

INTERVIEW WITH
Major General Charles I. Bennett
on
March 22, 1990
for
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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 MAJOR GENERAL CHARLES I. BENNETT

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This interview is being conducted by Martin M. Teasley of the Eisenhower Library with Major General Charles I. Bennett on March 22, 1990 in his home in Jacksonville, Florida.

MR. TEASLEY: I'd like to start, General Bennett if you would please give us some background information on yourself, where you're from, where you went to school, and how and when you entered the military service.

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, I was born in Chatanooga, Tennessee in December 1922. Then my parents very shortly thereafter, moved here to Jacksonville, which has been my home and was theirs until they passed away. Upon graduation from high school in 1940 I enlisted in the army at Camp Blanding here in Jacksonville, and very shortly concluded that, as I mentioned earlier, there had to be an easier way for me to win the war. So I asked for a transfer to the Air Corp and was accepted as an enlisted man. I served as an air mechanic for a very short time when I was transferred to California. I then made application for flight school as a flying sergeant or staff sergeant pilot and was accepted. I graduated in August 1942. I went then to the ferrying command in the unit at Long Beach, California and stayed there until I was transferred to England to fly the transport version of the B-24 and the C-54. I trained in both those aircraft in Boca Raton here in Florida. From England I was engaged principally in flying people in and out of Africa. Some of it was infiltration, some exfiltration.

MR. TEASLEY: Was this during '42?

GENERAL BENNETT: '42 and '43, yes. Then I was transferred to Orly in Paris and in that assignment I was flying almost exclusively the C-47 to move troops and material in support of emergency situations at one location or another. I remember, among many other very interesting aspects of that duty, the Battle of the Bulge. I recall very vividly flying to Marseilles and picking up a plane-load of troops that were about the sorriest-looking bunch of men I ever saw in my life. It frightened me. We apparently were at the bottom of the personnel barrel at that point and our guys had already headed for the Pacific. Lord, I swore to myself that some of those fellows didn't know one end of a rifle from the other. I learned subsequently that after we dropped them off at Metz it was just a matter of hours until they were in a shooting war and I felt incredibly sorry for them.

MR. TEASLEY: And this was the Battle of the Bulge? This would have been in December 1944.

GENERAL BENNETT: Battle of the Bulge. I was taking them to [General George] Patton. Subsequently, I got to know General Patton reasonably well and admired him fiercely. As I understand it, people either loved or hated him fiercely. I was one of his admirers. I still am.

MR. TEASLEY: So you would be flying the C-47 in theatre there?

GENERAL BENNETT: That's correct. We would fly into Italy principally, as I've already mentioned, and throughout France, back to England many times for various and sundry kinds of missions but . . .

MR. TEASLEY: Had you been commissioned by this time?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, I was commissioned in, Lord what was it? '43? I'll tell you an anecdote?

MR. TEASLEY: Sure.

GENERAL BENNETT: I'll tell you how I got my commission.

MR. TEASLEY: I'd like to hear that.

GENERAL BENNETT: This is going to sound kind of strange maybe but I have never had a damn bit of humility about my ability to fly an airplane. I am damn good. One day in this ferrying command thing when I was out in Long Beach, as a staff sergeant, I ended up with a captain for a co-pilot and we were taking a B-25 to Washington for some purpose not now remembered. In any event, when we got to Washington, I taxied the airplane up in front of base operations and a staff car whizzed up and picked up my co-pilot and took him to the officer's quarters. I got down, closed out my flight plan, put my parachute on my right shoulder and my B-4 bag in my left hand and walked three blocks to the enlisted men's quarters, drew out my bedding, went up to the third floor and made my bed then walked down to the enlisted mess to get something to eat, I repeated all that the next morning. When we got back to Long Beach I asked immediately for

an appointment with my colonel, Ralph E. Spake, I'll never forget that dear man.

MR. TEASLEY: S-P-A-E-K?

GENERAL BENNETT: No, S-P-A-K-E. He used to be in the insurance business in Atlanta, I was told. But he was a fine fatherly old colonel. I walked in and I said, "Now Colonel, we've got to do something. I'm not going to put up with this. I'm not going to put up with it at all." He said, "Well, son, I tell you what. Let me get you a flight officers rating," which was the equivalent of a warrant officer, "and as soon as we get that I'll get your commission." I said, "Colonel, that's the best news I've heard yet." And he did exactly that, in six weeks I was a flight officer, in six more months I was second lieutenant and then it just went swimmmingly.

MR. TEASLEY: A little different treatment upon arrival when that happened.

GENERAL BENNETT: Damn right, I wasn't going to be the first pilot on an airplane with my co-pilot being treated like that and my being treated the way I was. That's kind of a silly thing, and it's a childish story perhaps but nonetheless, a true one. I was irate when I got back to Long Beach.

MR. TEASLEY: Well maybe, that probably made you a little more sensitive later on to watching out for your crew members when you landed different places, I know that's . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: I did indeed, no question about it. Well, at that time we had a more or less tradition in my family. My father began as an enlisted man in the army, and separated as a captain. Got a battlefield commission. When I was a very young man, he'd take me out to this Camp Blanding I referred to earlier, took me to see his old cronies from the Georgia National Guard when they would come down here for summer encampment. Well I couldn't have been more than five years old when that started and that's when I began wishing to become a soldier. I've never had any other ambition. I never wanted to be a doctor, a lawyer, a fire chief, or anything else, I wanted to be a soldier, and I wanted to be a damn good one. Well, that's how I got my commission and it was as a second lieutenant that I checked out in the C-54 the first time. At that point I was the youngest first pilot on the C-54 in the air corps. Because at that point in time the regulations were such, or the policy, I guess I should say, was such that you had to have something like two thousand hours and be a captain before they would make you a first pilot on a C-54. But I did it as a second lieutenant right there in Boca Raton and went to Europe as a second lieutenant. But that's just something that I shan't ever forget for the remainder of my days.

MR. TEASLEY: When did you first become associated with General Eisenhower? Was that over in the European Theatre?

GENERAL BENNETT: That was in the European Theatre just days before the war ended. As a matter of fact they were already talking up at the little school house in Reims when Larry Hansen came down, oh say,

two weeks earlier than that to interview me at Orly.

MR. TEASLEY: Do you have any idea why you were selected to . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh, I think it was because I had the experience on the C-54 and Hansen was just then getting one and he had none, at that point.

MR. TEASLEY: So you were looked upon as one of the more experienced pilots?

GENERAL BENNETT: More experienced C-54 pilots, yes. It was true, I was. But not all that much more experienced, but I had more than anybody around me, that's just about the way it went. [Laughter]

[Interruption]

MR. TEASLEY: Okay, we were saying that you were contacted by Larry Hansen because of your . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: There were at Orly, I think some half dozen guys or maybe more that had varying degrees of experience, amounts of experience in a C-54. But I don't know, you're never told these things. A guy goes through all the records and he comes to you, and comes to the other guys and either you get it or you don't.

MR. TEASLEY: You must have been viewed as a good pilot, that's obvious.

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, I would hope so, knock, knock, knock.

MR. TEASLEY: Were you a first lieutenant at that point?

GENERAL BENNETT: First lieutenant at that point, yes.

MR. TEASLEY: So when did you actually transfer?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, the first meeting that I had with General Eisenhower was at the little airport at the schoolhouse. I remember that there were an awful lot of questions about whether that C-54 could go in to that little 2,000 foot strip. I said, "Yes, I can get it in there, without any sweat." And we did. And we got out of there without any sweat. Then we went from there to Frankfurt. And of course . . .

MR. TEASLEY: Now were you pilot or co-pilot?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, I was probably, fair to say, co-pilot and yet we were both first pilots, you know. None the less, I'm not trying to modify what was the fact. I was assistant to Larry Hansen, that's what it was. But often times I flew as first pilot without him, using another co-pilot. That happened until Larry left to come back to be separated. As a matter of fact I took the general to Moscow with another co-pilot and countless other flights when Hansen wasn't even on board. But his father was ailing at that time and he was, as much as could be permitted or arranged, going back and forth to Cleveland and that's when he decided that he just had to separate to take over his father's business. Well, Larry and I, we remained friends until he died. He lived down around St. Petersburg,

someplace. That's not the exact name, but it's one of those little retirement places down there.

MR. TEASLEY: So you flew the General while he stayed over there in Europe for the early part of the occupation anyway before he went back to the states.

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, a good long time he was there after the war before he came back to be Chief of Staff, I mean I remember it as being a good long time. I couldn't tell you exactly how many months it was but I know we did an awful lot of traveling.

MR. TEASLEY: And were you then based back in Orly at that time?

GENERAL BENNETT: No, I moved to Frankfurt.

MR. TEASLEY: Frankfurt, OK. And was he in the I.G. Farbin building?

GENERAL BENNETT: He was in the I.G. Farbin building, that's correct. I lived there, you know we had our quarters right next to . . .

MR. TEASLEY: Were you out at Rhine-Main or what would become Rhine-Main?

GENERAL BENNETT: That's what it would become, yes. We had three different airplanes at that point, a B-25, a C-47, and the C-54.

MR. TEASLEY: What determined which one you took, the range you needed?

GENERAL BENNETT: The range we needed, the number of people going along, things like weather, you know. Many considerations would go into that decision.

MR. TEASLEY: Did you fly all three of them?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes.

MR. TEASLEY: How many pilots were assigned to this contingent?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, we had Hanson and myself and then we sort of varied. We had a fellow named Kurt Heilbronn who was a sort of a stop-gap co-pilot. We had a guy named Eddie Devon, there were a couple of other guys that were there so temporary that . . .

MR. TEASLEY: And were you on call basically? This was full time?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, all the time.

MR. TEASLEY: You didn't do any other flying for other . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Well sometimes General Eisenhower would send me to take somebody else somewhere and that brings to mind, lest I forget it, another anecdote. One day I was in the snack bar behind the Farbin building and the phone rang and Kay Summersby said, "The boss wants to talk to you." Now I'm sure that you know that's the way we always referred to General Eisenhower, the boss. And I said, "Kay, give me five minutes, let me run over to my quarters so I can have some pencil and paper. I don't know what he wants to say." I did just that, it was only a three minute trot back to my quarters. I

dialed the phone, Kay answered, I said, "OK, it's Charlie." And I was standing up by the side of my bed and he said, "Bennett!" And that's the first time he ever called me "Bennett" in my life, it was always "Charlie." "There's just one damn thing I want to tell you." Now that's verbatim. I sat down on the bed; it scared the hell out of me, I didn't have any idea what he was talking about. He said, "When you're flying that plane you're in command, nobody else." I said, "Sir, I never had any doubt about it." He said, "That's all." [Slam]

It took me two years to find out what prompted that call. General Patton, not to be too harsh, was sort of a pain in the rear end with his air crews. Always telling them up, down, left, right, do this, do that. And at a dinner the previous night Patton had been present at General Eisenhower's quarters and somebody had said something like that. And that's what he was calling to tell me, not to worry. If Patton started up with me I was to remind Patton I was in command of that airplane. And that is the mark of the man. Right there, boy that taught me a lot about him. Consequently I didn't have a bit of trouble. I took General Patton to Washington the next day and brought him back. Didn't have any problems. As a matter of fact, I can't say "friends," you don't have "captain" friends with people like Patton, but we had a damn fine relationship anyway.

I'll cite another anecdote. Often General Patton would come up to the Farbin building to talk with General Eisenhower and at the close of the business day, we would leave the Farbin building and drive down to the General's train. Craig Cannon was, at that point,

the train commander. That was his business, an engineer. He was a military engineer, but he commanded that train. He was the boss. Well, they had the finest club car of any you ever saw in your life. General Patton, his aide, myself, my co-pilot, maybe one of the other co-pilots, we would go down to that train and I would all but literally sit at Patton's feet and listen to him tell war stories. Now he is a cracker-jack storyteller, I'll tell you. And we did that any number of occasions, and it was in that context that I said what I did earlier. We had a relationship, very open and very friendly and he told an awful lot of tales that I'm not ever going to repeat in my life, but it was interesting anyway.

MR. TEASLEY: Pretty salty probably, too.

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, very, very. But that was good duty there. Really, really good duty. We took him over, for instance, to see the King and Queen to receive the sword of the city. To London. We took him into Czechoslovakia. We took him into all over France, all over Germany obviously, all over the Soviet Union. Not really all over, but we went to Moscow, Leningrad, and Stalingrad.

MR. TEASLEY: These aircraft were specially configured in the cabin, they were one of a kind planes in terms of the accommodations inside, that you know of?

GENERAL BENNETT: Inside, but not in the cockpit. Everything in there was standard. Back in the back, we did all kinds of innovations back there to provide him with the ability to sleep when

we were crossing the pond. We first installed some, actually replicas, of pullman berths, upper and lower. Subsequently, after we came back, when he was Chief of Staff, I put a full-size bed in the back with a screen that went all the way around it where he could sleep more comfortably and I got it as near to the camber of the wing as I could so it would minimize the movement in rough air. We had a nice galley, a really first-class galley, and there was another one of the crew members who was one of the best stewards I ever saw in my life. That fellow was great. A great cook. And some of the mechanics we had were outstanding guys, I mean really, really first-class.

MR. TEASLEY: So when you took a trip, how large was the crew usually, you had . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: We had two pilots, unless it was going to be a very long trip then we had three pilots. And one other thing lest I forget this, we had two berths up in the crew compartment so that the off-duty pilot could get some rest before his next time to fly came up. To return now to the crew, there would be a pilot, and a co-pilot, maybe two, a navigator, a steward, and always a mechanic. So I believe five was about the norm for a good trip with any distance involved.

MR. TEASLEY: Did that apply to the C-54 and the B-25 and the . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: No, the B-25 we couldn't carry but just a pilot, co-pilot and a navigator. And one other thing, we'd have a radio

operator on there sometimes too, that's six, that's what it was, I'd almost forgotten the radio operator. Another one of the finest guys I had there was just a radio operator. He was sharp, really sharp. Today's flying, you know, bears no resemblance to what we had to do then. Not only could we not get above weather, in Europe you're in it all the time. This day of jets makes flying a snap. I've known both, so I know what I'm talking about. [Laughter]

MR. TEASLEY: Was the radio operator a traditional crew member or was that because you were taking around a five-star general and he needed to be in more close contact with the headquarters?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, that's right, he could use plain old morse code you see, for that kind of communication. It wasn't just all voice because sometimes the voice communications were very limited. We could get ahold of anybody in the world with that wireless arrangement but . . .

MR. TEASLEY: You made frequent trips all over Europe and then probably took him back to the States frequently?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, oh yes, until he came back to stay. And then when he moved into the Pentagon I had a little office right next door where I and one other fellow, one of the co-pilots, kept office hours every day, waiting on something. He used us for all kinds of things. That's one of the most amazing aspects of that assignment. It wasn't just as a pilot who would receive a memo or a lot of planned flight or something. And this is very difficult to believe,

but it's true. In the whole three and a half years that I flew General Eisenhower, he never told me anything except where he wanted to be at what time. You know, that was really fantastic. Then it was my job and my next call was to say, "General, if you would be kind enough to board at such and such a time, I'll get you where you want to go when you want to be there." And that's all there was to it, but in the meantime, . . .

MR. TEASLEY: So you did the route planning and . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, everything.

MR. TEASLEY: Unless he wanted to stop somewhere specifically on the way to do something?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, he'd tell me that. Now I've got another anecdote about one time, I never will forget this. Let me finish on this other thought though, unless I already have. What I'm telling you is the literal truth, there could not have been an easier man to work for in the world, in any capacity. So what I alluded to earlier was that he would use us in many other capacities. And he did. We had, you know, special communications to deliver, special people to talk to, special things to do, special roles to play in gatherings of one kind or another, which became all the more demanding, if that's the right word to use, after he became Chief of Staff. I was assigned, for instance, as the American aide to Field Marshall Montgomery and when he'd have parties at his quarters I was always invited, often times with Katie [Mrs. Kate Bennett]. And it was

that sort of relationship. After he became President, nothing changed. We were at the White House half a dozen times, almost always it was a family occasion. Mrs. Eisenhower's birthday, for instance, or some other kind of thing like that.

MR. TEASLEY: So when you were flying him you were almost, not just a pilot, but a military aide, you were one of his . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, I hate to use that word because I don't want to step on anybody's toes because the real aides were Craig [Cannon] and [Captain Harry] Butcher and James Stack and last but certainly not least Bob Schulz.

MR. TEASLEY: Maybe you were the Air Force representative or . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: We never had a special title to it. If the boss said do something, I did it. [Laughter] There was no title associated with that at all, I was a pilot, that's what it was.

MR. TEASLEY: Who did you work with primarily in the General's office as far as . . . Craig Cannon?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh, it would be Craig, if Craig was the aide, it would be Bob Schulz when he was the aide. Bob, you know, he was with him twenty-two years or something like that and was a number one, first class, guy to work with. I don't ever recall an unpleasant situation arising in the entire three and a half years that I was there. Not even one. That's unbelievable, I know.

But I wanted to tell an anecdote about stopping short of where you're headed. I took off with him one time from Frankfurt headed for the Azores coming back to the States. As we neared Orly Field, which is just a short hop from Frankfurt, I lost an engine and had to land. The General decided, well, at that time he had a suite in the George Cinque Hotel, that he would spend the night. I told him we'd be ready to go in the morning. Then he did something that senior generals are not supposed to do. He picked up the telephone and dialed the George Cinque. He was not supposed to do this. A lieutenant colonel answered the phone and I heard, "This is General Eisenhower, I'll be into the hotel in maybe an hour and I'd appreciate it if you would have my suite prepared." And then I saw the color rising up in the General's face. You know, red as hell. And then he said something like, "You heard what I said, God dammit, it better be ready!" and he hung up the phone. And I said, "General, what happened?" He said, "When I said 'This is General Eisenhower' that lieutenant colonel said, 'Yeah, and I'm Jesus Christ too'." [Laughter] That's a true story. We got on our way the next morning.

[Interruption]

MR. TEASLEY: Back in Washington, were you based out at Bolling Field, or where?

GENERAL BENNETT: Bolling, yes.

MR. TEASLEY: How many aircraft did you have?

GENERAL BENNETT: I had two then, B-25 and the C-54, but we rarely

used the 25 at that point. It was sort of, well noisy and uncomfortable and I can imagine why he would certainly prefer the C-54, anyone would. But . . .

MR. TEASLEY: Now was the, did the B-25 have a name?

GENERAL BENNETT: No, not that I was ever aware of.

MR. TEASLEY: The C-54 was the Sunflower II.

GENERAL BENNETT: The Sunflower II, yes.

MR. TEASLEY: What was the Sunflower I?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, except for the interior furnishings that I alluded to earlier, it was the same airplane. There wasn't that much difference at all.

MR. TEASLEY: Do you know when the change from I to II was made?

GENERAL BENNETT: To tell you the truth I don't even remember. We just got a new one and went about business. I really don't recall when that transpired, but I do remember Sunflower I, and then Sunflower II.

MR. TEASLEY: And it was an actual different aircraft, just a little different interior.

GENERAL BENNETT: Different aircraft, right, different interior, everything else was the same. There were some fascinating experiences that I had flying him to various and sundry places while

he was Chief of Staff.

MR. TEASLEY: How many passengers could the plane carry?

GENERAL BENNETT: We could get twenty people on there without any strain at all and there were very commodious accommodations.

MR. TEASLEY: Was it regular passenger type seating and then a table and seats facing one another maybe with a table in between?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, it was a little better than normal, but it had two tables and seats facing each other with a table in between, I had those tables made myself, as a matter of fact. I had them made down in Alabama. I had a window cut in the side so Mrs. Eisenhower could see out. You know, big pane like this.

MR. TEASLEY: Was that related to her fear of flying? She wanted to see where she was going?

GENERAL BENNETT: She didn't like flying very much, yes.

MR. TEASLEY: She was very serious about that, not wanting to fly, I think, wasn't she? At least you hear . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, you know, she was uncomfortable, there's no doubt about it and I took all kinds of measures to minimize anything unusual. On the trip when we went to Latin America, we got all the way to Rio without ever getting above the clouds. Now that's hard to believe, but it's true. We landed at a place called Belem, and I remember the then Air Force Chief of Staff who was on board, General

Hoyt Vandenburg. I was standing by the airplane after doing my inspection. General Eisenhower was talking to a large group of people and General Vandenburg, with whom I also had a very unusual relationship, was standing by the steps to the airplane with a camera in his hand. I don't know how I got so brassy, but I said, "General Vandenburg, you're supposed to be over there shaking hands with those people." He said, "The hell I am, and if you think I've got any film in this camera, you're crazy." [Laughter]

MR. TEASLEY: He was looking for an excuse to avoid the demands of protocol.

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes. But he was a mighty fine fellow, I enjoyed him immensely and it was a great sadness to me when he died of cancer, I believe. He was a fine man.

On one of the trips we took out of the Chief of Staff's office was to Biloxi, Mississippi. Ostensibly he was there to receive the surrender of Biloxi. The thing was that they had never surrendered during the Civil War and the city fathers informed General Eisenhower that he was the first Yankee they ever considered worthy of surrendering to. That was fabulous, honest to gosh. Photographs were taken on the Court House steps and that night we went on one of the old sternwheelers and chugged up the Mississippi until almost nightfall then the pilot just jammed the bow into the mud bank. One of the hands jumped off with a big hawser and tied it to a cypress tree. That's where we spent the night. The next morning I had gone down into the salon early. General Eisenhower came down a few

minutes later and we were the only ones there. And I've never quite understood how I had the gall to ask this question, but I did. I said, "General Eisenhower, what advice would you give to a young officer who aspires to be a good officer?" He looked at me and he said, "Charlie, the best thing to do is study history and don't read the regulations." [Laughter] He realized that he'd stunned me and said: "I'll tell you why I said that. I've never had any respect for a man who couldn't distinguish good from bad or right or wrong without having to look it up in a book." There's a great philosophy lesson. I never forgot it. Essentially, those were exactly the words he used.

MR. TEASLEY: Yes, that's interesting. He at West Point got more than his share of demerits and he said, "But it was never anything serious." He said, "I couldn't wear my hat straight, I never could wear a hat straight, I didn't feel bad at all getting gigged for that sort of thing." Were there any special security precautions taken on his flights overseas, were there ever any escorts or . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Overseas, we all had arms. I had a sub-machine gun which I turned in after we came back to the States. And from then on, I don't remember that we had any anywhere. If there were any, they were somebody else's doing. I knew nothing of them.

MR. TEASLEY: The machine guns you're talking about, was that during the war time?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes. One of those old-fashioned Thompson sub-machine guns was what it was. But we all had sidearms, 45's.

MR. TEASLEY: During the Chief of Staff time period there were no arms that you knew of, going to Mexico or Latin America.

GENERAL BENNETT: No, none at all, none at all.

MR. TEASLEY: I think I was reading on one of the trips there was a fighter escort but maybe that was more ceremonial than . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: That was ceremonial and I got rid of it in a minute. That was in Mexico City. The weather was awful. That was that same trip where I was worried about Mrs. Eisenhower. In stormy weather she was very uncomfortable. It was stormy in Mexico City and I was trying to negotiate into the airfield with the least possible inconvenience or discomfort to Mrs. Eisenhower. And then somebody called and said, "We have a fighter escort." I said right away, "Call them off, get them out of the area." And they did. We landed in Mexico City then went to the Reforma Hotel where we stayed. We had a big tea or something at the Ambassador's residence, as well as two or three other things and several huge parties.

MR. TEASLEY: On trips like that were you, I'm sure you were still concerned with the airplane and making sure it was ready to go for the next leg so you probably spent some of your time back at the airfield.

GENERAL BENNETT: I did indeed.

MR. TEASLEY: Probably you were involved in some of the social events as well.

GENERAL BENNETT: Almost all of them. But then they would be at hours when my presence would not be useful at the airport. Once I had things taken of to my own satisfaction, there was nothing to worry about. That was long before the days of blowing up airplanes and assassinating prominent figures and that sort of thing. It was just not something that required a great amount of attention. You couldn't be patently stupid but there was nothing at all to be concerned with such as you would have to be today. I'll bet even the Secret Service today is orders of magnitude more concerned about the welfare of the President than they were back then. Even then it was important, important as heck, but . . .

MR. TEASLEY: Did you have any special criteria for aborting a flight or turning around that, that applied to your aircraft when you had the Chief of Staff on board more than if you didn't have a VIP passenger, did you have any written guidelines that . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: No, no.

MR. TEASLEY: Just normal safety standards?

GENERAL BENNETT: Normal safety standards, now I could always get emergency descents and emergency landing privileges. It just wasn't any sweat because all the FAA guys knew the Sunflower and knew that tail number, 9146. You didn't have to say very much, you got an awful lot of cooperation.

MR. TEASLEY: You mentioned that Eisenhower didn't interfere with your scheduling. Did he come to the cockpit? Because he had a love of flying, I think.

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes, often he would come up and every now and then he would actually sit at the controls.

MR. TEASLEY: Sit on the right side and . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh, I don't know, I'd get up and let him sit on the left side.

MR. TEASLEY: Did he take the controls too?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh, yes. But not for very long, and not very often. Quite frankly, the man was so busy with other things that he just didn't have time. He was working all the time. I meant to tell you earlier that when we were on a trip to the Philippines, I met this Colonel who had actually taught General Eisenhower to fly when he was in Manila with MacArthur. It was strange that we ran into one another, but we did. And I guess somebody told him where the aircrew was staying and he came over. He was still an aviation enthusiast. We had long, long talks about the early days when he was teaching him to fly.

MR. TEASLEY: Did you have any close calls, you already mentioned losing an engine every once in a while, did you have any weather, or close calls, or . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: No, not really. No, I can't ever recall anything

of a very serious nature. If the weather was just abominable or, I mean unsafe to fly, I wouldn't fly it. And we had several times that I would recommend that we hold off until a later hour to depart and without exception, he would agree. Still another anecdote about something like that. On that same trip to Latin America we came back through Panama. We had picked up a bunch of tourist-type stuff. I was very busily engaged in manipulating the load gadget that tells you where your center of gravity is, how much weight is on board, how much runway you require to take-off, etc. Panama is a very strange place, in a way. At the end of the Albrook runway, with the wind blowing a particular way, you take off right into a hill. I calculated that we had to off-load or we had to send some on, in another airplane or we had to do something, because the calculations weren't coming out right. When I reached that conclusion, General Eisenhower was having drinks with the Air Force general who was the Albrook commander. I went up to his quarters, knocked on the door and went in. And I asked the General if I might speak with him for a moment and he said, "Of course." I said, "Sir, I've some news I'm reluctant to bring up but I must. Our airplane is overweight for take-off. I would prefer that we find another airplane and that we shift some of the people and some of the things to the other airplane and send it on or bring it behind us, whichever is most convenient." He said: "Fine. Go ahead and set it up." And at that time the Air Force general said, "Captain, you sure you're right?" I said, "Yes, Sir, I'm right." He said, "Well, I don't believe it." He said, "I'll fly that thing up there." General Eisenhower said: "The hell

you will." [Laughter] He made him get a B-17 and one of the guys that got selected to go early was Bob Schulz. A number of others, too. We had an awful lot of weight. They took it up there in a B-17. Subsequently, when I was later stationed there, I flew that same B-17. But . . .

MR. TEASLEY: But you were in charge?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, from then on no one said a word. That same general remembered me when I went back to be stationed there. We're coming up to the time for the General to retire and go up to Columbia. I guess I flew him maybe half a dozen times after he went there. The President would call him back for some kind of consultation, they'd send me up to get him; at that time in a C-47.

MR. TEASLEY: Were you in Panama at that point? Or were you, you were still in Washington.

GENERAL BENNETT: No, at that point I was over in Bolling. I was an operations officer for what became the Special Air Missions Squadron which is now the wing over at Andrews AFB, MD. That's where it all started; in a little gymnasium building at Bolling.

MR. TEASLEY: You mentioned before about the discussions over the Columbine and how Eisenhower had some reservations, or didn't think it was necessary to switch from the C-54 to the Columbine?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, those were the views that he voiced. I always had the sensation that he just wasn't taking it seriously.

You know, he wasn't really paying any attention, he was satisfied with the airplane he had. I know that at this point I'm speaking for him, which is foolish, but it was my sense that he had enough on his plate at that particular time that he wasn't going to waste time thinking about getting a new airplane. That just wasn't something he was all that worried about. So the conversation didn't last very long, but that was my feeling. I might have been wrong, but I don't think so. In any event he didn't get it. He didn't get it then; it was much later.

MR. TEASLEY: So in other words, had somebody proposed it at that earlier point?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, the manufacturer probably. [Laughter]

MR. TEASLEY: What was the president flying in at that time? Was he flying in a . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: He had a Columbine.

MR. TEASLEY: A Columbine.

GENERAL BENNETT: That's right.

MR. TEASLEY: OK. But he called it . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Hank, what the hell was his name, the president's pilot? I almost got to fly President Roosevelt at one time, but then they decided, no, that General Eisenhower would come back with the president to Washington. But when he came back to stay, when he came

back for the big welcome he received in Washington, I flew General Eisenhower then. And we had an en-route change in itinerary that was not anticipated. We had planned to land at Gander in Newfoundland to refuel prior to going into Washington. This was the normal thing to do. But the weather at Gander really went sour and the best alternate I could find was Logan Airport at Boston. So, again, I said, "General, the weather at Gander is just unacceptable." As it turned out Logan wasn't much better. But at that moment it was better. He said, "OK, fine." And Lord, then there was the race to get everybody up there to meet him at Boston. And that took some doing. Most of them got there in time but when we landed there it was really socked in. I mean badly.

MR. TEASLEY: And this was his official homecoming at the end of the war?

GENERAL BENNETT: That was at the end of the war. Finally, we got everything all sorted away, got back out of there, and came to Washington.

MR. TEASLEY: And did he then fly out to Abilene on that trip, too?

GENERAL BENNETT: I'm not really sure whether it was that one or another one, but I took him out there several times. As a matter of fact, that's where I visited the house.

MR. TEASLEY: When you flew to Kansas, did you land at Schilling or Smoky Hill, I don't know what it would have been called, in Salina.

GENERAL BENNETT: Salina is where I would have gone, that is my recollection.

MR. TEASLEY: There's an air force base there, I mean it's closed now but . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, I know, it is closed, but I know it was there. I'm almost certain that's what it would be, I don't remember Schilling. Perhaps it was called something else before Schilling.

MR. TEASLEY: Smoky Hill at one point, it was a SAC base, it had B-47's but that would have been . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: I'm embarrassed but I can't remember precisely where we did land on that trip. On those trips we'd do the same thing, you know, when they went to Denver. We went there several times.

MR. TEASLEY: You'd land at Lowry there.

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes.

MR. TEASLEY: What was the range and the speed of the C-54 and how did you figure that when you were flying your trips?

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, I've gone through so many airplanes since then that I'll have to think a minute. My recollection is that something in the neighborhood of about 180, well a little more than that. I don't know why, 180 sticks in my mind, that is about what we would use for planning and compute the wind and all that kind of good stuff. But around 9,000 feet was about the best flying altitude,

which would put you right in the middle of every bloody storm in the North Atlantic. That's what makes the jets such a dream these days.

MR. TEASLEY: Was the cabin pressurized?

GENERAL BENNETT: No, no, that was long before pressurization.

MR. TEASLEY: Yes, so that . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: That's what held you down. That and the engines, even if it had been pressurized the engine wouldn't have taken it much higher. Without being in a quasi-permanent stalled configuration.

MR. TEASLEY: What other passengers did you carry of interest that you can recall, I know you mentioned Patton and . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Many, many.

MR. TEASLEY: These were at the request of Eisenhower?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes, yes, always. Nobody dared get on that airplane that he didn't invite. One interesting flight was another trip to Moscow to take the American Ambassador there. And General Hap Arnold, he sent me one time to take him when he retired out to his ranch at Half Moon Valley in California. General and Mrs. Arnold were on board and, as was my usual custom, after reaching altitude, I put the aircraft on automatic pilot, turned it over to my co-pilot and went back to see how everything was going in the cabin. General Arnold, who was a puckish kind of man anyway, at least in my

judgment, just liked to poke fun and test you. He tested me on that trip, I'll tell you for sure. I guess we were not even three hours out of Washington when I walked back and he said: "What time are we going to get to thus and so." And I told him, I happened to have computed the answer to his question before I walked back. He said, "It can't be." I said, "Sir, I'll go check." And I went back, checked and then said, "Yes sir, that's correct." He said, "Now let me just recount for you." And he said: "You go from Washington to this station, to that station, to that station, to that station and there's so many miles in each one of them, and you've already told me your groundspeed so you can't get there at that time." I said, "Sir, but you forgot one." And that's exactly what he had done. And Mrs. Arnold turned around and said, "Let that man alone." I remember that very well. Then we got to some bad weather at Denver. The weather was truly bad, so I said: "General Arnold, we're going south through Albuquerque and take the southern route. The weather on a direct route they don't even know but it's bad and they can tell." "Oh hell, let's go straight across, it'll be faster." I said, "No sir, the weather's not right. We're going south to Albuquerque." Well, he did that to me about three times, I mean really, he had me all tensed up. I'm not kidding a bit. Finally he came up and said, "One last time, which way are we going?" I said, "Sir, we're going to Albuquerque." He said, "Well, I was just testing you, boy." [Laughter] That's a true story too.

MR. TEASLEY: Were you a captain or a major by this time?

GENERAL BENNETT: Captain, I didn't make major until after I got to Panama, after the General retired.

MR. TEASLEY: That's kind of tough, being a captain transporting these flag officers around and having to tell them what to do, right? What you were going to do and it's your ship.

GENERAL BENNETT: That didn't bother me. I knew the time would come, if I was entitled, it would come. I have no complaints at all. Sometimes that was even easier, really, it was even better. Because almost everybody else's pilot was a lieutenant colonel and the president's pilot was a colonel.

MR. TEASLEY: You probably flew into a lot of strange airports where you'd never been.

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh, yes. Many, many times.

MR. TEASLEY: And did you just do your homework in that case or, flight planning, talk to other people who had been there or something?

GENERAL BENNETT: I did, when I could. But I remember . .

MR. TEASLEY: Especially overseas trips must have been pretty difficult.

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh yes. Particularly the ones, one of the best examples is Prague. I took him to Prague for a big celebration and that was kind of weird because information on the airport there was

pretty skimpy. But I got enough so that it was no sweat at all. Fortunately, the weather was quite good when we got there so that didn't pose any problems. But it could, you know, it really could.

MR. TEASLEY: Were there language barriers too? Was English the flying language back then?

GENERAL BENNETT: Sometimes. Generally it was, but not always. For instance: on the first trip, as well as the second and third that I took to Moscow, we had to pick up a Russian navigator at Berlin. There's a kind of funny anecdote that occurred on that trip. Those were the Stalin days, you'll remember. This Russian navigator had the only real map. All mine showed white, unexplored, in much of the Soviet Union. I mean even the Pripet Marshes were just very generally outlined.

MR. TEASLEY: The Pripet Marshes?

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes, that's a big, vast steppe in the Soviet Union that's just as flat as a dime. But Lord, you could be flying at fifty feet and be quite safe. Of course, I wouldn't do that. About an hour and a half out of Berlin the weather started going sour and this Russian kept telling me to go down. Well, I did until I got down to five hundred feet and that was it. He still wanted to go down because the only map he had, and he had it folded up in two inch squares. Just so I couldn't see it. He tuned in what we call a bird-dog, a direction-finder where you tune in a frequency and a needle points to a transmitting site . . .

[Interruption]

GENERAL BENNETT: I tried every shenanigan I could think of to get a look at that map. Lord, I was trying to buy it, trade for it, or to do anything in the world necessary to get that map. No sir, he knew that he'd get shot if I got that map. I never did get it.

MR. TEASLEY: Did you want it for future trips or just for . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: Sure, I didn't have a good one and I needed one. Whatever he had was certainly better than anything of mine. Anyway, as I mentioned, the weather was going sour and he'd gotten me down to five hundred feet. I said, "This is it. We're going up." And we did. We got up on top of the clouds and I then watched even more closely when he was tuning in the little bird-dog. He'd say, "Go here, go there." You know, that kind of stuff. And, I'll jump ahead in my story just a little bit because that really is the gist of it. When we came back, not one of those frequencies worked, not one was the same. Anyway, we landed at the Moscow airport. I and my crew were staying at the Metropol Hotel which is just off Red Square. As anyone would do, you, me, anybody, you forget your glasses, you forget your cigarettes, you forget your briefcase, or something like that. Everyone had gotten off the airplane and two Russian sentries were at the bottom of the steps. One of the Russian generals, now it wasn't Zhukov, and he was on board that day. I'll tell you another funny story about Zhukov. But it was another Russian general. He tapped his pockets as if looking for his glasses or some such, made as if to go back up in the airplane. One of the guards said: "Nyet!"

And he got a little angry with them and started to go in anyway. Damned if one of the guards didn't take his machine gun and stick it right in the general's belly and say, "Nyeti!" They'd had their instructions. There was something new for me. The general turned right around then, kind of red-faced and abashed, and went about his business. I don't know what he left, I have no idea in the world, or why he wanted to go back.

Then we went into the hotel and I'll say this as delicately as I can. I remember a warrant officer in the embassy who reminded us that all the hotel rooms were bugged. He says, "Your bags won't hit the floor when you get up to your room and the phone's going to start ringing and there will be some girl wants to come say hello." He said, "My advice is wait until the third time they call because they get better looking every time you say no." [Laughter] That's all I'm going to comment on but it was kind of interesting. At that particular time, too, the Russians had the first, what I believe the Russians call a sports parade since the war began. No doubt there's another word in Russian. It's kind of like the May Day parades now. I mean massive parades. That was the time that General Eisenhower stood on Lenin's tomb. He was the first American to do that. Anyway, I was separated from that high muckety-muck arrangements. I was watching the parade form in Red Square. A funny thing about the Russians at that time is that an American was a source of total wonderment and awe to the Russians on the street. I was wearing what we call the Eisenhower jacket, you know, with two breast pockets. I had one of them stuffed with chewing gum and the other with Life

Savers. Well, kids started coming over to gawk so I took out a piece of chewing gum and the guy in front took it. Then I'd get another one out and then some guy shot his arm over the guy in front of him and grabbed it out of my hand. The boy who missed it acted as if I had cut his legs off. That was amazing. So I gave him two.

By that time I'd picked up an unsought interpreter. It was a funny thing. I know this is commonplace now, but at that point not everybody understood how the Russians were teaching American, not English, certainly not Oxford English. They were teaching Chicago American. This young man who showed up let me know that he could speak English. He really spoke American. The crowd started building. I mean I had two hundred people all around me. All of a sudden comes this mounted trooper doing just like they do in New Jersey to clean out crowds. You know, he was side-stepping that horse and coming right to me. He got there and this kid said: "The sergeant says you have to quit that." I said: "I am a guest of the Soviet Union and I am only handing out candy and chewing gum. Tell him to get lost." Well, the kid must have said something. Anyway, by then I'm out of candy. The guy then called and he says: "Hey, the sergeant says that you are creating a riot and you have to leave." I said, "OK." I turned around and walked two blocks back to the hotel. As I turned into the revolving doors, I looked over my shoulder and there must have been at least a hundred people who had followed me all the way. That was really something.

MR. TEASLEY: My goodness, just because you were American.

GENERAL BENNETT: That's right. The uncanny part of it was they would come right up to you, look you in the eye, no facial expression whatsoever. It was almost as if you were wooden, there was no expression change, apparently just curiosity but without any change of expression when they were looking at you. We went through the Kremlin Museum the next day. General Eisenhower and John Eisenhower were there and I was there. I can't remember if any other crew were there or not. As we walked into the Kremlin gate there was one of the most massive cannons that I'd ever seen in my life. Anyway, I remember John remarking, "This was the cannon to end all wars." I remember him saying that precisely. Then we walked on into the museum and to this day, it is the most breathtaking sight I can ever recall. Last month's National Geographic had some photographs taken in that museum. I swear even as gorgeous as those photographs are, I remember being totally awestruck. For instance, Catherine the Great's carriage with all its ornate carvings, and gold and jewels, and even the horses were there, stuffed of course. Some of the old art objects, the eggs, you know, that were made by that fellow in France. Clocks, swords, all kinds of things from the czar's time. You knew very well that whereas they might have hated the czar they didn't hate his possessions. It was truly fantastic.

MR. TEASLEY: And you made three trips to the Soviet Union with him?

GENERAL BENNETT: Only two with General Eisenhower, but the other one was when he sent me to take an Ambassador home and I came right back out. But Marshall Zhukov was on board on my first flight with

General Eisenhower. He came up to the pilots' compartment and I invited him to sit down in the pilots' seat. He was quite a person. He probably was as close to a barbarian as I'm ever going to see in my life. But he was one shrewd, hard, mean general. He probably had to be in the situation he was in. But that's really not for me to say, I suppose.

MR. TEASLEY: Now he was flying from Berlin to Moscow escorting General Eisenhower?

GENERAL BENNETT: Escorting General Eisenhower.

MR. TEASLEY: Picked him up in Berlin, I would say probably?

GENERAL BENNETT: We did indeed. Now, you know what an open man General Eisenhower was. He, I'm almost certain, without ever checking with anybody in Washington, invited Marshall Zhukov to come to the United States. All Zhukov could say was: "I'll have to check and see." Well, it was two or three weeks later and he got his answer back. General Eisenhower called me in his office and said, "I just want you to know something that ought to make you feel good. Marshall Zhukov says he's not certain yet whether his government will permit him to go back to the United States. But he told me that if they do let him go, he will only go if you're his pilot." That made me feel damn good, I'll tell you.

MR. TEASLEY: Did Eisenhower ever say anything about the Russians, that you can recall?

GENERAL BENNETT: No, not really. I don't have any recollection of him saying anything but he was too much of a diplomat to do that anyway. In any event, I knew that he'd be invited to Berlin for a luncheon or for some other specific purpose. In those days of Stalin, you know, the Russians tried to get you smashed every time you turned around. I mean that they served vodka as if it were ice water. The first lunch we went to I stayed there about fifteen minutes and the soldier-waiters were bringing the vodka to my table and I said: "No, No." I got my entire crew out of there and back to Tempelhof. From then on, I didn't permit any of us to have anything to drink.

MR. TEASLEY: You were transferred to the Air Force in '47?

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes, in September 1947.

MR. TEASLEY: September '47 and that was, Ike was the Chief of Staff then and so was there any ceremony or did you just come in the next day with a new uniform on?

GENERAL BENNETT: That's about what it was. As a matter of fact the uniforms took a little while. They had to be manufactured, you know, and they had to decide what it was going to be. There wasn't really much of a change because by that time, under General Arnold, the Air Force, in all but technical terms, was already a separate service. Because of that is why there was no great transition trauma. It was really very simple. Just a change of serial number and uniform. That's just about all there was.

MR. TEASLEY: In our conversation before we started the formal interview, you told me an interesting story about Eisenhower and the military tradition of asking one's commanding officer permission to get married.

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes. Shortly after the war ended and General Eisenhower returned to Washington as Chief of Staff of the Army, one of my navigators, who had earlier been divorced, remarried without asking the permission of his commander. Since his commander was General Eisenhower, and obtaining permission to marry was a tradition of very long standing in the Army, it soon became clear that my navigator was guilty of a serious dereliction. The first indication was the total absence of any form of congratulations or good wishes from General or Mrs. Eisenhower. The second was the fact that neither of the newlyweds was included in any invitation to any function sponsored by the Eisenhowers or at which they, singly or together, would be present .

In December 1945, I asked for the hand of Kate LeCompte Woolford Gordon, daughter of Major Andrew LeCompte Woolford Gordon, USMC, granddaughter of Judge James Gay Gordon of Philadelphia, and a Private First Class, USMC. Perhaps needless to observe, I had many trepidations as to how I was going to handle the officer/enlisted question but I decided that nothing was to be gained by being faint-hearted. I asked and received an appointment with General Eisenhower to seek his permission to marry. I must have perspired buckets but in the end he gave not only his permission but his blessing. The

ordeal was not over in any five minutes, though. He questioned me for a very long time about everything imaginable. But he was gentle and understanding while making it quite clear why marriage is a very serious undertaking for anyone. On the day following our marriage, the New York Times captioned a news item, "Captain Marries Private," and reported the details.

MR. TEASLEY: And the General then went to Columbia from the Chief of Staff job in '48, and how much advance warning did you have of that?

GENERAL BENNETT: Oh, I knew when it was going to happen for a long time. That's my recollection anyway. I knew it was going to happen because he had already asked me what I wanted to do. This is kind of a strange experience perhaps. But I said, "Sir, I think I'd like to go to the Air Command and Staff School." He said, "Well, go down and tell Tooley Spaatz that that's what you want to do." General Spaatz was then chief of the Air Force. I walked down to his office and talked to his exec, "Smitty", whom I knew, and told him what my mission was. He said: "Go on in." And I walked in and he was having a drink with Hanson Baldwin, the New York Times military editor for so many years. My belief is that Hanson was the last newspaper man anybody in uniform was entitled to trust. General Arnold liked him, General Spaatz liked him and we trusted him. We meaning, collectively, the services. He could be told, "don't print that", and he wouldn't do it. Well, I walked in and General Spaatz says, "What do you want Bennett?" I said, "Sir, General Eisenhower told me to come down here and ask you if I could go to Air Command

and Staff School." He said, "Sure. Go out there and tell that . . ." That's just the way he said it. "Go out and tell that, that major out there." He couldn't remember his name, his own execi [Laughter] "Tell that major out there that I want you to go to Air Command and Staff School the next class." "Thank you, sir." And I left. Well, sometimes I wonder what in the world is the matter with me on occasion because shortly after that I found out that I wasn't really eligible. By then, they had come out with specific lengths of service, ranks, and this kind of stuff, as prerequisites to go there. But they were going to send me anyway. I thought, no, that's not very wise. Because I had learned a long time ago that one's contemporaries as friends are just as important as your superiors. I wasn't going to take advantage of my situation. It was the strangest thing that about a week later I went to Columbia to pick up General Eisenhower. On the way back, I finally screwed up my courage to say: "General, I've got something I need to discuss with you." And I explained all this and I said, "I don't want you to think I'm not grateful or that I don't think I could handle it because I could, but it wouldn't be fair and in my own long-term interests and what I think is the right thing, I'm going to ask that I not go." He'd already retired by then but I wasn't going to not tell him what I had in mind. He said, "That's all right, son, that's OK." And that's the last word he ever had on it and I didn't go, went to Panama instead. Well, as it turned out, I had opportunities after opportunities. I started going to college when I was in Panama. I continued going to college after I had left there and went to

Maxwell Field to serve under the guy who had been my base commander in Panama and had since come back to Air Command and Staff School. I was assigned there as his adjutant. About a year after I was there, he sent me, believe it or not, to take a master's course in business at the University of Pittsburgh. Now if you don't think that was hard work, you're crazy, because I really had to do some work. But I did well. I left there and went to the Pentagon. In the meantime, I had taken the Industrial College of the Armed Forces by correspondence and completed that. When I ended that tour up I was selected to go to the United Kingdom Joint Services Staff College in London.

MR. TEASLEY: What year would this have been?

GENERAL BENNETT: That would have been 1957. Anyway, I took that course which was a marvelous one. I enjoyed it thoroughly. I left there, was transferred to Germany, to Wiesbaden, where I got into the missile business. I was in a part of the staff there that's known as programming. That's laying on all the A-B-C's and the 1-2-3's for every system that you're installing. It is a fascinating part of the business. Anyway, my boss at that time told me to take over direction of the installation of the missiles in Italy, from the headquarters point of view, not, of course, the engineering of it, but the programming of it, and the overseeing of it and the reporting of it. I did. Subsequently, I was the negotiator for the operations section of the agreement between the United States and Italy for the installation and operation of those missiles. Later, I

had exactly the same responsibilities in Turkey. I have to confess, I don't believe I ever had one comfortable moment in Turkey. That whole group of quasi-barbarians never let me be at ease once and I've always maintained that aside from the few cultured, educated Turks of the country, the rest of them are just barbarians, the veneer of civilization is very, very thin. But I made some interesting friends there, some of them in the military, the Turkish Air Force, and . . .

MR. TEASLEY: You mentioned that you were, you kept in touch with the Eisenhower's and went to the White House social things, was that before you went overseas?

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes. I was really coming back, see, I was serving in the Air Staff after finishing at the University at Pittsburgh when the General was in the White House. Again, my friendship with Bob and Dottie Schulz continued and I have always imagined it was through his efforts more than anyone else's that when social events came along, we would be included. In any event, it was a very pleasant experience. I enjoyed, and Katie enjoyed, every bit of it. But then after I finished that tour I went back to Europe. When that tour was completed, General Eisenhower was at Gettysburg. We visited him there on two or three occasions and always marvelled at both the farm and the residence.

MR. TEASLEY: What year would that have been?

GENERAL BENNETT: That'll be '62. Then in '65, when I was about to wind up my tour in the Pentagon, I was selected to go to the National

War College, an experience that ought not be denied anyone in the service. It's really marvelous. Hard, hard work but while there I attended George Washington University, taking a master's course in political science.

MR. TEASLEY: Were you a colonel by this time?

GENERAL BENNETT: Yes, a colonel. When I came back from that I again went into War Plans as a deputy director and then John P. McConnell became Chief of Staff after Curtis LeMay retired. For reasons I shall never understand, I was selected to be his executive assistant and stayed with him until he retired. Then I went to Vietnam but it was . . .

MR. TEASLEY: Had you made general yet?

GENERAL BENNETT: Just then, the day he retired. I have a funny story, the day he retired . . .

MR. TEASLEY: McConnell was the . . .

GENERAL BENNETT: J. P. McConnell, yes. We met, as he was taking off in a helicopter to go fishing up in Newfoundland with Bob Schulz, you know, General McConnell pinned on one of my stars, Bob Schulz pinned the other. Then I went to Vietnam, to Saigon, as Chief of Staff, 7th Air Force.

MR. TEASLEY: What year was this?

GENERAL BENNETT: 1969. I left there in 1971. While there, I had opportunities to fly just about everything they had. There were a few single seaters that I had not checked out in, mostly Reconnaissance aircraft, that I was not permitted to fly. But anytime I could have an instructor pilot fly with me because I was a general officer and that was the rule throughout the Air Force; a general officer couldn't fly without an Instructor Pilot, no matter what. But I was able to fly many types of aircraft over there, and many different kinds of missions. As a matter of fact, on one of them I had an opportunity to take my number one son along in an AC-130 which is a gun ship with 40 millimeter cannon. We had a big time that night. As I recall, the kill count on trucks was something like thirteen, which wasn't too shabby, because that was the first time I'd fired a forty millimeter cannon and the first time I had flown an AC-130.

MR. TEASLEY: So you were over there for two years or three?

GENERAL BENNETT: A year and a half in Vietnam but another year and a half on Guam. The general officer tour was a year and a half. When I was leaving there, General Bruce Holloway came on a visit to the theatre. I had known General Holloway when he was vice-chief of staff of the Air Force. He is one of the finest men in the world. While we were having luncheon with General George Brown, later Chairman of the JCS, who was commander of the 7th AF, General Holloway called down to me to say: "Charlie, am I going to see you before I take off?" "Yes, sir, I'll be at the foot of the ladder like everyone else." [Laughter] He said, "No, I want to talk to you privately. How about right now?" "Yes, sir." So we got up from the

table and went into another room. He said: "I've just gotten the chief to agree with me that you should command the 47th Air Division and the 93rd Bomb Wing (SAC) at Castle Air Force Base [California]." Well, I almost fainted. I left Saigon and went to Castle AFB, a perfectly beautiful place in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley.

MR. TEASLEY: Was that a second star at that point?

GENERAL BENNETT: No, I got my second star just as I left Castle to go to Guam to become Vice Commander, 8th Air Force. That was where I learned to fly the B-52 and the KC-135. Katie and I made an awful lot of friends there, each of whom we treasure to this day. It's of perhaps passing interest that I started the first Air Force Association chapter at Castle. Two years ago I was invited out there and the name of that Air Force Association chapter is the Major General Charles I. Bennett Chapter of the Air Force Association. Talk about being a proud guy. I was as happy as I could be. Well, anyway, that's where I learned the LOOKING GLASS thing, you know, the aircraft that is airborne out of Omaha every hour of every day as a command post in the event of nuclear attack.

In any event, it came time for the Castle tour to end and the 8th Air Force tour in Guam to begin. To say the very least, my tour on Guam was thoroughly interesting. I am confident that I dropped the very last bombs in the Vietnam War because I was within two and a half minutes of the deadline for the cease-fire. I sent the mission plan for that mission to the Castle Air Force Base museum where it's hanging on the wall now. It was a very interesting life. When I left there, I came back to the Pentagon as Deputy Director of Plans

Major (now retired Lt. General) George Loving who is a thoroughly superior officer and was a good friend. He still is. Then I decided it was time for me to retire. I had then thirty-three years service and I had at that point failed at selection to permanent major general. The maximum you can serve, under those circumstances, even if I had made permanent major general, is thirty-five years. So there wasn't any reason to go on but I had been a major general for two and a half years . . .

[Interruption]

GENERAL BENNETT: Well, it was very kind of you and I'm honored that you've taken the time and trouble to come and do this. I know that when you're half a block down the street I'm going to remember half a dozen other things and wish I had mentioned them to you but . . .

MR. TEASLEY: Well, what we can do in that situation, actually, is if when you're reviewing this you think of other things you could just write them up and we will insert them at the appropriate point.

GENERAL BENNETT: OK, I'll do that, that's fine.

MR. TEASLEY: We'll wait to make an insert, if anything comes to mind that we've forgotten, any other Eisenhowerisms or anecdotes, but we appreciate your sharing with us, giving us some insight. As I indicated we do not have interviews with any of the other pilots that Eisenhower had at any time in his career so this was pretty crucial, we thought. So we appreciate your time.

GENERAL BENNETT: There were so many things, you know. They were awfully good people to me and to mine. Mrs. Eisenhower was as kind to Katie and my children as anybody in the world could have been and so was the General. He never forgot someone on their birthdays and things like that. Never failed to be absolutely gracious. Some of my most vivid recollections are of going up to visit them at the Gettysburg Farm. What a gorgeous place that was. I think I started to say earlier that some of the memorabilia I see in the photographs you sent of the museum and library, I'd seen them much earlier.

I'll tell you an interesting little sidelight of something that he said one day that was very telling at that time. Denmark, I believe it was, had awarded him the Order of the White Elephant--many countries much to my surprise, have an Order of the White Elephant--and I've never quite understood it. But it had a big diamond right in the belly of the elephant. It was one of those life-time awards and no doubt has long since been returned. But I remember one day he was complaining in a half-joking way, "My God, on a general's pay I can hardly afford to buy the insurance for the darned thing." And it was true, absolutely true.

MR. TEASLEY: We have the replica of that in the museum, the original having been sent back, so we have that on display. He was one of only a few foreigners to be awarded that.

GENERAL BENNETT: That's right. Another thing that I remember happened. Do you remember the castle apartment that he was given in Scotland?

MR. TEASLEY: Culzean Castle.

GENERAL BENNETT: Culzean Castle, well, I've been there too and I was invited to go right along with the crowd and we spent the night there. As a matter of fact, John Eisenhower was along that day and I remember the ceremony at dinner with all the lords and ladies and what have you present. And then came the pipe major who paraded around the table blowing those god-awful shrieking bagpipes. At the end of it he goes up to the host, who pours him, in a big silver thing, the biggest drink of scotch anybody in the world could get down. And this old pipe major stands there and drinks it down, straight down. Then he gets the pipes going again and they parade out. Well, after the principals had departed, John and Jim [Colonel James R.] Stack, who's a name I haven't used in all this day and he was one prince of a man. God, I loved that fellow. Jim Stack, John Eisenhower, myself, a couple of British guys whose names I can't remember, sat down and mimicked the pipe major. [Laughter] I surely was glad that we didn't have to fly the next morning. That was really quite an experience. But that old Culzean Castle is an absolutely fascinating place. I have some photographs of it on the wall. All the swords, you know, as you go into the entryway. It is a fascinating place.

MR. TEASLEY: Yes it is.

GENERAL BENNETT: One last thing. On the day that General Eisenhower died, I had arranged to get an aircraft to fly myself and three or four other officers out of Washington for the weekend. I was to be

dropped off in Jacksonville to visit with my parents and the others were to go on to Orlando and Miami. Katie and I discussed at length the upcoming honors and ceremonies associated with the funeral and decided that there would be no place in such things for a lowly Lt. Colonel and his lady, so I continued with my planned flight to Jacksonville. I had not been in my parents home for an hour when the telephone rang to convey a call from someone at the White House who announced that the President had written in his own hand the names of persons he wished to participate in the funeral proceedings. That afternoon, an aircraft, dispatched by the White House, picked me up at the Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, and flew me back to Washington. I was advised that while the President was lying in state, I was to be afforded a "private moment." On that day, a limousine picked Katie and me up at our quarters and took us to the Capitol where an Army officer led us to the rotunda and signalled to someone who stopped people from entering. As soon as the rotunda was empty except for the honor guards, Katie and I proceeded to the catafalque and had our private moment. We also were invited to the National Cathedral for the events there. Very much to my amazement, we were seated with old friends of the Eisenhowers, both military and civilian. It was more than just a "touching" time. I cannot tell the story to this day without tears coming to my eyes.

MR. TEASLEY: Well, thank you, sir.