

**General John D. Lavelle, USAF  
1916 – 1979**

**Transcript of audio-taped conversation of  
April 6, 1972 of  
President Richard M. Nixon,  
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, &  
Lieutenant General John W. Vogt**

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WHT Reference Cassette # C-1965 RC-2  
WHT 329 Part 1 of 9  
329-1 to 329-13 (bgn)  
CD 1 of 1  
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6 April 1972, Tuesday  
White House  
Location: Oval Office

President Richard M. Nixon  
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger  
Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt

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329-1 through 329-9

329-13

RN Yea, let me tell you, tell me when you'll go out there.

JV I expect this weekend.

RN This weekend. And you'll go out for what, for what purpose now, will you be in charge of the air?

15:58

JV I'll take over the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force and I'll be a Gen. Abrams air deputy.

16:02

RN Fine. Now the thing that I want to tell you this, that a, I want you to clearly understand that the performance of the air out there has not been in my view, adequate.

The reason it has not been adequate is not because of the [very brave] people I know that a great number of those guys are POWs. . .

16:26

RN The reason it's not been adequate is its been routine and by the numbers, with no imagination and so forth. Now this is probably the last time the Air Force is going to have a combat role. It will very well be. The stories they write. If the Air Force at this point doesn't do an adequate job at this time, and screws it up, as it has been screwed up from me before, because of a lack of imagination, lack of a willingness to take risks. It isn't [going to be a paradigm stage] in history of a very fine outfit. About many fine men. The thing I really want from you is to kick everybody's ass out there and say now look here we're not looking for safe harbors. We're not looking for you know a coast along. You know a drop the bomb in this secondary target out in the boon docks in the mountains of [] or something like that. But, we've got to go in there and win this operation. It cannot be won without getting []. It's got to be done. Now in that connection, let's see some, use some imagination. For example, the weather's been bad for the last week. I cannot understand why [] have a massive strike . . . [] B-3 area. That would give them, that would give them a hell of a jolt. The point I'm getting to is this.

18:00

That is, that the a, that the a whole operation out there for a variety of reasons, but I can't understand why, realizing the huge [undertaking involved] and so forth and so on. I came back up to military aid, Bombay, to Cambodia, Laos, [] now the main point is that we back we do something now but isn't going to be any, there aren't going to be any. There will be plenty of medals but there'll be no damn glory. Medals are not what we're in this for. We have got to get the Air Force, I want you to get the navy into this thing, I want you to get the Naval Air, all of that, and don't listen to those old bastards out there, or the young bastards that just want to do it by the numbers. Let's get some

imagination.

19:01

RN Some drive. The day after you get there, the day after you get there I gonna watch it every morning and every night, and if we see that same routine stuff coming in I give you a brand new job. Now we've really got to do this now this thing is a Oh. I heard all the arguments []. I've talked to Moorer. Moorer will admit that things that we haven't done everything perfect. Including the mess (on the mountains). And a that is what the job is about, commander is, but its not your job, you're goin' out there on a rescue operation [].

19:42

RN But if you go out there I want you to know, I want you to know that you'll be backed to the hilt, and you'll have to take some casualties. I know that. Some guys are going to have to take some runs at things or maybe they already suppressed the SAMs.

30:22

RN The main thing is that, you're [goal], you're [goal], not just, let me say, not just for. . . but for the whole thing out there. Just, and you can take it straight from the horse's mouth and you can []

JV Sir, I. . .

30:42

RN I feel very strongly about this.

JV I get the message loud and clear. I will clear, get across to them that reorganization []. It would be very useful to me to expedite that. A plan is made to a eliminate one of the Army four stars, and make the Air Force, instead the Air Force Commander [] instead of just his air dep.

RN Right.

JV This would be extremely helpful if we could do that.

RN [Undecipherable]

JV [Undecipherable]

RN The point is, the reason it should be worked out is that not just the personnel, the reason it should be worked out is the only thing the whole goddamn thing is about now is air. Right Henry?

HK Oh yea. This is sophomoric.

JV This has all been reviewed by the Chiefs.

31:29

RN However with this change being made, now is the time to do it. And. . .

38:58

HH He's smart enough that I'm sure he registers all that. He can go out and use what he got this morning.

HH I'm saying that'd be a hell of a thing for him. For a three star to go out and be a, go out [] and be in charge and be a commander-in-chief. []

39:20

HH You got a guy volunteering for the assignment because he know's its fucked up out there. He knows it's fucked up out there. That's why he volunteered.

RN He volunteered?

39:22

HH Yea. He came to Henry and said, "I'll give up my, my fourth star, he's so smooth [], I'll give up my fourth star if you'll let me go out to Vietnam and [get the military back]." He saw what they were doing wrong. []. . . instead of worrying about his own fat ass in the Pentagon; it's his interest in trying to get out and win the goddamn war. And then you put it the way you did. He knows he's got backing. He knows, you told him pretty clearly he's

not to listen to his commanders.

40:00

RN . . . has to pull this off, it's the Air Force. . . .  
[Undecipherable] I'm not going to fart around with all  
this anymore. Abrams is through, I'm not going to put  
Abrams up in that thing. Fuckin' Laird is going to get  
his way if he wants.

40:20

HH If he pulls this off, it ought to move him in as Chairman  
of the Joint Chiefs.

RN Yes, sir. That's. . .

HH He's also got the [] to do it.

RN Also, he's got [] Joint Chiefs. Because I'm not  
satisfied with how the Joint Chiefs have done. Well  
comparing, for example, as much as I don't want to,  
Cushman, about, Cushman was a fine, loyal officer, but he  
has as much imagination as a goddamn [coke-a-cola].

41:30

RN [Undecipherable] don't want to see him run out of the  
service. I mean [that piece of pipe thing].

41:41

HH It was a stupid thing to do, but that's too bad.

RN He was making a point. [] I appreciated his point.