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- Naftali: Hi, I'm Tim Naftali, Director Designate of the Richard Nixon Library and Museum, and I'm here today to interview Steve Bull for the Richard Nixon Presidential Oral History Project. It's June 25, 2007. Steve, it's a pleasure for us to be able to interview you. Thank you for joining us.
- Bull: Thank you, it's a pleasure to participate.
- Naftali: Let's start with -- gives you a sense of you as a person, let's start with your tour in Vietnam.
- Bull: Okay, I was in the Marine Corps during the early days of the Vietnam conflict. I compare my service to others, and mine was inconsequential. It was the early days, I did very little that was -- that would distinguish my career. I served three years total in the Marine Corps, went in through an OCS program called PLC. It's something you did in college, during the summers of college, and I came out, was commissioned to second lieutenant, was stationed initially in Quantico, Virginia, then Camp Pendleton, just south of San Clemente, where I would subsequently spend a great deal of time, went over to Okinawa in, I think it was April of 1965. We went down to Vietnam I believe in June of '65, and I spent probably about 12 months in Vietnam outside of Da Nang. There was some conflict, but it was not heated conflict in which I was involved. I was a commanding officer of a motor transport company. From time to time, a few pot shots were fired, but fortunately people missed. But I do have friends who were actively engaged in combat there -- in combat there, and I have high regard for them, and I don't consider myself in the same category as people like that.
- Naftali: America changed while you were away.
- Bull: When I went to -- when I was leaving for Vietnam, I left out of San Francisco. And while awaiting the plane, I remember wandering up to Berkeley, California. I'd never seen the school up there. And this was about the tail end of the so-called free speech movement with -- I think his name was Mario Savio or something like that. And others disparagingly called it the dirty word campaign, but by any means, it was the -- one of the first acts of rebellion in this emerging generation, with my generation being characterized as the apathetic generation. During the time that I was gone, drug use, marijuana use became much more common. Watts blew up. There was increasing civil rights discontent. There was just generally rebellion within society. When I came back in June of '66 -- or July of '66 -- one of my -- I was released from active duty right away. So the first thing I had to do was go find a job. I remember being up in New York City -- this is perhaps ten days out of Vietnam, and what do I see? A
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bunch of scraggly guys marching down the street with a Viet Cong flag, chanting, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is going to win," NLF being National Liberation Front, the communist organization.

And I recall my own reaction that, you know, two weeks earlier we would have dealt with extreme prejudice with people carrying Viet Cong flags and advocating death to Americans and American service people. So it was a different society that I returned to. And it took me a while to recover from that thing, and to adjust to this different generation. I think a generation we normally consider 15 to 20 years. I saw a difference in separation -- in two generations, separated by about a two or three year period. I graduated from college in 1963, and those who were graduating from college in 1966. Even a couple of fraternity brothers of mine who were freshman when I graduated had an entirely different outlook on life. It was a different world.

Naftali: What do you attribute that change to? At least on the people you knew.

Bull: A series of forces and events, ranging from greater civil rights awareness, greater militantism within society, not just in the civil rights area, not just in opposition to the war. There was a growing -- I think that there was a growing political involvement and liberal orientation of the press. I was part of that apathetic generation, and I had very, very little political interest. A seminal moment -- a key moment for me transitioning was when I was in Vietnam, and there was an operation in which I was involved. I wrote an account of it in a letter. I received in the mail two or three days later, and it was a letter that had crossed mine that gave an account of how that operation was depicted in the media, and I think it was on an ABC evening newscast. It's inconsequential which network it was, although there were only three of significance back then. They were so far apart, you could only conclude that the ABC reporter either lied or wasn't there. And that's when I started becoming politically aware that there was something seriously different and deficient that was going on in the media.

Naftali: How did you start getting involved in politics?

Bull: Never intended to. When I got out of the service, I went to work for a soft drink company, Canada Dry Corporation, and went through one-year training program where I traveled around the country, learning about the business. And about that time, I was finishing that training program, we had a change in management. We had a new CEO come in, a dynamic young guy who had always had a young assistant around him. Well I was the only young guy around in the entire company, so almost by default I became his executive assistant, if you will. In the spring of '68, he -- this man David J. Mahoney, having been involved somehow in one of the

earlier Nixon campaigns, I think probably the Presidential of 1960, and probably it was as a contributor, received the form letter from the Nixon campaign looking for people to be -- to either volunteer or be volunteered or offered as advance men. Well, he -- I was the only person who even came close to meeting the profile, which was mainly youth -- youth and availability, certainly not intelligence or accomplishment, I hadn't done -- didn't qualify for either, certainly at that point.

And so, being the closest guy around, he asked me if I was interested, and I said sure, it sounded like a great adventure. So I'd take off and go work on setting up campaign stops around the country. But I always intended to return to Canada Dry Corporation. And the way I got involved in the Nixon White House was near the end of the campaign, I think primarily because the Nixon campaign had a bunch of older people, sort of an old man's -- old pals image -- they wanted some younger faces around, and I just happened to be a young face that had been involved in the campaign. I had already served my military service, so, you know, I was clear in that regard. So I was given the opportunity to come down to Washington and work in a rather amorphous position, initially working in the office of Bob Haldeman, who was the chief of staff.

Naftali: What did you do during the campaign? Did you do any --

Bull: I was an advance man.

Naftali: Just advance man? Do you remember some of the more memorable events? Do you remember?

Bull: They were all fun. They were all kicks. I mean you're -- the first one was out in San Francisco. We did a series of stops in a motorcade there. I think I remember going from there to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, from there back to Los Angeles, there to someplace in Ohio, and I think to -- up to Detroit, and you know, I was 25 years old with my first charge card, I mean what more could you want?

Naftali: How did you feel? Did you feel confident that Nixon would win?

Bull: No, I don't think anyone was ever confident. And we certainly weren't confident at the very tail end of the campaign when the daily news headline came out and it said, "Humphrey 43, Nixon 42."

Naftali: What were the crowds like at the end?

Bull: Well, the ones -- I mean, that's a loaded question. I was the advance man. My job was to build the crowd. I don't know about the rest, our crowds were always great, of course.

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- Naftali: So you get a job, and what is the job? What is the staff assistant? The President -- Richard Nixon has been elected --
- Bull: Well, I initially worked for Haldeman. And there was an office of Bob Haldeman. There were three or four of us in there: a guy named Jay Wilkinson, a guy named John Brown. Ken Cole kind of headed that office, and Higby, although Higby was closer to Haldeman. Initially we were, you know, summarizing documents, doing odd jobs around the White House, just picking up special projects and things of that nature. And I kept at that job until they had a realignment of responsibilities in the spring of '69. And at that time, Dwight Chapin, who had been the President's personal assistant, was elevated to a higher position, and I moved into the personal assistant job. And while I had different titles over the years, it was always -- my job was always, from start to finish, kind of the personal assistant to the President who ran his schedule on a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour basis, and just generally ran the Oval Office and some of the events.
- Naftali: No one ever talks about him, but he mattered a lot. Tell us about Manolo Sanchez.
- Bull: Manolo had been with the President, I think during -- oh, I don't know, perhaps ten years up in New York when the President had -- I guess he -- the President had returned to -- or moved to New York in about 1963, after he lost the gubernatorial election to Pat Brown. And that's when he went to New York to become a lawyer with Nixon, Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander. They added his name at the front end of the title, and I think that's where he met Manolo. Manolo and his wife Fina were both Spaniards. Manolo was kicks. He was a funny, fun, very loyal guy to the President. He served the President as his valet, sometimes chef, at least for lunch where he'd prepare the typical meal for lunch in the White House, which was the famous ketchup and cottage cheese, and he was just generally available to the President to serve coffee and just serve him and take care of him. I liked him very much, and I'd see him, he'd come by my office; my office was right next to the Oval Office, and you know, he'd check in -- nice guy.
- Naftali: What did his wife do?
- Bull: She was pretty much a personal assistant to Mrs. Nixon. I'm less sure what the daily duties were, but I think that, you know, she served as perhaps, you know -- whatever a woman's personal assistant does.
- Naftali: Now, as the scheduler of the President, you were working with Haldeman, because I suppose the chief of staff decided who --
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Bull: Yeah, I was the implementer of whatever went on. So I mean, I was getting people in and out of the Oval Office, ensuring that he had the proper documentation, the briefing papers and the like for whatever's coming up. Sometimes if there were events like a Rose Garden ceremony, or something in the Rose Garden, I'd set that up -- swearing in ceremonies, things like that, I'd be setting those up. I wouldn't decide if there was going to be one, or who was going to be sworn in, but once that decision was made, I had to make it happen.

Naftali: Now, the President generally spoke without notes, right?

Bull: Yes, he prepared for major presentations himself. But generally, he would -- he spoke extemporaneously.

Naftali: Now, when you were preparing his schedule, you left time aside for him to -- I mean, how did he prepare? I mean --

Bull: I mean, it depends on what he's doing. Is he preparing a you know, a major speech, something of that nature? Haldeman or the appointment secretary would have ensured that there was adequate time on his schedule. I'm taking -- I'm going back almost 35 years now, but a typical schedule, as I recall, would have the -- daily schedule for the President would be him coming in someplace around 7:30, him going through whatever papers were pending, perhaps a briefing book or two, the news clips that was prepared -- that were prepared by -- initially by Pat Buchanan, then subsequently by a man named Mort Allen, whatever other documents he might be responsible for signing or reviewing. And then he would call -- being going through on an informal basis one-on-one meetings with a Kissinger a Haldeman and a Ehrlichman, perhaps Rose Woods on those matters. And then his formal schedule would start around 9 or so, and as I recall, there would be sort of a major event of the morning, which would be about 10 o'clock. And that could be a cabinet meeting, something of that nature. If he were going to be giving a speech that night, chances are certainly the afternoon would have been cleared, and previous afternoons would have been cleared for his preparation.

Naftali: Because he often wrote much of his speeches.

Bull: He did indeed, yeah. He would get suggested remarks, and that was the -- that's really a term of art that we use, suggested remarks. That isn't a finished script. It might be bullet points prepared by a Ray Price, by any number of people in the so-called research and writing staff. He might get suggested remarks from Pat Buchanan for the same event, and he would meld those two or accept or reject, but generally the final product, if it wasn't his in entirety, it was greatly influenced by what he wanted.

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- Naftali: What role did Rose Woods play in this, on a daily basis?
- Bull: Rose attended to, certainly the personal matters. She was his personal secretary. To a great extent, she was a member of the Nixon family. And as -- I think that the daughters, Julie and Tricia, I believe that at one time they would refer to her as Aunt Rose. So she was kind of the ambassador to the larger Nixon family, but attended to many of the personal matters and special relations with friends, old friends, people like that.
- Naftali: You mean the relationship with Bebe Rebozo or --
- Bull: Yeah, and other people. I mean, if the -- you know, if there was an anniversary coming up or something like that with an old friend, she would ensure that the President sent greetings or a letter, whatever you send, a card.
- Naftali: Did you -- were there some changes that you made to the Presidential routine over time that -- did the President, for example -- was there -- did the President exercise during the day?
- Bull: No, to my knowledge, he didn't exercise at all. I don't believe there was any sort of workout facility in the residence. The only sports in which he engaged, as I recall, were bowling, and there was a bowling alley in the White House, and an occasional game of golf.
- Naftali: Was there a swimming pool anymore in the White House?
- Bull: The swimming pool was eliminated in the summer of '69. I remember it quite well because we were out in San Clemente, California the first summer. We spent a month out there. And the word came down from Haldeman, this is one of his great jokes, the three or four of us very junior staffers -- and I have to emphasize that I was a junior staffer start to finish -- but that we would be given swimming pool privileges. I thought, "Well, isn't that really neat." So we get back from this extended trip to California only to learn that the decision had been made before that to dry up and cover over the swimming pool and create a new press room that would be built on top of it.
- Naftali: That was the joke?
- Bull: Yeah, they told us I could use the pool. Of course now it was emptied and it was covered by, you know, 3/4-inch plywood.
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- Naftali: A little cruel, that's what I meant. Tell us a bit about King Timahoe, the dog.
- Bull: King Timahoe, an Irish setter given to the President for his birthday, I believe. And he was named after some Irish town or castle, or something like that. Well, you mentioned Manolo Sanchez before. Often when Manolo would come over, he'd have the three Nixon dogs -- or two -- well, he'd have three Nixon dogs in tow. There was a little tiny dog, I don't know what it was a Yorkshire terrier or something like that, a little dog named Pasha. And then I think Trish's dog was this poodle named Vickie, and then Tim. Well, Timahoe spent all the time with Manolo, and really didn't know who the President was. You know, it wasn't the President's dog. If I can personalize this just a second, at some point I got this memorandum from Larry Higby. Someone had convinced the President -- I think it was Manolo -- that if Tim -- King Timahoe was ever to be a full-fledged adult dog, he had to be bred. And so it fell to me to find a suitable partner for King Timahoe. So if you want a job description, that's partly it. I had to procure for an Irish setter.
- Naftali: Did you find a -- an appropriate bitch?
- Bull: That's such a loaded question. Helen Thomas would qualify.
- Naftali: Did you find a female dog for Timahoe?
- Bull: Yes, I believe we did. I've forgotten exactly --
- Naftali: Did Tim breed?
- Bull: I don't remember, I wasn't there. I was only on the procurement side, not into the implementation.
- Naftali: Oh, okay, that's wonderful. I understand that you -- the White House did have dog biscuits so that Tim would be friendly, because he didn't know the President, right?
- Bull: Well, I remember the, you know, President calling Tim, and Tim would kind of cock an ear, but Manolo would be, you know, 20 feet behind, and Manolo would, you know, signal, and the dog would come running, but it would run right by the President, right to Manolo. I don't know about the dog biscuits -- could be, I've forgotten.
- Naftali: Tell me, what role did you play when the President traveled abroad?
- Bull: During the first term, none. I traveled very little abroad with him. That's when it became very much ceremonial, and the uniformed military --
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whichever one of the military assistants, there was one for each branch of the service -- that individual would serve as the aide. During the second term, I traveled more abroad.

Naftali: Would you -- but you did travel to San Clemente though, when he went?

Bull: At resignation, yes. It was -- and it was kind of expected. It was -- no one ever asked me to, I just assumed that he -- since I traveled every place else with him, he was traveling to San Clemente on August 9th, I traveled with him and stayed there for about four months.

Naftali: Well, we're going to get to -- we'll get to August 9th in a moment, because I'd like to ask you about that trip. We actually have the helicopter from -- why don't you take a swig? Let's -- because we want to talk about that -- let's talk about the taping system. While you were just staff assistant, did you know there was a taping system?

Bull: I didn't, I didn't know about the existence of the taping system, and didn't until approximately March of 1973. I learned of it when Alex Butterfield departed, and he was not replaced, but his job was divided into three parts. I inherited one-third of his job that included liaison with the Secret Service. The technical security division of the secret service had originally installed and continued to maintain the taping system, so that when I inherited the liaison function, I inherited also the knowledge of the taping system, and was given a briefing of how -- about how it worked.

Naftali: And did they explain to you why there was a taping system?

Bull: I believe, or I recall that -- being told that he -- the President was encouraged by President Johnson to have some sort of a recording system. Previous -- he noted that previous Presidents had recording systems -- LBJ had one, Kennedy had one, and the tapes I believe are all still sequestered up there.

Naftali: No, no.

Bull: Are they starting to come out?

Naftali: Two-thirds of them are out.

Bull: Are they, okay?

Naftali: And the Johnson tapes are almost all out.

Bull: Yeah, I've heard those. I hear those on C-Span radio. They're fun.

Naftali: The Kennedy tapes two-thirds done.

Bull: Eisenhower apparently had some sort of system whereby he had -- he could have someone listen in, and even going back to FDR apparently there was some system. I'm told that using the grate were -- the grate in the store -- in the floor, that a stenographer could overhear and from time to time they'd place a stenographer in there to do a transcript of a conversation.

Naftali: Please tell us how the Nixon system worked.

Bull: It's complicated, and you're going to need three or four reels of tape here. But it was a very rudimentary system, and it wasn't -- there's not the same system for every location where there were -- there was a taping capability. There was taping capability in the Oval Office, separately in the cabinet room, on telephones, over in the Executive Office building, and up at Camp David, so we're up to five on that. There were tape recorders in the -- in a closet on the basement level of the West Wing of the White House that would tape record conversations in the Oval Office and the cabinet room. And I believe that's where the tape machines were for the telephones. Separately, over in the President's EOB office, there was a contiguous closet that contained two tape recorders -- and I'll come back to why there were two tape recorders -- that served only the President's private EOB office.

Now, in order to avoid having tape recorders running all the time, they devised this system that tied them into a locator board that was maintained by the White House police. Just for internal communications purposes, when the President went to one of six locations, someone sitting down in the police, White House police headquarters room would punch a button. So if the President was in the Oval Office, the uniformed guard would say, "The President's in the Oval Office" and the guy down there would push a button that read "Oval Office." And I think there were five or six offices and departments that had access to this locator board that told them where the President was at any one time. So, in order to ensure that at least the Oval Office tape recorders were activated -- had juice at least running to them, it was run through that locator board, and particularly that little portion that said "Oval Office." So you didn't have juice -- electricity running to those tape recorders in the Oval Office until the guy down in the basement in the squad room pushed the button that said "Oval Office." Okay, so that starts it now. Secondly, these are voice -- these are -- I'm sorry, these are sound-activated tape recorders, so that if no one's saying anything, even though the little Oval Office light is on, it's not recording. But as soon as there's noise, it starts recording. Now remember, I didn't -- I'm distinguishing between voice and sound. [taps microphone] That's

sound. That would start it, and it would run for a few seconds. But there was always a little bit of a slow start-up.

Remember, this is 1970, roughly. This is not a high-tech time. So you'd have a voice starting up like that as it would pick up. So that's how the Oval Office worked. I just would say also that the microphones were also not high-tech. They were, I think, about the size of a -- half the circumference of a lead pencil embedded in the desk. Well, that's not really the best system for, you know, high fidelity recording. And I think also I learned that they had put some similar tiny little microphones in a couple of sconces over on the other side of the Oval Office in the -- over by the fireplace. Now, when the President picked up the telephone, I think that was a direct feed. And I don't think that had anything to do with the locator board. There were about four telephones as I recall that had recording devices on them: Oval Office, EOB, Lincoln Sitting Room, and the cabinet room. Now the cabinet room was separate. They were -- it was also kind of the same system, but there was a button on Alex Butterfield's phone -- he had a multi-button set, and so when he saw that the President was in the Oval Office, in order to activate it, he had to push the button on his telephone.

Naftali: To activate the cabinet room?

Bull: To activate the cabinet room. Now, over in the EOB, there were two tape recordings -- tape recorders in that closet. In order to reduce the amount of ongoing maintenance that the Technical Security Division, TSD, of Secret Service would have to maintain, they had a timer clock that alternated the tape recorders on its -- on a day-by-day basis, so that, for example, recorder number one would be activated on a Monday, day one. It would flip over at midnight to tape recorder number two, and turn off number one. So tape number two is Tuesday. Wednesday you go back to number one. Thursday is number two. Friday, number one, Saturday, number two, and because there are seven days in the week, last week's number one tape recorder becomes the number two tape recorder, if that's not too complicated or if I didn't explain that properly.

Naftali: But they had to change the reels all the time.

Bull: So you had -- one of the tape recorders that would be doing -- when the -- that was a Monday, Wednesday, Friday tape recorder one week because there are seven days in a week, it became a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday tape recorder. Now, I'll come back to why this is important. Up in -- that's pretty much it as far as the taping system. There was a -- the telephone in the Lincoln Sitting Room had very, very good quality when the President would pick up the phone there.

Naftali: And it was automatic?

Bull: It was -- that was automatic. As I recall, all of the phones, I think I mentioned EOB, Oval Office, I guess just Lincoln Sitting Room. They were just direct line to telephone tape recorders.

Naftali: Nothing in San Clemente --

Bull: No, not to my knowledge.

Naftali: And Key Biscayne?

Bull: Not to my knowledge there either. At one point -- I think later on they did the installation up at Camp David, and I believe they did it in preparation for the Brezhnev visit, I believe. I can't confirm that, but I believe that was it. And at a later time, I was in Sirica's court when they were investigating the so-called missing tapes, and they were asking about what other areas, and it was not known that there was a taping system at Camp David, and Brezhnev was still alive, and it was a very awkward situation for me, because I couldn't testify in public about a matter that I thought probably had some delicate foreign policy implications. Back to the significance of the EOB double tape recording system. Very early on before -- even before the existence of the taping system became known, there was an interest by the President in hearing a couple of the tapes, and later on when some tapes were -- when the system was -- existence had been disclosed, other people wanted to review some tapes before they were -- the subpoenaed tapes were turned over to whichever group was subpoenaing them, the special prosecutor's office or the senate Watergate committee.

So it fell to me to go find conversations in question, because a tape could have a week's worth of conversations on it, or in the case of the EOB system, you might have three weeks. So I'd have the assignment, "Go find a conversation that occurred on June 20th, 1970 between Haldeman and Ehrlichman and the President at 10 o'clock in the morning." Well, I'd have log books, and through voice identification, I could, you know, try to follow along, but it was maddening to try to find your place on tapes to figure out where you were, because if you had a week's or two weeks' worth of conversations that might spill over between two different tapes systems, but two very large reels of tape, you could never really find your place. So I'd have to go through and speed up and try to find a place, and ultimately come to what I believed was the conversation in question. And remember, you didn't go to the filing cabinet, and you would have clearly catalogued conversation. All you have is tape, EOB, June 1st through June 30th. And you had to find it someplace.

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- Naftali: And the secret service, the TSD people had written these? Who wrote these? Who had written, you know, 'June, 1970'?
- Bull: Whoever the technician was who would swing by the closets from time to time to make sure that there hadn't been a power failure, and that there was still -- there seemed to be enough tape left on the machines.
- Naftali: Now tape was fragile, wasn't it?
- Bull: It's the old -- what is it, quarter inch tape? This is 1970, so it's the old quarter inch tape, you know, reel to reel tapes, not even cassettes.
- Naftali: I heard that they bought the tape at the drug store.
- Bull: Could be -- you know, I don't know where they bought the tapes, but this was not a sophisticated system by any means. These were just some standard old tape recorders that you might have for -- that you might use in a junior high school classroom for whatever purpose.
- Naftali: So let's talk about your job when Butterfield leaves. Your job is to make sure that the Secret Service is doing its job? Did you have --
- Bull: Pretty much so, yeah. I mean, I dealt with them on -- we had daily scheduled meetings, so I'd talk to them about what the President was doing, and you know, whatever information they needed to do their job for securing the White House, and for the Secret Service itself to, you know, protect the President, or whomever. That was my involvement with Secret Service.
- Naftali: Tell me about -- well, your involvement with the tapes. Who had access to the tapes in that early period?
- Bull: Besides TSD, Secret Service, of course, they did, because they maintained it. During the early stages, to my knowledge, after Butterfield left, I was the only person who had access, but I can't confirm that.
- Naftali: Where were they kept?
- Bull: They were kept over in the Executive Office building. There was a closet under a stairway, a locked closet, and it was a three or four door drawer safe file cabinet, you know, big, heavy drawers. Otherwise, it's a safe.
- Naftali: And the door had a lock?
- Bull: I believe so, yeah.
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Naftali: Combination lock?

Bull: I don't remember.

Naftali: Okay, so --

Bull: I would not go over myself and get them, I saw them. But I'd call TSD and say, "Okay, here's what I need" and no one ever questioned.

Naftali: Now, on the tapes, actually we have evidence that in -- just before he was fired, Haldeman listened to some of these tapes in April of 1973.

Bull: Okay.

Naftali: Now he could -- he would -- and he had to ask you for them.

Bull: I think he did, yeah. I believe that's right.

Naftali: It's a call to you, actually.

Bull: I think that's it, yeah.

Naftali: And this was, I believe -- I just -- I'm going to ask you if you recall, this is because the White House knew that John Dean was about to testify, and so they wanted to double check what they were hearing about John Dean's likely testimony against the tapes.

Bull: That could be. I remember providing tapes to Haldeman. I just can't confirm the date of that. I just remember it was mid-spring of '73.

Naftali: When did Fred Buzhardt and Bebe Rebozo start listening?

Bull: I didn't know that Rebozo did. I didn't realize that.

Naftali: Well --

Bull: Fred Buzhardt, I guess -- he came aboard probably in June or July of '73, so probably about that time. By that time, he could have -- he was probably in a position to get them independently, and he wouldn't have to check with me, nor would TSD necessarily say, "Hey, Buzhardt is asking for tapes, should I?"

Naftali: Did the -- if the President wanted to listen, did -- he did -- did he have to go through you?

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- Bull: He did, because it was my job to assist him in whatever he wanted assistance in, in that area. So what he would typically do -- or someone would give me maybe a list of conversations he wanted to listen to. And I remember on a couple of occasions, I mean going over to the EOB and sitting outside, and with my list and a bunch of tapes, and trying to find the conversation that he wanted. Then I'd put it on the tape recorder, I'd mark the beginning and end, take it into his office, and say, "This is" whatever, "the June 20th Haldeman-Ehrlichman at 10 o'clock." And I'd have -- I'd put markers right in the reel itself so that when he came to the end of the marker, just a little piece of paper, would fall out. So that would be the end.
- Naftali: And did you give him headphones?
- Bull: Yes, it looked like the Mickey Mouse Club.
- Naftali: It looked like the Mickey Mouse -- so you gave the President -- and the President would sit there? Because there is record -- a record of on June 4th, 1973, the President spent 12 hours listening to John Dean-related tapes.
- Bull: Could be.
- Naftali: In the EOB.
- Bull: Could be.
- Naftali: And that you set up five different tape recorders.
- Bull: And it probably took eight hours to do that, because of the process you had to go through just to find the conversations in question.
- Naftali: Must have been maddening.
- Bull: I hated that job. Whenever I heard that I had to do more tapes, I just groaned. It was tiring, frustrating, and there was the President, who could sometimes be impatient.
- Naftali: Well, did he ask you to help him understand what he was hearing?
- Bull: No, I didn't get into the substance of it. And really, I was in such a hurry to find the next conversation, I never listened to a tape including -- and you're going to find this hard to believe -- I was at one -- during one of these exercises, there was -- I was supposed to find a conversation of a meeting that took place at Camp David. And so going through, I found --
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finding, you know, my reference point, ran across a discussion with Haldeman, and they were talking about personnel issues and my name came up, and I hit fast forward, because I just didn't want to hear.

Naftali: I actually -- that I understand. Now, in late June, the President wanted a tape flown out to San Clemente.

Bull: '73, we're talking?

Naftali: Yes, but you couldn't find a courier. Do you remember this at all? Buzhardt listened to the tape, and sent a summary to San Clemente. Does that ring a bell for you?

Bull: No, it doesn't -- just something vague -- vague recollection of it. Could be.

Naftali: What I'd like to know is why the system kept running, still producing tapes at this point. Why didn't somebody shut it down by now?

Bull: I don't know. I've speculated on that for years. I believe that, first of all, no one really know -- knew what happened, what was said, what wasn't said, who was responsible for what during during this whole Watergate period. And I'm -- probably the person who came closest after the fact was Diane Sawyer, who did all of the research on Watergate for the President's book they --

Naftali: RN

Bull: RN, yeah, but at that time, there was no comprehensive view. And I think as far as the President was concerned, like most of us, we have selective memories, and we kind of conveniently forget that which we hoped we didn't say. And I think that, you know, probably many people thought, "Well, you know, maybe that taping system is going to vindicate the President or vindicate us or vindicate other people."

Naftali: In Ehrlichman's book, he describes the President coming -- in one of the books, the President's described coming out of the old executive office building on June 4th, 1973 with a smile on his face after he's listened, because he thinks that the conversations with Dean weren't as bad as he had feared. Does that --

Bull: I'll take his word for it. I never had a conversation with the President like that. I remember a conversation with Haldeman, and this must have been after Haldeman had departed, but he talked -- he was the one who said, "Well on the tape, there is the statement that we can raise a million dollars, but it would be wrong." Now that's what Haldeman told me. We

subsequently learned that there was quite a gap between the time when the President said, "We can raise a million dollars" and later on, "But it would be wrong," which gives it an entirely different meaning, of course. But my only point, just to elaborate on that, because again, in kind of the wishful thinking, selective memory phenomenon, that I think we all have, he might have concluded, at least retrospectively, that those two points were closer together, and just as others might recall certain statements as being exculpatory, when only selectively have you picked out the points that are exculpatory.

Naftali: Now we've been talking about the period before the public revelation of the tapes. Do you recall any effort to make any transcripts during that early period, or were people just listening?

Bull: To my knowledge, they were only listening, and to my knowledge, we didn't start making transcripts until the fall. And that was in response to a subpoena, I think from the Senate Watergate Committee. And of course, I think there were nine tapes that were supposed to be -- that had been subpoenaed. One didn't exist, for whatever reason. Either the conversation didn't take place in a room that had a recording device, or it was when the taping system had run out of tape and the technician hadn't replaced it. But that -- it was one of those -- that group that the infamous 18 and a half-minute gap occurred.

Naftali: We'll get to that in a moment. I just want to ask you what you remember -- first of all, what warning, if any, did you have that Alexander Butterfield was going to reveal the existence of the taping system?

Bull: It was on a Sunday when I received a telephone call at home from a guy named Scott Armstrong -- I'd never met Scott Armstrong, who was an investigator with the Senate Watergate Committee -- that's how he introduced himself. And he called to say that -- he introduced himself and said he'd kind of like to talk to me the next day. Well, this came -- I remember -- you know, out of the blue. This was on a Sunday, so after we hung up, I called, I think it was Buzhardt, someone in the counsel's office, and said, you know, "I've just got this call, there's only one thing they want -- could want to talk to me about, and that's the taping system." By this time, there had been enough conversation that I knew Buzhardt knew about it, and perhaps other -- and other people did as well. And he said, "No, no, they wouldn't know anything about that, but just sit tight, and I'll find out." Now, sometime later that day, he called back and said, "Yep, they know about it, and they heard it from Alex Butterfield." So the next day -- "And they want you up there," he said, "but don't go on up until we talk in the morning." Well, the next day, Buzhardt called and essentially says "I'm off the hook." He said they do want Alex Butterfield, he's going to testify today to the existence of the taping system, and they put him on

national television to do that. I've always been very grateful to Alex, because that very likely would have been me.

My understanding of what happened on that, and there have been different accounts, but Alex went up to the Senate Watergate committee -- everybody was being -- all White House staff were going up there for interviews, and when he went up, it was after John Dean had testified, and said something to the effect of, "I was meeting with the President, but by the way he was acting, I got the impression that I was being recorded." So they said, "Mr. Butterfield, is that possible? Mr. Butterfield, is it possible that any other conversations in the White House were recorded?" To which Alex, at least as he -- what he told me was -- figured that they knew about it, and he wasn't going to perjure himself, and said, "Well, of course you know about the existence of the system then," you know, "I'm not going to fool you or something." And whoever it was at the Watergate committee staff -- it was the just the staff -- the staff interview -- was very cool. I think it was even Fred Thompson, said, "Well, you know, just tell us again exactly how it worked." So Alex proceeded to describe it. You know, that's my understanding of what happened and how it happened, and I think Alex Butterfield, over the years, has been branded traitor, I don't -- I think he -- it was an innocent disclosure of a guy telling the truth.

- Naftali: How did you hear that the system was going to be torn up -- torn out?
- Bull: I don't know if I ever heard that it was going to be torn out. At some point I heard that we were going to stop taping. And I don't remember when that was. That was probably in the summer of '70 --
- Naftali: But just two days?
- Bull: Was it that --
- Naftali: Yeah, it was that --
- Bull: Was it that --
- Naftali: It was that fast.
- Bull: Okay, that fast. I had forgotten.
- Naftali: At that moment, the President is ill.
- Bull: Yeah.
- Naftali: This is the Bethesda -- he's in Bethesda --

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- Bull: He's over in Bethesda.
- Naftali: How ill was he? You spent a lot of time with him.
- Bull: Yeah, but I -- and I wasn't hanging around the hospital room. I understand -- he had pneumonia at that time; that was pneumonia. And I understand he was quite ill. Of course the Mary McGrory's -- she was a correspondent and quite a critic of the President -- I recall that she questioned the legitimacy, the reality --
- Naftali: I understand.
- Bull: of his illness, but I think he was ill.
- Naftali: Did you know anything about the debate swirling among his inner circle as to what to do with the tapes, and whether to destroy them?
- Bull: I was not party to any of those conversations. Now, over the years I've read a lot about it, and I've read of the conversations, and I can't recall what I've read and what I recall -- what I had contemporaneous knowledge of. There were some of us -- I -- maybe I was overly believing and naïve -- felt that, number one, it would look pretty darn suspicious if suddenly you destroyed exculpatory evidence, and number two, hoping that the tapes did indeed contain exculpatory evidence. So I would have been opposed to it.
- Naftali: Tell us, just so people have a sense of scale, how many -- how much -- how many tapes were there by that point? Not a number, but I mean, just size. Because Spiro Agnew suggested a bonfire. I mean, how many -- what would it have taken to destroy all those tapes?
- Bull: You know, as I recall, the safe I described was the size of a standard three or four drawer filing cabinet. So it wouldn't have been a very big fire. And anyway, it's all made of plastic, so it would have just melted.
- Naftali: Now, it takes -- it takes two -- nothing really happens with the tapes once it's decided not to. But custody is transferred. The state -- the Secret Service --
- Bull: After resignation?
- Naftali: No, no, before that. I'm talking about at this point when there -- when the system's revealed. Doesn't the Secret Service transfer the -- change the locks
- Bull: I think it went to the counsel's office at that point.
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- Naftali: Okay, went to the counsel's --
- Bull: Yeah, now I don't remember whether TSD got completely out of business -- out of the business or not, but the good part was once the counsel's office took over, there were other people that could listen to tapes, because up until that time, really I was the guy -- sort of the only trusted guy who could go through and do what needed to be done with the tapes.
- Naftali: Now, I want to confirm this. Is it true that Haldeman had access to the tapes after he resigned?
- Bull: He got access to it through me, whether it was a mistake or not, but he contacted me, said -- I believe he said the President wanted him to listen to a tape. I took his word for it and provided it to him. I didn't check with the President and say, "Haldeman asked, should I do it?"
- Naftali: And you kept notes of what everybody listened to, right? Did you keep notes? I mean, could we figure out which tape he listened to?
- Bull: You might. I remember I had notes, but the notes were more -- I diagramed how you find a certain conversation on a reel of tape. Now I don't remember if I kept notes on the specific tape or tapes that I provided to Bob Haldeman.
- Naftali: Did any other member of the staff ask you in that period to listen, other than the President and Buzhardt.
- Bull: No, what I was told, I think Haig told me or Buzhardt told me early on that the President wanted to listen to a series of tapes, and here's the list of the recordings he wants to hear.
- Naftali: And that was the June 4th, probably.
- Bull: And there -- yeah, that was probably it.
- Naftali: Did -- was that the only time the President listened?
- Bull: No, there were other occasions. Up until -- even up through 1974, I remember going through this exercise, probably in June of 1974, just a month or two before resignation.
- Naftali: We'll get to that one in a minute. Let's jump ahead to September. End of September, you go to Camp David with Rose Woods.
- Bull: Right.
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- Naftali: What are you doing there?
- Bull: I went up with Rose -- we had a list of tapes that had been subpoenaed, I believe, by the Senate Watergate committee, again a group of about nine tapes, she was going to make a transcript of each tape. My job was to find the conversation for which she was to make a transcript. It didn't take me very much -- well -- much time at all, compared to how much time it was taking her to do a transcript. I don't no, I'm not a -- I don't do shorthand or anything. So what she did, she had her typewriter and she had this tape recorder. So she'd push a button, play, and then type like mad, you know, and get, I don't know, four or five words, stop, and have to go back and find where she was and keep going. Well it was a maddening process for her, and I think she only got one transcript done the whole weekend. So when we got back --
- Naftali: But let -- before we get back, I want to ask about something else. The President also listened, didn't he, during that Camp David --
- Bull: If he did, I didn't see him listen. I think he came into the cabin where Rose was at one point. I don't remember whether he listened or not, or whether Rose may have taken the tape recorder with a tape on it into his cabin. Because once I had gotten all of my -- after I finished my job, finding the tapes, I had nothing to do anymore that I could do. She was doing transcripts and I wasn't going to sit around just looking over her shoulder.
- Naftali: Now, what cabin were you in?
- Bull: I've forgotten the names.
- Naftali: But you were in a different cabin.
- Bull: In a different cabin.
- Naftali: From Aspen Lodge, which --
- Bull: Right.
- Naftali: Now, the reason I ask this is that some controversy later on about when did the President first figure out that there were two missing -- so-called missing tapes.
- Bull: I don't think he ever did; I think I did, because I had to find the tapes, and I had to determine those tapes don't exist. And I remember having a conversation, I guess, with Buzhardt about it, that two of these tapes are missing. And I remember him saying, rather naively, I thought, "Well, I'll just tell the judge and he'll understand." And I'm thinking, "Yeah, fat
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chance on that." And sure enough, the unrecorded conversations became missing tapes. And there was a court hearing presided over by Judge John Sirica over this whole issue of missing tapes. And I was, you know, sitting on the stand rather uncomfortably trying to explain that, "No, it's not missing, it was never recorded in the first place."

Naftali: To set up October 1st, I need, Want to ask you one more question. Who was it -- there was -- the subpoena requested a June 20th conversation involving the President, Haldeman, and Ehrlichman. Who was it that figured out there was no such conversation? There's one with Ehrlichman, followed by the one with Haldeman, and the one with Haldeman has not been subpoenaed, we're going to focus on the Ehrlichman one.

Bull: Well, I would have determined probably that the -- if the conversation took place, it was not recorded. Remember, the -- unlike the LBJ tapes, where LBJ had the capability of turning the system on and off, the President didn't. This was an automatic system. So I would have determined that the conversation is not -- was never recorded. And I might have said there's another one that's the President and Haldeman, or another one, President and Ehrlichman, but there's not one that's President, Haldeman, and Ehrlichman. So I would have made that determination. But as to whether the subpoena was correct, and which one to focus on, probably would have been someone in the White House counsel's office. But I couldn't -- wasn't in a position to say what was right or wrong with the subpoena.

Naftali: Okay, so now we get back to Washington, and Rose is still continuing to do transcripts, even though it's been --

Bull: Yeah.

Naftali: -- a bit a failure in Camp David.

Bull: Right, so I called TSD and said, "Is there such thing as a tape recorder, standard tape recorder that has a foot pedal on it?" Because I'd seen that when I worked at Canada Dry. You know, stenographers, they had foot pedals on machines. So they got a tape recorder manufactured by the Uher, U-H-E-R, a German manufacturer I believe, that had a foot pedal. And it was on this machine that the tape erasure ultimately occurred. Now, if you let me jump ahead, because this is the famous 18 and a half-minute gap. Much was made of it, and a group of tape experts concluded that there were five to nine deliberate erasures. Now, I don't know how you ever define the term deliberate unless someone says, "I did it deliberately." But it's like, you know, the charge in the military when some guy goes AWOL. Well, is he intending to desert forever, or is he just going to go visit his girlfriend for a week? And you could bring the guy up on

desertion charges maybe after day five, but you know, what was the real intent? Well, I maintain that there was never any intent by anyone to erase a tape.

After resignation, in -- I was out in San Clemente, and I wish I had saved this newspaper, I don't know where it is, but there was a newspaper down in Orange County. I don't think it was the "Orange County Register," but some small newspaper. There was a journalist there who had run across a woman who had a medical transcription service, and as I recall and as I understand it, a physician would telephone in and telephone a diagnosis, whatever would be important to the person's record, and this woman would type up whatever he called in, and send back a finished copy. She did it on a Uher system, and she had a foot pedal, and they were experiencing erasures. This reporter went over there and actually witnessed an erasure of a tape almost identical to that which happened to Rose Woods on the same type of tape recorder. And they had their own expert, and they found that by adding this foot pedal in there, from time to time, it caused an electrical malfunction that would activate the recording head. And when you have the recording head running and there's no sound, it will just erase it.

So visualize Rose Woods then, trying to tape -- trying to transcribe a tape, and she comes to the end of a portion and she stops, and then she tries to go back. Well, when she's going back now, she's erasing. So she goes back and forth, trying to find her place, maybe as many as nine times, maybe as few as five. And I firmly believe that that's the explanation for the 18 and a half-minute gap. When I first offered the explanation to Richard Ben-Veniste, assistant special prosecutor, I was kind of laughed out of -- almost laughed out of the room. I do believe that the explanation I gave is the most plausible one. It's not the fun one. I mean, Al Haig said a sinister force did it. That's a lot more fun to believe. It's more fun to believe than the so-called Rose Mary stretch, where she was leaning over that famous "Time" or "Newsweek" cover. But I can't imagine anyone erasing a portion, but not all, of an incriminating conversation. I would have done a much better job. You wouldn't have seen anything on that tape, forget it. The President couldn't have done it. He was not known for his dexterity. And Rose Woods would not have taken it upon herself to do it. It just -- none of it makes any sense. It was fun to believe though, that someone was sitting there with a giant eraser --

Naftali: But why did she offer the stretch -- she's the one that offered the stretch theory, didn't she?

Bull: Well, I don't think -- remember, I didn't find out until a year later, or nine months later, what the plausible explanation was. That was in September or October. And I think she was thinking that that's probably what happened, that while she was doing her transcript, she reached for a

telephone, and it may have happened in that way. No one else had a decent explanation. The explanation I just gave you came in either September -- August or September of 1974, after the President had resigned. At that point, no one cared. The President had resigned, he was gone.

Naftali: Do you remember the day that she discovered she'd done this? Maybe because -- didn't she tell -- I mean, when she gave you the tape back, she must have said, "Oh my God, I've erased this."

Bull: No, no -- I think I heard it from -- other people heard it before I did. Some staff members did before I did. I heard it, I believe, from a guy named Tom Korologos, who was in the -- in congressional relations. And they had received a briefing on this problem in order to be prepared to deal with Congress on it. So I learned from one of them.

Naftali: So -- she already handed back the tape.

Bull: I guess, I've forgotten.

Naftali: There must have been enormous concern. How would you describe the reaction?

Bull: I'm trying to remember the reaction of others. I was not that personally concerned at the time. I mean, it was a -- you know, an "Oh, hell" reaction, I'm sure that I had, and many others did. I don't remember, though, whether initially people thought that this would be a huge bombshell.

Naftali: At this time, actually November, there was another -- there was the issue again of the so-called missing or untaped conversations.

Bull: No, they called it missing tapes, and that was the deal, missing tapes.

Naftali: But one of them was an April 15th conversation, '73 in the old Executive Office building, where apparently the machine had run out of tape.

Bull: Yeah.

Naftali: And you wrote on the box "part one." Do you remember this at all? Because the issue was, why did you put "part one" if there was a second reel of tape?

Bull: Well, probably what happened -- it probably was before midnight. Remember, the machine -- one machine would switch off, and the other one would switch on at midnight.

Naftali: Right.

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- Bull: So if the -- if machine number one ran out, that didn't automatically activate number two. You had to wait for the clock to catch up to it. So that's probably it. I can't remember exactly why I wrote, "part one" or "part two." I was probably referring to the two tapes that encompassed the general period of time in which a conversation occurred.
- Naftali: Because -- and a part would not be for a day, necessarily, but would be that those general --
- Bull: Yeah, because of the Monday-Wednesday-Friday, Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday phenomenon on that taping system.
- Naftali: So one tape could have Monday for one week, and a Tuesday from another week, and a --
- Bull: Yes, right.
- Naftali: And the only way you could differentiate these was by listening, and then looking at the logs.
- Bull: Exactly, yeah. So if I were -- if I had to find a conversation for -- take the April 15th. I had to get from, through Secret Service, two tapes that would be marked, hypothetically, April first through April 30th, finding just one tape wouldn't be good enough. I had to find its --
- Naftali: That's right.
- Bull: -- number two counterpart.
- Naftali: Okay, now, the -- I was going to ask you about -- did Garment or Buzhardt, after the revelation of the 18 and a half minute gap, come to you? Because some people suspected you did it.
- Bull: Oh yeah, a lot of people did. There was -- it was down to three people: the President, Rose Woods, and me.
- Naftali: Who came to ask you, other than Sirica?
- Bull: No one, no one ever asked me.
- Naftali: No one in the White House?
- Bull: No one.
- Naftali: Garment, Buzhardt?
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- Bull: No one.
- Naftali: To what do you attribute that?
- Bull: Well, two things -- one, I guess I was viewed as a loyalist. And if I had done it, I would have been doing it -- I would have done it perhaps at the request of the President. And they might not have wanted to have that knowledge, or they didn't believe -- or they believed the Rose Woods scenario, and just didn't bother to pursue it. But I thought it kind of interesting.
- Naftali: Did anyone ever ask you to erase any tape?
- Bull: No.
- Naftali: Did you ever feel like you ought to erase some tape?
- Bull: No, but again, I listened to so few tapes in question. I didn't have time. I -- I'm sitting there with a list of, you know, maybe a dozen tapes -- or a dozen conversations that I have to find. And I have an impatient President sitting in the next room, wondering why it's taking so darn long. So if I could just stay, you know, slightly ahead.
- Naftali: So you weren't given two days to get this stuff ready for him.
- Bull: Oh no, oh gosh no. Normally it's on -- "The President's going over to the EOB now, get this done."
- Naftali: Tell me about the Saturday Night Massacre. Where were you, what did you think?
- Bull: It was quite a tumultuous day. The information would -- the reports were coming in, first that, what, Eliot Richardson had been directed to fire the special prosecutor, and he refused and resigned, and so I think William Ruckelshaus, who was the deputy, it fell to him to do it, he resigned, so then it fell to Robert Bork, the Solicitor General, and he went ahead and did it. I remember Saturday afternoon, you could hear the honking of the horns and the banshees out there on Pennsylvania Avenue screaming for our collective and individual heads. And there was a guy who worked for Haig who came into the Oval Office and said, "You know, I think the President really helped himself today." And I remember a couple of us looking, "You've got to be kidding."
- Naftali: What did you think of the Stennis Compromise, the idea that this old man could listen to these tapes? I mean, you knew them better than anybody.
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Bull: I didn't know the content, though.

Naftali: No, but I meant just hearing.

Bull: Didn't -- I believe by that time there was a transcript that he could -- that would accompany tapes, wasn't there?

Naftali: No.

Bull: There wasn't a transcript? Well, I think at the time it sounded like a good compromise to me, as long as I didn't have to listen to the darn things.

Naftali: The -- where did the President keep his dictabelts? Every -- you know, he would make these --

Bull: Yes.

Naftali: -- diary entries.

Bull: I remember there would be some in a briefcase. You'd find some in a top drawer.

Naftali: Where was the machine? Was it handheld, or was it on the desk?

Bull: I think it was on the desk. I think it had a microphone.

Naftali: Because when they didn't find the -- they didn't find a tape for that conversation in April '73, the President thought, "Well maybe I made a Dicta-Belt."

Bull: Yeah, and he called that a tape, I remember. And I think he used that term 'taped' when he was referring to a Dicta-Belt.

Naftali: And they couldn't find it.

Bull: Right, well, he may not have even done it.

Naftali: Yes.

Bull: You know, so I don't know. And also though, I do remember, now that you ask that question, I do remember him dictating something on his machine -- nothing to do with this, but just over, you know, at some time during the Presidency. I'm sure it was brilliant. There was a long piece that he dictated, and he had failed to turn the machine on.

Naftali: Tell me about -- did you play any role when the White House started transcribing tapes, the famous expletive deleted --

Bull: No.

Naftali: -- transcripts.

Bull: No, that was in the fall, as I recall.

Naftali: No, you didn't --

Bull: Right, and if you've heard tapes maybe, then you know what the expletives are, but they're not that tough --

Naftali: What were you doing --

Bull: -- expletives.

Naftali: What were you doing now that -- I mean, now that the taping system was open and it was shut down, what was your main -- in the last few months of the administration, what were your main duties?

Bull: Well, to continue, I mean to run the Oval Office and to run his schedule.

Naftali: Tell me about -- that he -- but you said he kept listening to tapes.

Bull: I'd say from time to time. I remember back in -- I think it was around June of '74 that I got back -- I got another request to queue some conversations up for him.

Naftali: Did you go with him to the Middle East?

Bull: Yes.

Naftali: Tell us about that visit, please.

Bull: It was a trip, started out in Austria, which was a rest stop. And I think we went from there to Egypt, where he took a train trip from Cairo up to Alexandria. And it was about that time that his physician diagnosed phlebitis, whatever phlebitis was. It was the first time I had ever heard of it. And we subsequently learned that he was cautioned against overexerting himself, because there could be a clot that would free and could be fatal. And he went from there to Saudi Arabia, I believe, to Syria, Jerusalem, Amman, Jordan, and back home.

Naftali: So it was during the trip that the physician --

Bull: I think so, I remember there was concern expressed. Now, whether he had been diagnosed before he left or whether it was during the trip, I'm not sure. But that's when we learned that he had some sort of condition -- some condition known as phlebitis, and as -- again, I'd never heard of phlebitis before, nor had a couple of others, like the military aide.

Naftali: Did he elevate his leg? I mean, did you -- was he --

Bull: I don't remember if he elevated it or not.

Naftali: Tell me about the Pyramids. You visited the -- didn't you --

Bull: We visited the Pyramids, yeah. What was the more interesting -- you're not asking this, but the more interesting story was on -- was the plane trip from -- I believe it was Amman, Jordan to Damascus, Syria. And remember this is in June of '74. The disengagement of forces in the Middle East had occurred just really a couple of months earlier. While we're along in Air Force One, which -- his plane was a Boeing 707, and to my knowledge we were not accompanied by escorts, if we -- any sort of military, armed escorts. If we were, they were long out of sight. I remember sitting at the staff table and looking out, and seeing a jet fighter plane with camouflage markings on it, and I turned to Brent Scowcroft and said, "Brent, was it that?" And he looked over and said, "Oh, shit." And with that, Air Force One goes into a steep climb -- a climb -- and the plane goes underneath. So we look over on the right, and now there are two of them. And the plane goes down into a relatively steep dive. And this goes on this roller coaster for -- I don't remember, a minute, two minutes, and then the planes go away.

And what's kind of interesting is the part we didn't learn until afterwards, was that the pilot, Colonel Ralph Albertazzie, was trying to contact the Damascus tower, the control tower, and he was greeted with silence. He was subsequently told two or three different stories: one that it was an honor escort -- yeah, fat chance. The other was that, I think that they didn't have communications with the tower, so they didn't hear him trying. And the third was that it was just a bunch of, you know, loyal Syrians up there to say hello, and extend greetings. And it received little, if any, public attention, even though one of the members of the press was a aviatrix -- an amateur aviatrix. But I thought we'd bought the farm on that one.

Naftali: My God.

Bull: And it's received very little attention.

Naftali: That's really interesting.

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- Bull: Others who were on that plane include Jack Brennan, Colonel Jack Brennan, and of course, Brent Scowcroft.
- Naftali: We'll ask Brent Scowcroft.
- Bull: And see if he can remember it. And that's the -- en route to Damascus.
- Naftali: This was, for you, the most dangerous moment in the Nixon administration, was it?
- Bull: I -- yeah, I guess, yeah. There was a time, and this wasn't really dangerous. Again, you need a context of the time. This was a turbulent, violent time, when you didn't have just calm demonstrators chanting or holding up a sign. I mean, they were -- they'd do things like throw rocks, do things like that. I remember when the President was going to address a senior citizen's convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. This is pre-gambling -- this was old Atlantic City, and I remember it being a hot day. Now, when he would go through a crowd, I would be with him, helping. He'd sign an autograph and I'd give him a pen or something like that. And I remember, "Gee, you know, it feels -- I'm sweating a lot." Well, I was -- wasn't sweat, I'd been sliced open with a razor blade. Someone as going for him, and they got me. That's -- those were the times that were living in. And it's that atmosphere that I suggest that you keep in mind when we're -- when we try to figure out, "Why did Watergate happen? What was going on? What was the mindset?" Well, it was getting pretty violent out there. People -- we were close to civil war in that society over a lot of different issues. And the demonstrators back then were pretty mean. There was a time when he went to Billy Graham Day down in North Carolina, and not only were these guys -- it was not the Weathermen, but a group like that, they were not just throwing rocks, and not just rocks, but they had barbed hooks -- barbed, you know, fish hooks, so it would just tear people apart. It would hit them. These were nasty times.
- Naftali: You were going to tell me about Kent State, the day that you heard about -
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- Bull: Well, I just remember hearing of Kent State, being in my office, and having a conversation with my secretary, and essentially saying it was inevitable that this was going to happen.
- Naftali: Do you have any independent recollection of the President during the Yom Kippur war? This was also the time of the Saturday Night Massacre.
- Bull: Right, right.
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- Naftali: It was a very stressful time in the White House.
- Bull: It was, and I just remember we were in the whole time, and the President was spending a great deal of time in the Oval Office. But what was being said, what was being done, I can't tell you substantively.
- Naftali: Would the President go to the situation room?
- Bull: I don't remember him going to the situation room too much. One of my great disappointments was that, in the situation room, it looked some guy's pine-paneled basement. You know, the only thing it was missing was a ping-pong table. At the very least, I was hoping that I'd see, you know, some staff sergeant behind glass writing in reverse or something, but it was just a secure room, in the situation room.
- Naftali: In general, did the President keep long hours? When would he leave at night?
- Bull: He'd probably leave at six or so, someplace around there. But it's hard to judge, because he spent a lot of time -- if you looked at his notes, and sometimes he'd date the notes on his yellow pad -- you could see he was working into the night. But I wasn't there to see what he was doing in the Lincoln Sitting Room, for example.
- Naftali: Your day ended when he left the Oval Office.
- Bull: Yes, I tried to get there just before he arrived, and when he left, if I could, unless I had to do something, I'd leave.
- Naftali: So your day was usually over by six, seven?
- Bull: Well, it depends -- I mean, if there were a function that night, I'd have to go to the function, if there were a White House, you know, any sort of a social function, something like that, I had to be around for that -- not as a guest, mind you.
- Naftali: Now you spent about as much time with the President as any aide.
- Bull: Probably so, yeah. Haldeman probably the most.
- Naftali: Would he quip -- would he say, you know, "Steve, I got another speech to give," or did --
- Bull: No, I -- my job was kind of the anonymous, invisible assistant. And as I've said to someone else who asked sort of a similar question, when the two of
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us were in the Oval Office alone, just the two of us, I believe that in his mind, he was by himself. It was my job to blend in. It was my job also to know him, to anticipate what he might want or need, but just to be there.

Naftali: Tell us about -- you -- did you spend any time with Pat Nixon?

Bull: Some, yes, and I spent some time with the daughters from time to time. I spent the most time with Mrs. Nixon when we were planning a function for the returning POWs. But generally, it was more, you know, in passing, if there was a function, I would talk -- if there was an evening function with the President and Mrs. Nixon going out, I'd go up to the residence and be ready to tell them it's time to go and escort them downstairs. And during those occasions, I'd chat with her. But I didn't have an ongoing business relationship with her.

Naftali: So what -- was it your -- when Haldeman and Ehrlichman would come into the office to chat with the -- to meet with the President, you would then leave?

Bull: Yes.

Naftali: Tell us a bit about Ehrlichman. What was he like?

Bull: Good guy, and it was sort of strange -- when he appeared on television in the Senate Watergate hearings. First of all, they had this close-up where you could see every pore, and he looked like this devious guy. But he was really a very pleasant guy with a good sense of humor. During the '68 campaign, he was what's known as the tour director. So all of the advance men out on the field dealt with John Ehrlichman and to the last guy, they thought the world of Ehrlichman. He was a good guy with a good sense of humor, and very supportive, very smart.

Naftali: What about Chuck Colson?

Bull: Chuck Colson -- very bright, he was a friend of mine -- still is a friend of mine, a guy who is -- who had worked on the Hill, was an attorney, had been in private practice, had actually -- you know, had a good bit of background in politics, knew a lot of what he was doing, had a great sense of humor. A lot of the things people read about him now or hear about him as being this tough guy who would run over his grandmother to reelect Richard Nixon. I mean, he -- it was a quip, it was a joke. And he was a funny guy who would put -- do a practical joke. I remember one time he wrote this bogus memo and copied Ziegler -- bogus letter to a journalist, which of course, he never sent. And he did it just to drive Ziegler up the wall, thinking that, you know, Colson had really, you know, taken this guy down.

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- Naftali: But he did have a reputation among some as not knowing when to say no to the President.
- Bull: That could be. But at the same time, he never went -- I don't believe he went nearly as far as he's been given credit for going.
- Naftali: Len Garment?
- Bull: Len had a special relationship with the President, because he had been with him at the law firm and brought him down. Len had a great sense of humor also, and a very bright guy. He had -- his portfolio included things like dealing with Native American problems, and I remember there was the whole Wounded Knee issue, and that was Len's portfolio. But he had sort of the same privileged relationship that a John Ehrlichman did -- I mean that a John Mitchell did and a Pat Buchanan did, because they had an association with the President back as early as '66, 1966, maybe even earlier, long before he was President.
- Naftali: How about John Mitchell?
- Bull: John Mitchell is in post-resignation days, and after he got out of prison, I used to really enjoy introducing people -- Nixon haters and people who, you know, by extension thought they hated John Mitchell -- to introduce them to him, because he was such a delightful guy.
- Naftali: Let's talk about August 9th, 1974. Well, first of all, what kind of preparation did you have? I mean, did you know about the debates going on over whether to resign or not?
- Bull: The debates were both public and private. You couldn't open a newspaper when you didn't see the question of, you know, when, should, if, it's inevitable -- Nixon's resignation. So when I learned of it on the eighth, it was, "Okay, that's -- it's finally come to that." And I learned of it from my friend Jack Brennan, the Marine aide who had been told. I asked if they'd get things ready out in San Clemente.
- Naftali: And so where -- were you -- you must have standing with everyone during the farewell speech.
- Bull: No, I was in the back of the room where I normally was, and I think Colonel Brennan and I were probably together in the rear of the east room. But yeah, we were there, and we were a witness to it, certainly.
- Naftali: And did you board the plane, the helicopter?
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- Bull: I was on the helicopter, yes.
- Naftali: Tell us what you -- we have the helicopter now in Yorba Linda.
- Bull: Yeah, that's what I understand. Well, I just remember, you know, how -- I'd always board from the rear so you couldn't see me and other staff members board. The President boarded from the front, and he gave -- I didn't see the double victory sign that he gave. I've seen that on film subsequently. But I just -- the thing I remember is how quiet it was, that ride out to Andrews Air Force Base, where he boarded Air Force One. And then, you know, some of the anecdotes there.
- Naftali: Well, I've heard some -- which ones do you remember?
- Bull: One, Colonel Albertazzie came back and greeted the President. He was going to be his pilot to take him out to California. And the President very graciously said, "Well, Ralph, sorry I never made you a general." And Albertazzie said, "Sir, there's still time." And then the other one, of course, we didn't have press with us on the plane, and the President observed that perhaps the -- it was less odiferous back there in the press section than it had been in the past.
- Naftali: And you're on the plane, you're on Air Force One, were you sitting on that flight back to --
- Bull: We -- there was -- there were two staff -- there was a staff section that had two tables for four people each, and then behind those tables were two stenographer stations, so you can accommodate a total of ten people. As I recall, we had maybe six staffers, six of us staffers who went out with him. So we were sitting at those tables.
- Naftali: And you were there -- you were in San Clemente how long?
- Bull: Until, I think, mid-November of 1974 or so, about four months.
- Naftali: So you were there when he had his health crisis?
- Bull: Yes, very much so.
- Naftali: Can you tell -- did he just take sick one day?
- Bull: We heard that the phlebitis was flaring up, and he -- I think he went in there, in the hospital twice. Now his physician was a man named Dr. John Lungren, who had been with him for some number of years, I met Dr. Lungren on the '68 campaign, but he became, at that time, the President's physician. As a former President, the President no longer had military
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physicians as he had, you know, when he was President. So Dr. Lungren was caring for him. And the President went into the hospital, and I think he was in there a couple of days and then came out again. And he had to go back in again, and there was a surgical procedure in which they inserted some sort of a device that would prevent the phlebitis clot from breaking free and going to his heart. And while he was in there, he, in effect, I mean, he went into, I think, cardiac arrest or his -- he just flatlined. And I think clinically he was, you know, he was dead for whatever that period of time was, two, three, five seconds. It was, you know, post-surgery. He was up in the intensive care ward of this new hospital in -- I want to say, not Oceanside, Long Beach, California. But it was quite more severe than I think anyone ever realized.

Naftali: I understand that he started to dictate when he came out of it and was recovering, he was starting to dictate things because he assumed he might not survive.

Bull: Could be, I left about that time.

Naftali: Do you remember when the -- just to go back a moment, do you remember when the pardon occurred?

Bull: Yes, it was -- what, September?

Naftali: September.

Bull: September of '74, and I went into the office and he told me it was going to occur.

Naftali: Do you -- did he -- did you think, from your experience, from your observation, do you think he feared going to jail? Did he think he might be going to jail before the pardon?

Bull: I don't have any independent recollection that he had that fear. I've subsequently read that, so I can't be honestly responsive to that question.

Naftali: Now, you didn't listen to the tapes.

Bull: Correct.

Naftali: But you started -- but by the end of the administration, you saw some transcripts, and of course heard about the June 23rd -- what effect, if any, did that information have on you? In a --

Bull: I believe -- well, I continued to be loyal to him and believe him, and I have alternative explanations for things he did and didn't do. Part of it is that --

and this is going to be the long way around this question here -- people only knew the President as he was projected by his staff. He was the steady, 'the President', the institutional man, and he was never really permitted to show that he was a real human being. This was partly in response to the LBJ Presidency, where there were some on our staff who thought that it had somewhat demeaned the image of the Presidency, so they wanted this -- wanted President Nixon to be perhaps more professional, not like President Johnson, lifting up his shirt to show his scar from his phlebitis -- I mean from the --

Naftali: Gall bladder.

Bull: Diverticulitis or gall bladder operation, that type of thing. As a result, people didn't know Nixon the man. As I've said, I'm not a student of the Presidency. I was an observer of the man whose job it was to be President, and he was an individual who had the full spectrum of emotions. By concealing them to the American people, we did him a disservice, I believe. I mean, we didn't have to go to extremes, but we did a disservice. And therefore when the President committed what I think was a very normal human act, which was, when hearing that his buddy, his old friend John Mitchell may have been responsible for some illegal act, the President's -- Mr. Nixon's I'm being very deliberate in calling him Mr. Nixon --

Naftali: You were saying that -- you were saying his reaction to news of the -in was normal.

Bull: So that when he committed the very normal reaction to the report that his old friend had committed -- or had overseen an action that might be illegal, and therefore might ultimately hurt him politically, rather than looking at it in a selfish manner, which is call the sheriff, you know, have him locked up, his response was, "How do I help my friend?" People couldn't understand that. They would not anticipate that coming from Richard Nixon, because he was always kind of the one-dimensional plastic President. Plastic is a term that had been used disparagingly early in the administration. But he was a guy -- I remember saying to him -- I didn't have conversations like this very often, but I remember during -- after resignation, saying words to the -- I said, "You know, Mr. President, we ill-served you." I said, "If just once Ziegler in response to, you know, how did the President respond to the unanimous override of his veto," if he just once said -- you know, "he got so angry he threw, you know, an ashtray at me." People would have understood, but our response was always, "Well, he was very moderate in his response, and he decided he would, you know, study the budget and we would go on from here," or you know, some ridiculous thing like that. We never let him be a multidimensional human being. He was always, 'the President.'

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- Naftali: Well tell us a little bit about -- why don't we correct the record?
- Bull: Okay, I start by saying I was not a confidante of his. In his mind, even when I was 40 years old -- I was more than that when he died, I was still 26. So, understand that -- that's how I was always viewed. I found him to be a very, very serious person, very bright, in some ways insecure. I understand from his background, he was a guy who grew up in a -- one heck of a dysfunctional family with an alcoholic father who had a series of jobs over the course of a career. whose brother died of the lung disease --
- Naftali: Tuberculosis?
- Bull: Tuberculosis, thank you -- who had to scratch his way through law school, even living in a tool shed for a lack of funds at one time. And not having the right pedigree, so even though he graduated at a respectable level from his law school, he wasn't getting the generous offers from the northeastern law schools, it went to those with the pedigrees he didn't have. So he was a guy who -- a man who, I think, carried certain resentments against the privileged. He was a person who, I think, was dedicated to doing the right thing. I think he was certainly -- had the right intention for the country. Agree or disagree with how he did it -- agree or disagree with how he wound down the Vietnam War, but I think he wanted that war out of the way, he wanted to do it in a way that America's prestige could at least be retained, if not restored, how it could bring the prisoners of war home, and whether it was right or not, argue that substantively all you want, but I think that's what he wanted for the country. I was always amazed at his ability -- the ease with which he dealt with other foreign leaders, how he'd meet some prime minister, and Harold Macmillan, and it was Harold. You know, I guess maybe that's how heads of state -- heads of government address one another. But he seemed to know everyone, and he had the background on people. He had a depth of knowledge and historical perspective that may have been unmatched in this century -- very bright, very capable guy.
- Naftali: And you witnessed this?
- Bull: Yes, I'm very privileged to witness it. Again, I didn't sit down and have discussions with him on that, but as --
- Naftali: Were you allowed to?
- Bull: The more, as the years passed, and I realized what he was up against and what he was doing, it was ultimately accomplished, the greater respect I have for him.
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- Naftali: Did he let you -- did you get to sit in on any of these meetings with foreign leaders?
- Bull: No, but I saw pretty much all of them as they came through on I mean, you know they -- I was kind of the doorkeeper.
- Naftali: Now, but you -- did you -- the day that Elvis came through, were you the doorkeeper?
- Bull: Yeah.
- Naftali: Well, what do you remember of that visit?
- Bull: A rather flamboyant looking guy who showed up at the gate early in the morning, at, I don't know, five or six o'clock, and we heard that he -- that Elvis was at the gate and wanted to see the President. So Bud Krogh -- and I guess he had some sort of drug message, so a guy in the domestic council staff, Bud Krogh, whose portfolio included drugs, had the honors of dealing with Elvis, so he brought Elvis in, and Elvis was dressed -- well, you've seen the photographs. That's --
- Naftali: Do you remember seeing Elvis that morning?
- Bull: Oh sure, yeah. I had the fun job -- I met everybody who came and went to the President in the Oval Office.
- Naftali: You mean in the front -- in the -- where was your office?
- Bull: Right next to his, contiguous to his. It was between the Oval Office and the cabinet room.
- Naftali: So you --
- Bull: So I'd go into the office maybe 15, 20 times a day. And I had to get everybody in and out of the office.
- Naftali: So you'd be the one -- you'd open the door.
- Bull: Yeah.
- Naftali: And say, "Mr. President, this is..."
- Bull: Right, I don't remember having to introduce Elvis Presley.
- Naftali: No, I bet you -- well -- did you take -- were you the one who took the gun away from him, or was that the Secret Service?
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- Bull: No, I think that was Secret Service. Of course none of us recognized that the guy was probably higher than a kite when he showed up at the gate. I subsequently learned that he may have had some --
- Naftali: Were -- when they --
- Bull: -- forbidden substances.
- Naftali: When the secret service -- when he arrived at the gate, were you actually told that he was there?
- Bull: Probably, yeah. I don't remember whether I learned from Krogh or from the gate.
- Naftali: You were going to say something about the relationship between the President and the first lady. You witnessed some of that.
- Bull: Well, I -- earlier, we talked about a British author who'd made some reckless allegations that the President had been abusive of Mrs. Nixon, and I'm not, you know, a professional Nixon apologist who comes out and makes a statement every time somebody made an outrageous allegation about the President, even now, but that was outrageous. What I observed of the President and Mrs. Nixon is that they were in a very harmonious relationship. I -- as opposed to accounts you hear of other Presidential couples in recent years, I never had any evidence whatsoever, and I probably had the run -- more of a run of the place than anybody else, I never heard any discord, nor did I witness anything during the entire time that I was around the President and Mrs. Nixon, ever. In order to ever witness even the sniping that I do at my own wife, it just -- anything in that area I think is without foundation.
- Naftali: Are there any stories that you'd like to put on the record that we haven't gotten to -- some -- I mean, that story about Air Force One was remarkable, and I haven't seen that anywhere. Are there any other stories, recollections that you'd like to just preserve for the Archives?
- Bull: It adds very little to history, but one of my favorite moments during the entire time at the White House involved this POW dinner. When the POWs were released in January or February of 1973, they came to Clark Air Force Base. And I can't remember who the senior officer was, who first stepped out of the plane and stepped up to the microphone and said, "God bless America." And the President was on some sort of a telephone connection to the POWs saying "Welcome home, and I want to have you all at the White House. We'll have a big welcome home dinner." Now cut back to the period of two or three or four years earlier, when it -- the song
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"God Bless America" became sort of a signature song during the Nixon White House and at Nixon appearances. It was written by Irving Berlin, who came to this country as an immigrant in, I think, late 1890s, perhaps early 1900s. And I was always taken by Irving Berlin, just his -- the list of compositions goes on and on, but for someone of a Jewish heritage to also be responsible for songs that we associate more with Christian holidays -- "White Christmas," "Easter Parade," and there are a couple of others, and of course, his first really big one was -- I think it's "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," something like that, or "Alexander's Ragtime Band" was that his, I think? Nevertheless, we used to have these functions at the White House that we'd call "An Evening at the White House." And it was really a state dinner with only the entertainment. You'd have just -- we had Ray Coniff one night, you know, and you'd just have a party, a presentation by entertainment, and then there would be dancing afterwards. Well, I proposed that we do one in honor of Irving Berlin, and we'd have an evening of his music, and it would culminate in the presentation of the Medal of Freedom to Irving Berlin. So this was back, I think in about 1972 at some point, and I wrote this thing up.

And I remember presenting it to Haldeman, and Haldeman coming out of the Oval Office, and said, "You've got a sale, go ahead and try to set this thing up." So I somehow got ahold of Irving Berlin through the White House operators. The White House operators could get ahold of Satan if they needed to, they could get a hold of anybody. And so they got Irving Berlin on the phone. I said, "Mr. Berlin," you know, and I told him what we were going to do. I thought he was being extremely modest and humble. He said, "Oh no Mr. Bull, I don't want to do this. I don't want an evening at the White House, you know, I don't want a Medal of Freedom, but thank you," and we terminated the conversation. And I'm thinking, you know, what a nice guy. He's up in his 80s at this time. So I somehow find a friend of his who's sort of his representative in Washington, and I talked to this person, said, "Hey, you know, I need some help with, you know, Mr. Berlin. He doesn't want to do this." He said, "Oh, it sounds like a wonderful idea, let me talk to him." So a day or two later I get a call -- get a call from this man, a tearful Irving Berlin on the phone, saying, "Mr. Bull, I told you I don't want anything to do with this, why do you continue harassing me with this? This is not fair, I'm a sick old man," you know, "leave me alone, you're destroying my life."

So I feel about two feet high, so I hang up, and I guess I would have reported that this thing is not going to work, so we're not going to do it. So a couple of years passed -- pass, and we're putting together this dinner, and this is going to be a wonderful, wonderful event on the South Lawn. Someone came up with a tent that's half the size of a circus tent. They have waiters from all over town volunteering to serve at this dinner for the returning POWs. And they have everything all set up the night before,

what a beautiful night it is. It's mid-April, and it's warm. They have this tent with a stage on it, Bob Hope is going to come be the entertainer, you have some of these other entertainers that were there at USO shows in Vietnam. Well, the day before, I get this call from Irving Berlin, and he said, "Mr. Bull, I want to come and sing my song to my boys." I said, "Of course." So we added him to the program. Well unfortunately the next day it starts raining, and you've been in Washington long enough, you know how we can get those monsoons in late spring. And it rained and it rained to the point where we were almost -- we were considering maybe we've got to pull the plug on this program. The water was starting to get deep around the periphery, and inside the tent. But we go ahead with it, with the program, and the rain is coming down, the POWs all come in -- it must have been a dinner of 7, 800 people, because they all had their guests with them.

And we start into the program and we go through these various parts, and then finally come to the point where Irving Berlin comes out on the stage, and the rain is coming down, just pouring. And without any accompaniment -- a capella, he sings the first verse of "God Bless America," and he stops, and he starts again, and the Marine orchestra that's there joins him in accompaniment, and he gets through the second time, and he starts again the third time, everybody in the room -- in the tent, 800 people with the rain coming down, and the tears streaming down their eyes, were singing and holding hands, "God Bless America." That verse ends, he walked off the stage, and that was his last public appearance, I believe. It was a remarkable evening.

Naftali: Thank you for sharing your recollections with us.

Bull: Okay, thank you.

Naftali: It's been a pleasure. Thank you.