



INTERVIEW WITH
General Lauris Norstad

by

Dr. Thomas Soapes
Oral Historian

on

November 11, 1976

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

OH-#385; 52 pages
General Lauris Norstad
Open

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This interview is being conducted with General Lauris Norstad at his home in Dublin, New Hampshire, on November 11, 1976. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are General Norstad and Dr. Soapes.

DR. SOAPES: Before we turned on the recorder you were telling me some stories about your association with General Eisenhower after the war when he was chief of staff. Could you repeat some of those for us?

GEN. NORSTAD: Perhaps I might go back to one of my earliest meetings with General Eisenhower.

DR. SOAPES: Okay.



GEN. NORSTAD: He stated in his first book, Crusade in Europe, that we met in Africa on November the 10th or 11th of 1942, right after the invasion there. And it's true we did, but that was not the first meeting. The first meeting where I did any business with him was in the Old Munitions Building before that--matter of fact, shortly after Pearl Harbor. There was a chiefs of staff meeting, combined chiefs of staff meeting, the first combined chiefs of staff meeting in Washington when Mr. Churchill came over. Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt presided at those meetings. And shortly after that it was decided on the American side to set up this headquarters in

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London and that General Eisenhower would be the designated commander. And the chiefs then were working on the type of organization that he would have and how he would fit in with the British organization setup. And I was then working for General [Henry H.] Arnold who was the chief of the army air corps, and he asked me to go down and see General Eisenhower, to talk to him about this organization because, as General Arnold put it, he said, "I'm very concerned that this organization be properly done so that we don't handicap him by putting him too low in the organization structure. We've got to put him in a position so he can have enough influence with our British allies."

So I went down to see General Eisenhower and he was very gracious, as he always was, and very grateful to General Arnold for his interest. And I explained this, and we discussed the diagrams that the chiefs of staff had been considering. This went on for maybe an hour or an hour and a half, and it was clear to me that I wasn't making any particular progress. I wasn't getting anything from him that was different. So I stood up and told him that unless he had something else he wanted to tell me for General Arnold that I would go back and report to

General Arnold. And he then asked me to thank General Arnold for his interest and he said, "I appreciate his interest in getting me started out on an organization basis that will permit me to be useful. You tell him that I appreciate very much but that I have a feeling that I'll do all right." Which always struck me as being perhaps the understatement of all time. And I went back and reported that to General Arnold.



But that was my first official contact with General Eisenhower. I'd met him in the course of business in the Old Munitions Building shortly after he came back in the [War] Plans [Division], but that was the first time I did business with him. And then I did meet him when he first arrived in North Africa. I met him at a little air base, Tafarsoui, where I'd gone right after the landing on the 8th of November. It was a french naval air base. He cites this in his book. And then I remained in contact with him and seeing him quite regularly when we were there. And he went up to Algiers; then I went up to Algiers. And then I went to Tunis or to Sidi-bou-Said east of Tunis. And General Eisenhower, he lived up there for a while and had his headquarters up there. So I saw a great deal of him there.

Then after the war, he came back as chief of staff of the army. I was called in--now I go back to picking up your question--

called in one day by General [Carl] Spaatz who was the chief of the army air corps then. He said that General Eisenhower wanted me to come down on his staff as chief of plans and operations and that he, General Spaatz, agreed. But they wanted to know what I thought about it and I said, "What difference does it make what I think of it? If the two of you have decided, makes no difference."

And he said, "We still want you to have your say."

But anyway, it was agreed that I was going down and I looked forward to that. So I studied the organization book, and went down.

And the first day duty I reported in and he said, "You know what you're supposed to do."

And I said, "Yes, I've read the book and I understand it. In the words of the book, plus what is in between the words, it says that as the chief of plans and operations I should run the army."

He said, "Well," he said, "we understand it." He said, "Well go about it."

So I went about it. I used to see him--every day he would buzz on that intercom system and he'd always go through the



same ritual. "Are you busy?"



And I would go through this, give him the same answer, "No, I'm not."

"Well, can you, do you have time enough to come up here?"

"Yes, sir."

So I'd go up to his office whereupon he would come out with some proposal he had in mind, some thought he had in mind. He would be sitting behind his desk and I would be sitting in a chair maybe six or eight feet in front of his desk. But as soon as he proposed a subject, he was so physical that he had to get up--he started walking around and swinging his arms and his shoulders. And he'd be walking, pacing back and forth in front. And I quickly learned that he expected me to disagree when I did disagree, and I did. And I disagreed with him as strongly as was necessary for me to feel that he really felt the impact of my judgment on it, which he wanted. So the voices would be raised from time to time and there was great fun and great exercise. And I learned a great deal from him because many of the things he'd toss out I came to realize were for my education more than for any help to him. And this went on for months and months.

I might just jump a little bit here now and get on to the beginning of NATO. In the first proposal we would set up a headquarters, it was called in those days a COSSAC, chief of staff, supreme allied command, which was a way of getting a headquarters moving without having to establish it formally. And General Eisenhower was, of course, the only one really considered as that ultimate commander. And the chiefs of staff then were working on terms of reference for him, which were not very good because they were defining his position there in terms which would make it quite clear that he had to be directly responsive to the chiefs of staff. And it would have set up a weak office. And it was suggested, and as I remember the suggestion came from the White House, that since General Eisenhower had shown some reluctance to take this position that I might go up to Columbia and talk to him, which I did.

SOAPES: What position were you holding at that time?

NORSTAD: At that time, I think I was still the--no, at this time the Department of Defense had been set up and I'd gone back to the Air Force. I was deputy chief of staff, plans and operations, now, of the Air Force. And Bob Wood, who then was



an army colonel, later army general, who was a classmate of mine at West Point and we'd worked together a great deal in the planning business, we both went up to talk to General Eisenhower. And Bob Wood later came over to SHAPE as the secretary of the staff, the general staff there. And we explained at the outset why we were there, and he made it very clear that this did not fit directly in his plans. He didn't eliminate the possibility; he didn't close the door on it. But it was quite clear it was not in his plans. His plan was, he had this farm in Gettysburg and he was looking forward to spending some time there. And he emphasized the fact that Mamie was looking forward to that. At one point he said, "Well you know why they're thinking of me, why they want me--because nobody else wants it. Nobody else believes that it's going to work. So they're quite happy to have me take it on."

And I said, "Well, I think that's right. But I also think it's right that it won't work unless you take it on. There's no one else can swing it."

Well, after a little further discussion, then he said, "Be sure that whatever they do, whoever's going, they work out some terms of reference that permit the incumbent to do something."



They can't just throw him out there and tell him to organize this out of clear blue sky without giving him a position and giving him some authority."

So Bob Wood and I went back to the Pentagon and we took the draft that the chiefs of staff been working on and we worked on that. And I must confess that we--or I--did something that was quite improper. I bootlegged a copy of this draft to the White House, to Truman's staff. It just showed the general dimensions of what we should have. And then Truman sent over a letter for General Eisenhower which really made him Mister United States in Europe. And it was as great a directive I think as I've ever seen. It was clear enough so that it clearly established an authority, but it was broad enough so it didn't limit his authority.

He went over and took with him a few people with whom he had worked, principally General [Alfred] Gruenther, who had worked closely with him. And I had had the privilege of working closely with General Gruenther since the early days of the war in 1941 and we'd never been completely separated. So General Gruenther went as General Eisenhower's chief of staff, and he was a great chief of staff. And it was a great help to General



Eisenhower because their relationship was so close. It was a close personal one. And I went over, and I'm proud to say as a part of a team. My first assignment was as a commander-in-chief, United States Air Forces, Europe--which is a command I organized. But I spent most of my time that winter of 1951 working at or in connection with the group at the Astoria Hotel on the first organization of NATO. And then when it began to block out, shape up, then there was an Allied Air Forces, Central Europe to be created and General Eisenhower then asked me to organize that and to command it, which I did. And we started that in the spring of 1951. And I stayed there in that position until '53. In 1951 General Eisenhower asked me to come up to see him one day in Paris. And I went up and he said, "I'm going over and talk to the British chiefs of staff about this organization. I'd like to talk to you about your part in it."

I said, "Fine. I feel that I'm quite well situated."

"Well," he said, "there are two principal air positions in this organization--one is the air deputy to the supreme commander, and the other is the commander-in-chief Allied Air Forces, Central Europe. Now which one do you think you ought to have?"



And I said, "Well, I've created the Central Europe one and I think the best thing for me is to stay where I am. I think that's the best for the organization."



And he said, "I had a little different idea of this. I thought maybe you might come up here and work more closely with me." Well, that was very flattering.

And I said, "Well, there's some advantages in getting down and really organizing and commanding because these people-- there is no pattern to this," as he well knew and, "I think this is something that I can do and I would like to do it. Like to get it established."

He said, "Okay, but now when I go to talk to the British chiefs of staff, what do I do? What position do I offer them?"

I said, "Give them their choice."

He said, "Isn't that dangerous? They might choose the wrong one."

And I said, "No. If you agree with me that I should be in the Central Europe one, they will not choose the wrong one."

He said, "Why not? Why are you so sure?"

"Well, because on the chart, on the family tree, that deputy supreme commander sounds higher and is located at a

higher level. That's quite meaningless from my standpoint, but they will like that. And they'll take it, and let them have it."

He said, "Okay."

And he went over and when he came back he called me in, asked me to come up again. I went up there and he was furious. And furious at the British chiefs. And I said, "What's the matter."

"Well," he said, "it didn't go according to plan."

"What do you mean it didn't go according to plan."

He said, "I explained the two positions and I offered them their choice, and," he said, "they turned to me and said, 'Which one do you think is more important?'" And he said, "So they really didn't choose." But he maneuvered it around.

Now could I jump ahead a little bit and tell another story that I think will be of interest to you?

SOAPES: Sure.

NORSTAD: Later on in the spring of 1951, General Eisenhower called me. I was in Wiesbaden in Germany at the U.S. Air Force of Europe headquarters. And he called me one Thursday afternoon



and he said, "Perle Mesta in Luxemburg," who was minister to Luxemburg then, "has invited Mamie and me to come down and spend the weekend with her. And we have accepted and I'd like to have you come over and join us."

I said, "Well, I haven't been invited."

He said, "That's no problem; I'll get you invited."

And I said, "General Ike, you know I'm too busy."

He said, "Who in the hell are you working for?" He said, "We'll get something done." He said, "We'll have plenty of chance to talk. We'll play a little golf and we'll talk. And so this will be useful."

So I said, "Okay."

So I got the invitation, and my wife and I went over. We played golf on a Saturday morning, and at lunch General Eisenhower supervised the cooking for the barbecuing--or outdoor cooking of the lunch. And then we talked in the afternoon, took a walk and wandered around a bit. And then that night we were having dinner there at Mrs. Mesta's residence. And just when the coffee came on the table we heard violins being tuned and horns being tooted in the big room right off the dining



room. And General Eisenhower said, "Perle," he said, "what the hell's going on out there?" And I could see concern on his face.

And she said, "Well, General, I hope you don't mind but everyone here wanted to meet you so I thought the easiest way of doing this was to have a reception and the best way to have that moving and something happening is to have a little dance."

Well General Eisenhower's face fell at that. The last thing he wanted to do was to get involved in a dance. But anyway, I lost sight of him for a while when we broke up from dinner, went into this room. And there was an orchestra there and a lot of people and a receiving line was formed and he was shaking hands with them. And I listened for a while and then he disappeared. So I took off to try to find him because this wasn't necessarily my taste either. And in the farthest recesses of that building in a corner, sitting in a corner in a sofa with his feet on a coffee table was General Eisenhower just looking glum as hell. No one's face is more expressive than General Eisenhower's and he was tired and unhappy. So I asked him if I could sit down, and he said, "Please do." He said, "You don't like that dance either."



I said, "No, but I would like to sit and chat with you for a while if you don't mind."

He said, "No, I'd love it."

So we sat down. And just to make conversation after we'd been talking for a while I said, "General Ike, I understand you made a good piece of money out of that book of yours."

He says, "Oh, yes," he says, "haven't I told you about that?"

Well he had told me most of it, but I said, "Well not all of it."

He said, "Well, let me tell you." He said, "Somebody, I don't remember who it was, wanted to buy this as a package, not only the book but the rights to radio or any other rights, reproduction rights, book rights, et cetera, magazine rights." He said, "So I sold that for six hundred and some odd thousand dollars," I think it was, "quite a bit of money for me." And he said, "It was ruled that this could come under capital gains, but when I'm working out my tax I found that I owed the government a substantial amount--hundred and seventy-eight thousand dollars. And so I called Judge [Fred] Vinson, who was an old friend, and I said, 'Judge, I've got an important duty to



perform that involves you and I'd like to come over and do this personally.' So the Judge says, 'Well come right over.'" So he said, "I went over and," he said, "I handed him this check." He said, "Just think of it. Dwight David Eisenhower, the barefoot boy from Kansas, gave to his government, with one stroke of the pen, a hundred and seventy-eight thousand dollars."

And I was sitting across from him and I thought, "By God, I've seen them all; they all go the same way--'How Great I Am.'" But I said, "But here's one man I never thought would fall for that." So I was terribly unhappy and by the time I thought this very unworthy thought, he leaned forward and with both hands he banged that coffee table so everything jumped about two feet, and he said, "By God, it's a great country, isn't it?" And that I think illustrates the character of the man about as well as anything. That and the fact that many times I saw him come out of meetings with the great warriors, field marshals and senior military people, and he'd walk down the hall and he'd see the guards, the sentrys there, just run-of-the-mine G.I. type, and he would go over and introduce himself to them and ask them where they were from and chat with them with the same

tone of respect that he talked to the mighty. And this impressed me a great deal. That also is an illustration of the character of the man.

SOAPES: Was not one to see great differences in hierarchy and rank.



NORSTAD: Oh, no. He had great respect for people of any level, of any walk of life, providing that if what they were doing they deserved respect. And I think he could tell. He got a feeling right away that that man, might have been a private or a corporal, he's a good soldier. And that was important to him.

SOAPES: When you got to NATO, at the beginning, what was there? Was it really starting completely from scratch?

NORSTAD: It was absolute scratch. To give you an idea--there had been a military organization of the European nations, Western European Union, with Field Marshal [Bernard] Montgomery in command, but that didn't have much flesh and blood on it. It was an organization; it made some contribution; it made it somewhat easier, but it was not a pattern. It had to be made,

and General Eisenhower, of course, worked on this, personally, with key people. And I can remember one very dramatic meeting when he had all those who were going to be his top commanders in, meeting in the Astoria and we'd had about ten days, two weeks, and we were to talk about the strategy--what were we going to do? What was the general objective going to be? And each one of us had to make a report to him, and I've never heard more crying in my life. Everybody crying, they didn't have much, they didn't have anything. They had to have this and this and this--how weak they were. And I could see General Eisenhower becoming less and less impressed with this very negative approach, and finally he just banged that podium--he was standing at the podium, got red faced--and he banged the podium. And he said in a very firm voice that could have been heard, I'm sure, two or three floors below, that he knew what the weaknesses were. We didn't have to emphasize that to him. And he said, "I know there are shortages, but," he said, "I myself make up for part of that shortage--what I can do and what I can put into this--and the rest of it has to be made up by you people. Now get at it!" And he banged the podium again and he walked out. Just turned around, didn't say another word,



just walked out. And believe me there was a great change in the attitude. Right away there was an air of determination-- we will do it, we'll do it. We are the difference. We, the commanders, are the difference. And this is quite typical of the way he would handle people under circumstances of this kind.

[Interruption]



SOAPES: Was it your impression that Eisenhower always wanted to emphasize the positive aspect?

NORSTAD: As I told David [Eisenhower], when talking to him about David's book, he said, "What was the outstanding characteristic of my grandfather?"

I said, "Well, the outstanding characteristic of your grandfather just happens to have been the outstanding characteristic of my immigrant grandfather. They were both believers. He believed. He believed strongly. He believed in ideas; he believed in institutions; and he believed in people." And so he was always positive and constructive because he was a believer. That's why he could create things and make things go.

SOAPES: When you came to him with a problem, he was wanting you to say, "Here's our problem; here's a solution?"

NORSTAD: No, I'll tell you what he wanted. If a problem came up, legally he had to know many things, he had to know about problems. But what he wanted you to do is to come up and say, "Here is a problem that's come up; here are the facts. And here are the things that I could have done; but here is what I'm doing." Not even asking--just do it.



SOAPES: In regard, again, to the general situation that you were encountering, you were starting from scratch. What were the major problems that you recall? I'm thinking in terms of nationalistic problems as well as logistic.

NORSTAD: We've touched briefly on that--there was a certain amount of jockeying, in some cases, for position to be sure that there was adequate staff or command representation at various levels. And, of course, General Eisenhower was very gifted at handling that type of thing because he would come in and he'd blow. If people were quarreling and continuing to quarrel on some picayunish thing, he'd come in and blow all the opposition away, just by talking to them positively. But actually I found that, within my personal domain, that by going to the authorities and explaining, that the oppositional problems

were quickly eliminated. And this is, I think, the place where we all learn from General Eisenhower, because he liked people. He liked dealing with these various countries, and it was quite clear that that was quickly reciprocated--these people wanted to be helpful. They wanted to be constructive. So we all learned that we should get to know the country. And he used to tell us, "Get to know these people. You'll find it's much easier if you know the people and understand their problems. And don't just talk to the government; talk to the opposition as well. Get to know them as well. And explain to them and see what you can do to help them because sometimes they have political problems accepting things. See what you can do to help them with their political problems to make it easier for them to do what you want them to do." Of course, he was a master at getting people together, people who had never been together, never worked with anyone as a matter of fact and between whom there were great barriers of history.

SOAPES: By the time Eisenhower left NATO in the spring of '52 to come back to the United States to run for President, what is your estimate of what had been accomplished in terms of creating this new force?

NORSTAD: Of course, the body of NATO had been created by the treaty and by the work done to set up the council and its staff and, by that time, setting up SHAPE and its staff. But he had gone beyond that point. General Eisenhower had given it spirit. So it had body and spirit. And General Gruenther and I have spoken many times about the heritage we received from General Eisenhower. He left great spirit that was quite unique. And I think if you talk to anyone who ever served at SHAPE during General Eisenhower's days or even after his days, they will say that the experience was quite unique and the greatest experience of their lives. And there was a dedication that I have never seen at any organization. And that came from the spirit that General Eisenhower had really established. And, of course, when he came he continued to make a great contribution to NATO. In the first place when General Gruenther--General Matthew Ridgway was there quite briefly--and General Ridgway had never worked with General Eisenhower as General Gruenther and I had. But when General Gruenther took over--and Eisenhower clearly looked upon General Gruenther, who had served him as chief of staff over there, as the expert. And General Gruenther had his full confidence. So General



Gruenther had the strength that came from being able to operate knowing that he had the backing of the President. And General Gruenther carried this on to a very considerable extent. So I was privileged to have two heritages: the Eisenhower and also the Eisenhower as further defined by General Gruenther. And I knew that General Ike knew me and knew how I thought and that he had confidence in me. So I never had really one moment of concern from that standpoint. And believe me there were times when it was very important, when there were crises-- and I was there for most all of the crises--and you always have to wonder, "Now if something breaks, do I move or can I move?" And I knew the limits under which I could move because of my relationship with General Eisenhower, primarily. But by that time, with General Eisenhower's support and backing, I had the relationship with Prime Minister [Harold] Macmillan, with General [Charles] DeGaulle and with Chancellor [Konrad] Adenauer, and with the other countries. This is something that General Eisenhower cultivated for me. And so it would have been very hard not to be successful. And he watched us all the time. You could see from time to time that he would do something or say something to help establish us further.



SOAPES: Focusing on some of these crises now, the first one I think of, of course, is Suez in '56. What role did you play in that?

NORSTAD: I took over as supreme commander in the fall of '56 which was not, at that time, regarded as a most auspicious point in history. And there were some questions as to whether this would weaken the ties in the alliance because we had the French and the British going one way, and it was quite separate, independent of NATO. And I talked to the French and the British about it--they kept me, of course, quite thoroughly informed as to what was going on, which I appreciated. Then I explained to them one day, the senior people there, the problems. We couldn't have two countries in SHAPE that were going off in a different direction without the other people having any connection at all. I said, "We've got to find a way of bridging this gap. We can't let it become a gap. So I'm asking you to give to me and to all of the senior staff in the war room to give us a briefing every morning and a briefing on the basis where we can ask you questions so that it will appear that there is nothing hidden from anyone." And they did that magnificently and it did not split them at all. That, again, I think was



testing the spirit that General Eisenhower had established. Because he was, General Eisenhower, as you know, was primarily a man of the spirit. Dr. Snyder, Howard Snyder, was very close to him. He used to tell me that many things that General Eisenhower did were exhausting for him, for instance making a speech or presiding over a meeting where some difficulties came up because his power was sort of an emotional power. And he explained that this was very wearing.

SOAPES: So from your perspective at the NATO command, the Suez crisis did not create serious tensions.

NORSTAD: No. Well, for instance, as I say, I had just taken over; so when it broke I was sensitive to the problem. But I must say the French government and the British government, they leaned over backwards to keep me informed and to keep me feeling that they were on the team. And these briefings that we set up permitted everybody to ask questions and know what was going on. And once you eliminate the idea that there's some dark plot to do something else with which they're not familiar, then the sensitivities are removed.

SOAPES: Now what about the U-2 crisis?



NORSTAD: Well I was in the hospital at the U-2, I missed that. I might say a word on it, however. I was in a hospital in Munich recovering from a heart attack. However, I had all the intelligence people and my staff came down every day to talk to me. And I did get word from General Eisenhower .

This again I think is typical of General Eisenhower and probably an instance where doing the right thing, what appeared to us as being the right thing, and good thing, might have been the wrong thing. Because when the U-2 crisis came up, General Eisenhower's instinct was to take the full responsibility, which he did publicly. And it could be argued that in the world of tensions and the kind of tough diplomacy of that moment, that that might have created problems. But his instinct was: I'm the President; I knew about it; so I am responsible. It's not an issue of whether I worked it out and decided it should be done and ordered it; that's not the issue. I knew about it and I'm the President, so it's my responsibility; I take. He took it.

SOAPES: What was the general pattern of communication between you as the NATO commander and Washington? What type of consultation went on?



NORSTAD: The Eisenhower years were unique in the case of Gruenther and myself because we had a relationship with General Eisenhower. We could call him on the telephone or he might, sometimes he called us on the telephone, you know just chat with us about something. And everytime I came to Washington I saw him. Sometimes he asked me to come back just to talk to him.

[Interruption]



NORSTAD: I remember one time making a remark in Washington to a group of civilians in Washington, some people in government, that, as far as I was concerned, that there were only two people in the city of Washington who had nothing else to do except talk to me. One was the President; the other was the Secretary of State, Foster Dulles.

They said, "How can you say that? They're the busiest people in Washington."

"But when I come, I have instructions to let them know that I'm there. And the minute I come in, I let them know. And the question I get is, 'When are you coming over?' Not, 'I'll look at my schedule to see when I can see you,' but 'When

are you coming over?' And when I go over," I said, "they're never in a hurry. As long as we're talking about something important, it goes on and on and on. And I finally break it off." And sometimes I felt badly about that.

I can remember one time, this may interest you, one time when I was back there was a White House reception, one of those normal White House receptions--I guess members of Congress. And I'd been warned of it before I left Paris that I would be expected to go if I was in town. So I brought my full-dress uniform and I saw General Eisenhower in the morning, and I had to go down to Alabama in the afternoon, to Montgomery at the Air War College to talk in the afternoon. He said, "Now, you come back and have Isabelle come to the reception at the regular time, and then when you get back and get your clothes changed, you come up." And he said, "We'll send you up to a sitting room upstairs and then Mamie and I'll come up and we'll chat." I came in reasonably on time and he had a car down to meet me with one of his aides, and he helped me get dressed and we went right up to the White House and went right in, got right in the line. And he called one of the White House attendants and he told him to stay with me. He said, "Now when he's ready,



as soon as he's ready, you take him upstairs and then Mrs. Eisenhower and I'll be right up." So we went up and we started talking. Now this was not late, but it wasn't early. I guess we went up there about quarter to eleven.

[Interruption]



NORSTAD: After about half an hour, I thought, "My goodness, this man has had a very busy day and he had this social activity this evening, and I'm not going to keep him up." So I was sitting on a sofa next to him and we each had a drink. And I said, "General Ike, if you'll excuse me, I'll go home and go to bed and let you do the same." He put his hand on my knee, he said, "You sit right there; I want to talk to you." So this went on for another half an hour. Now we've been up there for an hour. And I went through the same thing, and the same response--"You sit right there." And after something well over an hour, maybe an hour and a half, now we're getting about one o'clock, and Howard Snyder was sitting across the room from us, but fairly close. He could see all this going on. And I'd try to catch his eye and Howard just smiled at me. And finally I stood up and I said, "General Ike, I'm leaving."

He said, "I know you had that long trip and you got a hard day again tomorrow. So if you feel you have to go, okay, and I've enjoyed it. And I'll see you tomorrow."

So I took off, I got in the elevator going down, I said, "Howard, damn you, why didn't you help me out on this? You saw that I was keeping him up and he's your patient and he was tired and it's unfair to keep him up this late."

He said, "I watched it." He said, "You must remember I know him as a patient better than you do." And he said, "I watched it very closely. This was good for him; it was better than sleep. He was enjoying it; he was utterly relaxed and enjoying it. He was having fun. And he doesn't get much chance to have fun. So I let it go on."

But I used to come back quite frequently after the first year, and then every time I spent a fair amount of time with him. And if I went over, say, one morning, he'd always have me go back in the afternoon or come back the next morning. And we'd chat. And another thing he would say--Adenauer was talking about doing something or DeGaulle was doing something--he said, "Now, when you see them, please tell them..." so-and-so. And I would report on any particular sensitivity or concerns that they had.



It was a great experience. He is the best boss that you could possibly imagine. I remember one time when I was in Fontainebleau, which was quite early, this must have been early '52. And one morning I was shocked to pick up one of the London papers to see a story on the front page that says that I had made a statement which was opposing something that General Eisenhower had been for, which I hadn't done. But we sat down at breakfast and I thought, now this is going to disturb him, and I hate to see that happen. But I waited, I thought somebody would call me from up there--no one called me. And about eleven o'clock I called him. And I said, "General Ike, aren't you upset?"

He said, "Upset about what?"

I said, "Well it was in the London papers this morning."

He said, "No, I'm not upset."

I said, "I don't understand it. Why not? It says that I took a position which is contrary to yours, publicly took a position contrary." I said, "This isn't true, but it says that."

He said, "Well, I'm not upset at all. Nice of you to call but don't worry about it."

I said, "Well, why aren't you upset?"



"Well," he said, "because I know that either you were misquoted or else you've learned something that I didn't know. And you might be right. So that doesn't disturb me; so don't bother about things like that." Now you can't ask for any more than that.

And I remember one time, the first time I came back to the U.S., came back to Washington, and he called me in. Asked me to go to the Philadelphia Bulletin Forum for him. He was supposed to speak and he couldn't go. "You go speak; you talk to them about NATO." So I went over. I had lunch with him the day before I left and he said, "Now when you're back in Washington, you quote me."

I said, "General Ike, what do you mean 'quote you'? Quote you on what?"

"Well anything that you think is useful."

You work for a man like that. And it imposes a great responsibility on you.

SOAPES: You said that you also had frequent contact with John Foster Dulles.

NORSTAD: Yes.



SOAPES: One of the issues that historians are debating about the Eisenhower administration is whether or not Eisenhower and Dulles were really of the same mind on foreign policy or whether there was a difference only of style. What is your evaluation of their compatibility on foreign policy issues?

NORSTAD: Well I have been with them many times when Dulles would come over and talk to the President about something important. And General Eisenhower would listen to him and ask some questions and then he would, in a very characteristic way, he would say, "Now Foster, I'll tell you--" He always used to do that to everybody. When he made up his mind on something he'd say, "Now I'll tell you--" Said, "Now, Foster, I'll tell you--. Let me tell you--." And he would tell him exactly what his view was.

I had a strong feeling that there was a vast difference in style because Foster Dulles, whom I always thought was a much better man than the American public gave him credit for, but he was not a very flexible person. Everything was pretty black and white: you're with us or against us; you're right or you're wrong. And General Eisenhower did have the flexibility and a great understanding, and he was unwilling to say



your position is black and mine is white. But other than that, I had a great feeling that the main thrust of their policy-making was essentially the same. General Eisenhower never just sat back and let Dulles decide what the policy was, because anybody who knew the man knew that this was an area in which he felt confident, in which he felt that he was the expert. And anyone who ever crossed him in a field where he thought he was an expert knows that he had pretty strong convictions on the subject. He always had very strong convictions on the responsibilities of the President, certain things, particularly in the foreign policy field. They got along well together. They liked each other; they enjoyed each other. And they were comfortable with one another. And there's no question but what there were areas in which Secretary Dulles enjoyed perhaps the same relationship with General Eisenhower that General Gruenther and I did in the military side. He knew our thinking, and he knew we knew his thinking. It was essentially together. His directive, not necessarily stated, but was just as clear, just implied, was "Get about it; do it." And he was a great one for doing things-- if you were going to do it, you did it. Because he was a great one for believing that sometimes if you did things positively,



to show your conviction, you could succeed where otherwise you might fail. And he let people do that.



SOAPES: One comment that Eisenhower did dictate at one point that's now open in his Diary Series in his personal papers, a comment on Dulles--Dulles always being the lawyer, having to prosecute the Soviet Union, and he's expressing some disapproval of that.

NORSTAD: Yes. And I think another area, although I can't quote him, another area is where Dulles was quick to take a position, if you're not with us you're against us. And that would never be Eisenhower's. I can remember coming back a few times when my spy system would tell me that, either security council or someplace, the government was about to do something, which I thought was wrong and which I thought that General Eisenhower would think was wrong. I'd come back and talk to him about it.

I remember one time I heard that the United States Government might be considering giving if not atomic weapons, at least some know-how to the French, which I always opposed. I came back and talked to Gordon Gray and found that this was true; it hadn't been decided, but that they were moving toward that.

And the President was at Newport. So Gordon and I went up in an airplane, went up to Newport. And we went in that little office and he said, "Something's worrying you; what is it?"

And I said, "Well, I want to talk to you about this question of giving nuclear information to anyone, not only the French, but to anyone."

He said, "Oh, you're going to argue with me on it."

I said, "Mr. President, I'm not going to argue with you, but I'm going to tell you what I think. And this thing can be very hard because I believe I think what you would have thought when you were in the same seat as I am now: That this would be regarded as something of an irresponsible action by many, if not most of our allies, because you begin to open it up, and we would lose some of our authority which is essential."

Whereupon he came over and he said, "Well you know damned well we can't do that."

"Mr. President, you said it."

I also came back one time when they announced they were to reduce the forces and pull out some of the forces in Europe. I went over to see him at the White House, and he paced the floor back and forth, and I gave him the arguments there. Finally, he came over, I was sitting at his desk and he pounded



his own desk in front of me and he said, "By God," he said, "you know we can't do that."

I said, "Mr. President, you said it; I didn't say it." I said, "Can I go over and tell the secretary of state that, that you've said that?"

He said, "Yes, but why?"

I said, "I've been around this town long enough to know that if a decision is taken, if you want it to really stand, it has to be disseminated somewhat, discreetly disseminated. And if I go over and talk to Secretary Dulles, he will see that some key people understand it and you'll all be working on the same wave length."

He said, "Sure. Go over and talk to him." I went over and talked to him about it.

Dulles was a great admirer of General Eisenhower. He was a great admirer of the man's character and the strength and the substance of the man.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: Okay, you were about to tell me something--



NORSTAD: One facet of General Eisenhower's life and his interests that hasn't been emphasized is the fact that he was very fond of fly fishing for trout, and he was a very good fisherman. I was privileged many times to go wading the streams in Bavaria with him when he wanted to talk about something and get out in the fresh air and get a little exercise at the same time. He's a fine fisherman. And I think he got a great deal of relaxation out of it. Now he also loved to play golf, but that never appeared to me to be that much relaxation for him because he always insisted on teaching whoever he was playing with. And I enjoyed it and I'm sure that everybody did, being on the receiving end of that instruction, but it made him concentrate while fishing seemed to me to be a pure relaxation for him. And somewhere in my files I have a marvelous picture of him taken in Bavaria. He was wearing hip waders and he'd waded in a little bit too far and he filled his boots with water. And we came on the bank and he was leaning against a tree and had taken off his boots, and it's a picture of him holding the toe of one sock and pulling a sock off and water dripping down. And with that remarkable face of his showing exactly what his sentiments were--this cold, wet sock interfered



with his fishing. And that expression on his face, as being an expression of his thought, is only equaled by that photograph of General Eisenhower on the banks of the Rhine near Mainz, Germany, when he received the word that General MacArthur had been fired by President Truman.

SOAPES: Yes, I remember that.



NORSTAD: And which is also a very expressive picture.

SOAPES: Was he a man to tell fish stories or fishermen's stories?

NORSTAD: Oh, yes. See General Eisenhower was one of the great talkers; he loved to talk, he loved to tell stories. He loved to reminisce. He was a very good storyteller. I can remember one time that by accident he was in Walter Reed Hospital for a physical examination the same time that I was. And he asked me to have breakfast with him. So we were in that little dining room there at Walter Reed having breakfast, and we were chatting back and forth and a doctor came in and he started to listen. He stayed right there and he drew up a chair and sat there and then another doctor. And pretty soon we had five or six doctors and all the nurses on the floor were listening and goading us on

while we reminisced about the war. And we started this about seven-thirty. And close to ten o'clock one of the doctors came in and said, "Sorry to break this up, but I'm afraid I'll have to tell you that you're both an hour and a half late for your first appointment for your physical exam."

And General Eisenhower said, "Oh, damn, we were just having a good time."

SOAPES: One thing I'd like to go back to on NATO: Very early in the Eisenhower administration they implemented a defense policy, what was called the "New Look"--increasing reliance on air power, increasing reliance on nuclear weapons. How did this impact on NATO?

NORSTAD: Well, of course, it changed the whole direction of things. This started in 1951 and early '52. And by that time it was not only foolish, but dangerous to plan military operations without considering the fact that there were nuclear weapons. We had to think from the defensive standpoint, but we always had to think in terms of the offensive standpoint. Otherwise plans weren't worth a damn. I think the first planning where nuclear weapons were considered was down at



Fontainebleau. Marshal Juin, LANDCENTEUR [?] commander and I had a joint planning session. And after having talked to General Eisenhower I said, "Marshal Juin, it's time that we gave some consideration to these weapons. We don't have the weapons. So let's make an arbitrary assumption that we will have fifteen weapons of some nominal yield." And I don't know whether he took twenty KT or, at that time, a figure that was known from the bombs that we used in Japan, it was a figure that was known, was in the public domain, as relating to nuclear weapons. So there was no secrecy involved in it. So we then jointly planned on where they would be used, how they would be used, and from then on, of course, we always planned on it. And from that there developed an entirely different approach. And then we would plan from there, you know, for the types of weapons and the deployment of the weapons, and the security of the warheads, et cetera, control systems. So from then on it just grew gradually. But that step was introduced with General Eisenhower's concurrence at that time. It was an obvious thing at that time.



SOAPES: Were there any special problems from the fact that the United States maintained its control over the use of the weapons and the knowledge of the technical aspects?

NORSTAD: Later. Later there was some problem in that. But it was pretty clear-cut. There was no alternative, and no one really argued for possession of the weapons. The argument--if you were sitting around after dinner talking to some of our senior allied people and this subject came up--was in case of air attack then what sort of assurance that these plans are based upon a solid foundation. I said, "Well in the first place, let's face it, your countries are not going to do anything, even in terms of meeting an attack, without the United States. And if the United States is involved, then she'll be involved with the weapons that she feels would be essential. And that would be nuclear weapons. And that's really our tea. Not only will you not choose to do anything but you can't do anything without the United States. So the United States is involved. And the United States isn't here to lose this, if there's an attack, to lose in the first round." And they accepted that. So there never was a great problem in this respect. There was more problem with the U.S. because some of the opposition began to talk about the European countries being so frightened of atomic weapons that they would give up entirely, and that never was the case, while there was a great deal of speculation in the U.S. about it.



SOAPES: They weren't concerned about American bases being there, drawing attack to them directly?

NORSTAD: This was not a critical point at all. There was some concern that, in case of a war, that they would be the targets, but they would end up being a target anyway. But strangely, they were fed a certain amount by speeches made in America and by newspaper articles along that line, that they should be concerned. They never were as concerned as was indicated by the American press. And they did accept the fact that in the case of attack which meant their survival, not only their freedom but their very survival, that they wanted to use the means that were available to defend themselves. So I always thought that their will was stronger than the Americans thought their will was.

SOAPES: You said earlier that you had a fair amount of contact with DeGaulle and with Adenauer. One of the things that we like to do in these interviews is to get your candid reactions to these personalities. So why don't we start with DeGaulle.

NORSTAD: Well at a time of great men, DeGaulle was a towering giant of a man. He was a great man; by any standards of any



time, he was a great man. A difficult man at times but, nevertheless, a great man. And also a very difficult one on this question of nuclear weapons. And we had one great advantage in those days because DeGaulle, who was not a respecter of other people generally--simply because a man held a high office that didn't mean that General DeGaulle necessarily was going to respect him, but he had both the respect and affection for General Eisenhower. He liked him. And he always spoke very kindly of him.

SOAPES: Frequently we hear references to World War II experience when DeGaulle was supposedly snubbed and this carried over. Did you see this?

NORSTAD: No. As a matter of fact, every reference that General DeGaulle made to General Eisenhower in my presence really conveyed the idea of not only respect but affection. And he had great confidence in General Eisenhower. He believed General Eisenhower.

SOAPES: Was he sensitive on the fact that France was not considered an equal with the United States, Soviet Union, Great Britain?



NORSTAD: He was sensitive, of course, again in the NATO context. He was sensitive to the fact that the U.S. and the U.K. had not only a special position but a special relationship. The only thing that I ever saw or heard about General DeGaulle which labeled him as anything other than absolutely first-rate, first-class, was the fact that he sometimes measured his position and the position of France against that of other people and other countries, and absolutely first-class people would measure only against absolute standards and not against the other standards that somebody else enjoys. On several occasions he indicated, in the nuclear field, that what he'd like for France was what Britain had. But I think the relationship was a good one.

SOAPES: How about Konrad Adenauer?

NORSTAD: Another great man. And, of course, he had a very warm feeling for General Eisenhower, although there were some sensitive times there with both of these gentlemen. At one time I can remember that there was a leak of some kind which was referred to as so-called Radford Plan. Radford was then the chairman of chiefs of staff, and there was no Radford Plan



as such. But this offended Adenauer a great deal. It had something to do with the maintenance of the forces in Germany. And I remember him, Adenauer, summoning me to come up and asking me what the hell this Radford Plan was and what the United States government was thinking of in developing a plan of that kind. So knowing this question was going to come up, I had contact back in Washington and I knew there was no such thing as that plan and that no decision was made by the President on it. And Adenauer accepted that assurance. He was a strong man, a fine man. I was very fond of him; I was very fond of DeGaulle.

And as a matter of fact I'm almost unique in that respect I think. Of all the people I knew of, official people that had official connection with DeGaulle, French or non-French, I think I'm the only one I knew of who really speaks of an affection for him. And I felt a warm feeling, of course, for him. He was terribly nice to me and he tried to be very helpful. We were in opposition on many things of policy, both as we developed policy ourselves but also as the French and U.S. government policies. But he was a very warm and very nice. He never missed a chance to assist me, and I knew that a lot



of that came from General Eisenhower. He saw that General Eisenhower was doing that so he was willing to sort of adopt me.

Now his great concern came during the Kennedy administration. Then there were all kinds of "New Look" talking but no definition of "New Look." And one time he sent General Ely up to see me. Ely was the chief of staff, chairman of chiefs of staff of his government. "Did I believe that the U.S. would use atomic weapons in the defense of Europe?" So I sent a message back to the President then, to Kennedy. I said, "I can give them my assurance but on a subject of this kind, the head of a NATO Allied government's entitled to some word from the head of the American government." And President Kennedy came back with his strongest statement he had ever made on that subject and said the U.S. would respect its obligations under the NATO treaty and would use such weapons as appeared at the time to be essential, including atomic weapons. And that assurance was accepted.

SOAPES: That raises the question of the assessment during the period that you were at NATO--and here I want to talk about



the entire period up to 1963--of the potential for Soviet aggression against Western Europe. What was your estimate of the likelihood of such a thing?

NORSTAD: In the middle '50s, up to the middle '50s, one would have to have assumed--I think we did assume--that there was a likelihood if the political circumstances turned a certain way that there would be an act of aggression. In my time, I think the position of NATO had become strong enough and our strategy was clear enough and our intentions were clear enough, our will was well enough established, so I thought that it was relatively small chance--a chance but relatively small chance--and it would only happen if we made some mistake. Now if you look at the communique at the end of the heads of government meeting in 1957, December 1957, when General Eisenhower was over there, you can see that was a pretty strong statement, and that was made at that time to eliminate the danger of a mistake to make it very clear that we would, and that included everybody, all the European countries. And that was meaningful because General Eisenhower was at that table and the heads of all the governments were there; so this was a very meaningful



statement. And I must say also that every time there was a crisis we used to drag that statement out and see that it got due publicity because it was strong. It was a strong statement of intentions. That was the first time it got into the missile question. Since the Soviet Union continued to take the threatening position, it was necessary for NATO to have nuclear weapons and missile delivery means and that we would do both. And I'd have to agree with that because I drafted it, personally.

SOAPES: The events in Hungary and Poland in the fall of '56, did that heighten your concern of possible Soviet aggression against the west?

NORSTAD: No, not really. Because that was a very special case and I think our reaction there was unique, as far as European aggression is concerned, and I think the Soviet Union saw that it was. And that the Soviets saw that we were responsible and we weren't going to fly off in all directions. And the one thing that no scholar has picked up yet, in due time will, or I will for them when I write my book, that the great contribution of NATO was to define the nature and the



extent of our interests in Europe and what we would do. And also it defined what the Soviets could do with impunity and what they couldn't do. And since wars more frequently start by mistake than any other way, this is terribly important. This is the great contribution that NATO has made. And during the confrontations and crises we sat on them pretty coolly, but we strongly and clearly indicated what we would do and what we could do under certain circumstances. Never was any question, for instance, in the Soviets' mind I'm sure that we would fight for Berlin. And at the same time, the Soviets, over the years, have defined what they would do. So I think we've eliminated here, if not eliminated at least reduced greatly, the danger of war by mistake. And that always frightened me. Just like dealing with an irrational person, there's no guard against that mistake.



SOAPES: You served as supreme commander during the period of two American Presidents--Eisenhower and Kennedy. You knew Eisenhower personally much better than Kennedy, but could you compare and contrast their styles, vis a vis your relationship with them.

NORSTAD: It is impossible. In the first place any statement I would make could be challenged because of the personal relationship with General Eisenhower and a relationship which had been built over the years which I always felt permitted me to work at full effectiveness. And in the Kennedy administration, I always felt that I started out in the minds of the Kennedy administration as a Republican, as a partisan in the first place. In the second place, I was a reminder, I think, of the Eisenhower success in NATO, and the new government didn't necessarily take kindly to that. And my problems with the Kennedy administration were not, from my standpoint, ever with the President, but I did have some difficulties with his Cabinet. And that was, I believe--they might have a different point of view on this subject and they're entitled to it--but I believe it was because they didn't have the same understanding of NATO as those of us who had grown up with it over the years had. For instance, I think that it's hard to boil down differences of years to just one thing, but I always felt that if I had to do that I would simply say that most of the problem came from the fact that too often they expected me to be the one who would carry out an American decision independently of the NATO countries.



And I couldn't and I wouldn't do that. Because, as I explained one time when we had a confrontation on the subject, I said, "This is the greatest alliance that has ever existed and the heart of it is SHAPE. The heart of it is the Supreme Commander, starting with Eisenhower." I said, "Ask the people of Europe. They believe in NATO more than they ever believed in anything. And they believe in it because they feel that we have demonstrated that the supreme commander, though an American, thinks of their interests and has an obligation to them as well as to his own country. And if you take that away, you destroy the alliance. And I'm not going to destroy it. I've spent too much of my life in this and it's too important to the world."

Now, of course, that principle of ours was first established by General Eisenhower that, to work, the supreme commander had to clearly establish that he had obligations to these countries. And when I mentioned the fact once to a couple of Cabinet officers in Paris, who wanted to do something that was wrong in any event and I told them that, tried to discuss it with them on the basis that it was wrong, the principle, so I said, "But even if it weren't wrong," I said, "I couldn't and wouldn't do it because I have obligations. I've been around here for--" I'd been around by that time about ten



years-- "and in the course of time these governments have done things because I've asked them to do it. And many times they've done it solely because I asked them to do it. And every time I've done that I've taken on an obligation, and I know it and I respect the obligation."

Whereupon one of these secretaries said, "That's the question we have--just to whom do you have an obligation?" In other words, it was challenging my loyalty.



My first instinct was to hit him and I thought that wouldn't be very dignified, but--so I didn't do that. I just stood there and I tried to smile and cool off a bit and I gave him a short explanation of what NATO meant and what the supreme commander meant in that whole cloth, whole picture. And I said, "Well, gentlemen, I think this ends this meeting." Whereupon I walked out and slammed the door. Went back and called my senior staff together and said, "Gentlemen, we aren't going to be together very much longer. If they can't put up with me after this, and I can't put up with them--so one way or another it's going to come to an end."

But you can't compare the two, you can't.