

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

RECORDINGS AND TRANSCRIPTS OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS

SITUATION ROOM SERIES

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The Situation Room Series consists of recordings of telephone conversations originally made on 38 Dictabelts. These recordings apparently were made by the staff of the White House Situation Room at the time of the Dominican Crisis in 1965, when President Johnson sent U.S. military forces to the Dominican Republic following a coup in that country. The staff of the Johnson Library found these Dictabelts among the Office Files of Mildred Stegall, the custodian of President Johnson's telephone recordings and transcripts, in a Dictabelt storage container labeled "TAPES – DOMINICAN CRISIS." They were not filed with those Dictabelts made by the President's personal staff that comprise the White House Series of Recordings of Telephone Conversations, although some of the conversations were transcribed by his staff, probably during preparation of the President's memoirs, *The Vantage Point*.

Most of the conversations recorded by the White House Situation Room staff took place on May 19 and 20, 1965, when National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance were in the Dominican Republic negotiating a settlement of the crisis. Other presidential advisors, including Abe Fortas, Robert McNamara, Bill Moyers and Jack Valenti, remained in Washington, DC, and used telephones in the White House Situation Room or in the Cabinet Room for calls to Bundy and Vance in the Dominican Republic, to the President, and to other advisors, such as Dean Rusk or George Ball, outside the White House. Occasionally, they also called their own offices or homes. In the Situation Room Series, the Library staff has described the person whose call was recorded by the Situation Room staff as the "Situation Room Speaker" and the person to whom they are speaking as "Speaker." The "Place" section describes the location of the Situation Room Speaker at the time the call was recorded, either the Situation Room or the Cabinet Room.

It appears that the method used in making the Situation Room recordings was somewhat different from the method used by the President's staff, and the record-keeping was not as precise. Dictabelt recorders apparently were placed on at least four telephone lines in the White House Situation Room: "426," "2154," "1230 Red" and "1255 White." After conversations were recorded, some of the Dictabelts were labeled, either with slips of paper or directly on the belt, with the belt number, the telephone line, the date and time range (usually in military time), and the names of the conversants, if known. Some belts were not labeled at all. Very seldom is a precise time given for any call. The Library staff has arranged the conversations in approximate chronological order, based on the content of the calls and the available documentation.

Because several people made telephone calls at the same time, occasionally it is possible to hear a conversation made on one telephone line in the background of the recording of a conversation made on another line. We note such a conversation as a "simultaneous recording" in the

“Comments” section of the individual descriptions of the conversations and list the citation number of the conversation heard in the background.

At times, conversations between the President’s advisors in the Situation Room and the President were also recorded on other Dictabelts by the President’s staff. The recordings made by the President’s staff are in the White House Series; those made by the Situation Room staff are in the Situation Room Series. These conversations are described as “concurrent recordings,” and the citation numbers for the concurrent recordings are listed in the “Comments” section of the description of both the White House Series and the Situation Room Series.

Calls to the Dominican Republic took place over non-secure telephone lines. Because they were concerned about their conversations being intercepted, the conversants used code names and cryptic references to conceal the identity of individuals. Abe Fortas, who earlier had used the code name “Davidson,” used the code name “Arnold” at the time the Situation Room recordings were made, and he is referred to as “Arnold” on the slips accompanying these Dictabelts. At other times, the conversants used documents that each side had in their possession to identify sensitive topics or individuals, and a reference set of these documents is available.

The staff of the Johnson Library also found several Dictabelts containing recordings of calls that have no relation to the Dominican Crisis among the Situation Room recordings. They all concern repairs that were made to the equipment in the Situation Room. According to Secret Service Work Project reports, repairs similar to those described in these recordings took place between July 6 and July 9, 1965. Although the recordings probably were made during that period, the Library staff cannot determine their exact date. These recordings have been grouped together on SR6505.07.