's the message he communicated to Gordon Gray and that Gordon Gray passed along.



SOAPES: So there were a range of options that could have been used to carry out Eisenhower's desire, but he was not ruling out assassination.

BISSELL: That is my view--that is my belief of what his position or instruction was--yes.

SOAPES: This question is, I suppose, more informed by our current state of mind and reaction to this sort of thing. How believable was it to you at that time that an order would come from the President of the United States to assassinate somebody?

BISSELL: It was quite believable. I would say it was pretty thoroughly believable.

SOAPES: Believable because of precedent or--



BISSELL: No. But at least as believable of the next President, who was a very different kind of a person in age, background, training, and everything else. And if anything, more surprising to me coming from Eisenhower than from Kennedy.

SOAPES: The reason I raised the question was on the basis of my own background in military intelligence where they taught us that, when you get a piece of information or directive, you evaluate it on two scales: one, how reliable is your source; another one is how believable is the information. And that raises the question not only of how believable is it that the President would want someone assassinated, but also the line of communication to you from the President in terms of its reliability. Now your line of communication would be directly from Allen Dulles?



BISSELL: Yes. In this case the line of communication was a very clear one because it was from a special group, with the input to the special group being from Gordon Gray and the link from the special group to the Agency being Allen Dulles.

Now I'll tell you something that I don't think is in the Church Committee report but that I saw in the course of looking over some of the papers and cables that were sent. This is an anecdote, if you will, having to do with this matter that bears on the line of communication. There was one critical cable of instruction that went out at some point in the month of August,

and I guess this would have been in 1960, wouldn't it? I'd have to check my memory as to the year, but it was the time when the assassination planning took place. It was a very vigorous cable indeed saying that every effort must be made to get rid of this individual, Lumumba. The cable had been signed off, because I saw the copy, by Allen; so there's no doubt that it was sent on Allen's authority. Interestingly enough, I had not signed off on it and there's no indication that I had seen it, but my deputy, Dick Helms, had. Now that, in my mind could not have happened if I'd been in town. Allen simply would not have played it that way. I think there was an indication that Allen, in fact, wrote the cable. But very often if he was himself writing an operational order of this kind he would not have it sent until I had seen it or in my absence Dick Helms, although he obviously had the authority to do so. From this I did some reconstructing with diaries as best I could and I'm pretty sure that it was a time when I was away on vacation, which would explain the absence of my initials. Here you have a quite explicit cable of instruction being, I think drafted--I think there was evidence of that--and definitely signed by



Allen and sent to the field. You have minutes of the special group that I think are quoted in the Church Committee report or at least were available to the Church Committee. There's only the one major ambiguity that I've already referred to. It just makes every kind of sense to me that neither Eisenhower nor any other President ever said, "I want that man assassinated." What he would say was, "I want that man got rid of." Now obviously if he could have been kidnapped and kept someplace for four or five years incommunicado, probably everybody concerned, probably any President, would have been much happier with that. But also any President, and notably I think Mr. Eisenhower, would have realized that if you go out to kidnap a guy in the middle of Africa and he's your enemy, the chances of his ending up getting killed are very good indeed. People can't exercise that kind of detailed and precise control over events when they're working through layers of Agency, sub-Agency, and ally. So it never occurred to me that the President necessarily used the word "assassination," and it certainly never occurred to me that he preferred that means of solving the problem to others that would remove the character from the scene of action, but I have not the slightest doubt that he wanted Lumumba got rid of and he



wanted it badly and promptly, as a matter of urgency and of very great importance. Allen's cable conveyed that sense of urgency and priority.

SOAPES: Looking at the other end of the line of communication, the field station officer, the Church Committee report quoted the station officer as saying that when he heard about the scheme that he called it a "wild scheme professionally". Was there normally a route for the station officer to communicate feelings like this back to headquarters?

BISSELL: Oh, yes, he could have made that comment back if he didn't like the operational plan, and indeed he should have if he didn't like the operational plan. I don't remember enough about the operational plan to know. I must confess, I seem to remember having, myself, some doubts as to whether it was going to prove to be workable.

SOAPES: Was it possible, and here I'm talking generally about covert operations, was it possible for instructions to be given or operations to go on within the CIA without Allen Dulles knowing



precisely what was happening? Was it a tightly administered agency, or was there some degree of looseness?

BISSELL: I would say in general it was a pretty tightly administered agency. Now, as you of course are aware, the number of activities that were classified as separate operations with operational names, and in the larger ones, the number of different phases of the operation or events comprised within it, added up altogether to a formidable total. So obviously no one person could possibly have detailed knowledge of everything that was going on. However, I felt that it was a very tightly administered agency in this sense, that up and down the line there was a pretty clear understanding of what operational decisions raised questions of policy requiring pretty senior level decisions or senior level authority and what ones did not raise questions of policy and therefore could safely be made at the level of the station chief or the case officer or what have you. And with a pretty clear understanding of that, I saw very few cases, I hardly remember any that I observed in the cable traffic, which of course was enormous, of subordinates on their own making decisions that they



should have referred higher up. Well occasionally you have to, that is, circumstances require that you, act on your own authority when it would have been better to obtain approval. I suspect if Allen were alive and you asked him that question, he'd probably point the finger at me more than at any one person who ever worked for him. That's in one context and is perhaps in part facetious, but I really think that I did this very very little with Allen.

There was one area of the Agency within which he knew comparatively little of what went on--almost nothing from day to day and week to week--and that was the U-2 operation. That was the most compartmented and self-contained activity within the Agency. It was the only part of the Agency that had its own operational cable traffic which did not go to Allen's office and of which he did not see any selection except cables that I personally took him. Now there was, in my view, a very good reason for this. The kinds of decisions that were involved and the subject matter of the cable traffic was heavily operational and even logistical. "Do we run a special flight of the C-54 from Wiesbaden to Turkey to carry such-and-such people back from leave



and to carry such-and-such spare parts." Well that's the kind of thing that Allen Dulles really shouldn't have had anything to do with whatsoever. And because it was a kind of quasi-military operation (the U-2) most of the traffic had to do with, as I say, logistic matters and a great deal of it was what I identified earlier, essentially personnel management. The important decisions about the U-2 were ones that he always, of course, participated in. These were the go, no-go decisions. I don't mean the decision to go tonight as against tomorrow night, but I mean the decision that you've been granted authority to go if weather permits. Now having been granted authority to fly such-and-such a mission weather permitting, it was entirely my decision (which I never took to anybody else) when I looked at the weather to see whether the weather'd be good enough and whether I would authorize the flight. Again, in the preparations for and conduct at the Bay of Pigs operation, there were an awful lot of operational decisions that I couldn't possibly take back to Allen. But I would say it was a very tightly-administered agency.



SOAPES: What about coordination with the White House, State, and with DOD? Was there adequate information passed between all of those agencies and the Agency?



BISSELL: I think so. Most of the coordination was with the State Department, and that became, in the years that I was there (not because of me but it came to be in that period) a very tight coordinating relationship. There were few decisions made that weren't discussed at either division level or bureau level at least with opposite members in the State Department. Also while I was there the 54-12 Committee (which has had so many other names since) became much more formal and, if you like, a more effective channel for coordination with the White House.

SOAPES: You would coordinate through Gray or [Andrew] Goodpaster?

BISSELL: Yes. Well, the U-2 operation was always through Goodpaster. The 54-12 liaison was Gordon Gray as security adviser to the President. And then, of course, later it was McGeorge Bundy under Kennedy. I believe that was very adequate, and I think the individuals in question themselves felt that it was.

SOAPES: You never had complaints or complaints never came to your attention from Gray or Goodpaster or from State, DOD, saying we didn't know about this?

BISSELL: No. DOD was a little different. There was an under secretary present at this 54-12 group, at special group meetings, and there was some coordination at the staff level, but the Pentagon was much less involved in most of the policy decisions that concerned Agency activities.

SOAPES: I'd like to turn in the last few minutes that we have here to Cuba. We've been told that Allen Dulles presented a plan to Eisenhower in early 1960 for the harrassment of Castro by sabotaging sugar refineries and that Eisenhower's response to that was, "If you're going to do that, why not do something that will lead to his downfall?" and that Dulles then returned to the Agency and came up with a four-point plan. Do you recall that sequence of events?

BISSELL: I don't. There's no particular reason why I should except that, let's see, by '60 I had been the DDP [Deputy



Director for Plans] for a year I guess. And I think that after such an exchange Allen would certainly have communicated the results to me, not necessarily to me alone. He would probably have asked me to come in with J. C. King, who was the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, and talked to us together, and he might have had somebody else in there as well. But I think it more probably would have been J. C. King and myself, and I'm really very surprised that it didn't proceed in that manner. To answer your question, I don't happen to remember any such session with Allen. Although I remember the plan that became the Bay of Pigs operation, the stage it was in early in 1960, I don't really remember the very earliest stages when the initial planning was being done in the WH [Western Hemisphere] Division.



SOAPES: Was it normal procedure that plans would not come to your direct attention until they were fairly well along in their planning stage; that something like the Western Hemisphere Division or similar divisions would begin them?

BISSELL: That could happen, yes. That could very easily happen. And quite often did. I would say, as I said to you earlier, the shaping up of a concept of an operation was much more apt to start in the Division or even in a station in the field than to start at my level and result in an instruction from me to the Division. What I don't remember about the beginning of the Bay of Pigs plan is an occasion when either Allen or I told the WH Division to get busy on a plan.

SOAPES: We've talked some about the administration of the Agency and I really would like to know something about Allen Dulles as a personality, as a person to work with, as a supervisor. Could you give me some sort of a sketch of your remembrance of the man, Allen Dulles?

BISSELL: I suppose I'll start off by saying that I became extremely fond of him and a great admirer of his. I had known him for quite a few years, also Foster [Dulles] and their sister, when I joined the Agency. At the time that I joined it however, I didn't know Allen very well, though I admired him. My first several months there were very inactive, rather dull. This didn't



bother me; it had been apparent from the start that I wasn't going to fit into a pre-existing job in the Agency. But I saw a good deal of Allen and then, of course, with the beginning of the U-2 project, which really totally absorbed me for quite a long time, I saw him very, very frequently. He was basically a good delegator, notably in that project. He backed me up; he never interfered with me. He was just an ideal superior from my standpoint. I don't think he ever felt that he wasn't being adequately informed in the U-2 case. And, as I say, he didn't really have to exercise very much control. He relied quite heavily on Patee Cabell with his Air Force background, and I saw Cabell constantly. As I've said, the kinds of decisions that Allen should have been and was concerned with on the U-2 were the policy decisions which were fairly infrequent. Actually, they were made by Foster Dulles and the President really rather than Allen himself. Well that's not a very responsive, partial answer, but let me continue.

When I became DDP I became more vividly aware than I had been of a habit of Allen's which for the first time began to



concern me quite directly; that of dealing with my subordinates directly. On one occasion I got quite angry--and I think I probably wrote him an angry memorandum--but in any case, I argued with Allen and he said, firmly, "I am going to talk any time I want to, to anybody in this Agency about anything, and I'm not going to do it only through you." He added: "The rule is that any time I give an instruction to any subordinate of yours, that individual is supposed to clear it with you before carrying it out. If you don't agree with what I have told your subordinate to do, you can bring it back to me and we can talk it out. If your subordinates don't follow that rule, if they go and do things that I told them to do without checking with you, that's because you don't have proper discipline. It's your problem, not mine."

Well I stewed over this for some days and Allen was completely uncompromising. He wasn't going to change and he wasn't going to discuss the matter any further. It was partly, I think, for that reason that Allen had the reputation in Washington--or at least I felt that he had the reputation--of being a bad administrator. That's one of those cliché characterizations and it was quite wrong. Allen was a somewhat untidy



administrator, notably in the way that I have just illustrated. He didn't always go down the line of command, even though this Agency was a much more hierarchic organization than the State Department for instance. It had overtones of a military organization about it still. Yet Allen would often go three echelons down to ask a question.

I became a complete convert to his way of operating after I'd lived with it for a few months. He never had done that, you understand, to the U-2 project because he couldn't get into that box. He didn't know what to ask: he didn't know who to ask. I'd kept that box closed. But he knew all the people in the clandestine service, notably the division chiefs, and I became convinced that one of Allen's greatest strengths as an executive was that he had on a sample basis at least, a depth of knowledge of what was happening in the Agency and of the people in the Agency.

In the three years that I was DDP, whenever there were important personnel appointments or assignments to be made, a new chief or station, a new division chief, a new deputy division chief, these of course I had to talk over with Allen. He would



have been most displeased, and rightly, if I had ever acted on these without talking to him. On quite a few occasions I came into Allen with a recommendation to appoint a specific individual to a specific job, and I would say that nearly half the time Allen disagreed. I will certainly say to you, I believe it's true, that in every single case where Allen disagreed with me and persuaded me, perhaps reluctantly, to do something else, I was convinced with hindsight, he was right and I was wrong. After a few experiences of that kind, I wouldn't have been willing to make any single appointment without consulting with him because I admired his judgment and it was proven in my eyes. It was thoughtful. He would frequently, in discussing such a matter-- personnel matter--bring up a consideration or an aspect of an individual's competence or an aspect of a job that I hadn't thought about. And I came greatly to value his position as a counsellor in these matters.

On the substance of policy, I quite often disagreed with him. I was quite activist and he was, on the whole, I think, the wiser. I never counted these cases up in my mind in the same way so I couldn't give you even a guess at how often when Allen didn't



let me do what I wanted to, I concluded that he'd been right, and what percentage of the time I felt after the fact that I'd been right. But I'm sure I thought he'd been right a fair proportion of the time. Generally speaking, we didn't have very many disagreements; at least we didn't have many that we couldn't talk out. And our manner of working together was very seldom that of the recommendation and then concur or reject or modify or overrule. Obviously I'd go in with things and talk to Allen about them. If I had a position, I would try to persuade him of it. And if he somewhat disagreed, he'd try to persuade me of his view. Obviously, in the end his view would prevail as the superior officer, as indeed it should. But I found that that whole relationship of talking over personnel matters I mentioned, talking over organizational matters with Allen, talking over most policy matters, talking over relationships with other agencies was highly effective. It seems to me in the vast majority of cases, I found the consultation with Allen and his role in the decision-making process one that ranged from being easy to live with to being extremely valuable to me, and I'm sure valuable to the Agency. He was fairly impatient of many



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aspects of organization. That's another reason he somewhat got the reputation of being a "bad administrator." I've heard that label put on other Washington figures and they've usually been the men who were so concerned with substance that they didn't spend all their time on organization charts and budgets.

