

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
Allan Kenney
June 11, 1994

Interview conducted by Richard Robbat
Videotape length 76 minutes

AK: My name is, as you know, Allan Kenney, and you asked for a little bit of my background. I went through the Arlington school system, graduated from Arlington High, went on to Harvard College and when I got out of Harvard College I volunteered for the draft for Korea. Fortunately for me, I didn't go to Korea. I went to Paris, but I am a Korean War veteran.

We moved to Lexington in 1956. We had two daughters. It looked like a nice, upcoming town with a good school system and a good environment to bring up a family. I was elected to the Board of Selectmen in 1967, about ten and a half years after I moved to the town, and I think that that was something that could happen in the town in the sixties—a newcomer like that. It wouldn't have happened in the fifties or the forties, but the town was changing. There were new people coming in and I was one of the people who became involved in local politics and I became a Selectman. If you look up at the makeup of the Board then, of the men involved all four were veterans. The other three gentlemen were veterans of the Second World War, and we had a very charming and talented lady, Mrs. Riffin [Natalie Riffin], and that was the makeup of the Board. Can I continue with this a little?

INT: Yes.

AK: I think that when you look at the issue of what happened on the Green, Memorial Day weekend of 1971, it must be viewed within its historical context at that time. I mean, it's easy now to say the Vietnam War was a huge mistake and we never should have done it, and maybe it was. But in 1971 there is no doubt that the country was divided over the

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war. If you look quickly back on how we got into it, we were the saviors of the world in a very real sense in the Second World War. In Korea, it was a stalemate, and the happenings in Indochina were changing rapidly. The French lost at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. They were no longer an influence in Indochina. We began under Kennedy to support—I think his name was President Diem, head of the South Vietnamese country—and our support escalated from military support and supplies to advisors, to technicians and to troops. When [President Lyndon] Johnson came in, the troops, the escalation, continued up until the point of around 1969 we had over five hundred thousand troops in Vietnam. The country was becoming so divided that that's reason why Johnson stepped aside because they had riots at the Democratic National Convention with the veterans and various other things. When Nixon campaigned he campaigned on the premise or the promise that he would end the war and bring the troops home.

So it's difficult for me to speak for all the Selectmen, but I think generally speaking, at least the veterans, we were not hot for the war; but on the other hand, we felt that as long as American soldiers are fighting and dying over there, that they deserved support. Even today, someone like Jane Fonda, the things that she did,¹ I am completely against. So, when the Vietnam Veterans came in, we sort of looked at them with a jaundiced eye.

INT: You are saying that you looked at them—these men that were coming back from Vietnam—you looked at them with a jaundiced eye?

AK: Yes. I mean, I think we generally supported, wanted to support our troops. We weren't happy with the war, but we sort of felt that the fellows over there are still fighting and dying at this service. I mean, that's a huge generalization, and the situation then developed from there. As I

¹ Hollywood actress Jane Fonda, who opposed American involvement in Vietnam, visited North Vietnam in 1972. A photograph of her taken posed next to a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun, surrounded by North Vietnamese soldiers, and her radio speech from Hanoi brought forth much criticism in the U.S.

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say, I went through the attic and found some old notes and letters and if I... You ask your questions first.

INT: Let me ask you this. Were there other war related issues that came before the Selectmen prior to this one that you had to address?

AK: Offhand, I can't think of...related with the Vietnam War?

INT: Right.

AK: Without doing some research, I can't remember. There might have been. I think there probably were some petitions for leafleting or something like that because there had been some activity with the town.

INT: Were there other protests prior to that time that were held on the Green?

AK: Yes.

INT: Do you recall?

AK: I don't have a good recollection of those issues. I know in looking at the minutes—I went as far as a year afterward—and on Memorial Day there was a group of townspeople that wanted to have a silent protest on the Green and the Selectmen accommodated them for that.

INT: From 1956 when you first moved into Lexington to 1971, what changes did you see in the town?

AK: The biggest thing, of course, was that they were building a lot of houses. A lot of new people were coming in, and the town was heavily engaged in building schools. Taxes were rising. Some of the people who were older felt that the taxes were rising too rapidly, and so I think that the town was rapidly physically developing and adding more people, and adding more diverse people.

INT: In terms of the diversity would you be part of—politically now—part of the newcomers in town that reflected this growing diversity within the town?

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AK: Probably not, because I sort of sided in with the people that were established within the town. I recall when I first thought about running for Selectman—and somebody actually told me this—that there already was one Catholic on the Board and up until that point that's all they wanted. I mean, Bob Cataldo was on the Board. That's the sort of thing that obviously wouldn't even be thought of today, or ten years ago, but it was a thought in the late fifties and the early sixties.

INT: What was your constituency then? Who were your supporters?

AK: I became involved in the Republican—the town is nonpartisan—but I mean going to state conventions, worked for Ed Brooke for the Senate, and things of that nature, and met people. I met some of the newer younger people, and sort of broadened that constituency to the point where I was able to...and I ran hard to get elected, and that was the basis of my support.

INT: Who were your opponents or opponent when you first ran?

AK: The first time I ran there were three people running for two seats, and two of the other fellows represented older Lexington interests, and I was just barely defeated. I did not make it. So I turned around and ran the next year, and at that time I wasn't even a Town Meeting member. I had just begun because I was criticized for not even being in Town Meeting and running for Selectman, and I ran against a fellow—as I recall, he was chairman of the Planning Board—and I won, not fairly substantially. It wasn't a landslide but it was decisive. I forget the vote but it was...

INT: Would you characterize that as “old Lexington” versus “new Lexington?”

AK: No, not the second time. The first time was. The second time this fellow was one of the newer group coming, and very bright.

INT: When was the comment made about being a Catholic, already having one Catholic? Was that the first time you ran?

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AK: Oh, no, that was was even before I ran. I don't think it was applicable necessarily to me, but in the forties and fifties and earlier than that the Yankees were the predominant political force, and they were the conservative Yankees, too, in the town. There's no doubt about it. I think Mrs. Morey was the first woman member of the Board of Selectmen, and Mrs. Riffin probably was the second.

INT: When you were serving on the Board of Selectmen, was there a feeling at all with regard to decisions that had to be made, old versus new? Were there issues that you saw surface?

AK: I think were we fairly conservative; but, again, there were a lot of things going on. The town was adapting itself to the changes and a lot of the changes were physical—new roads, beautification of the Center, and new schools, and so there was not a particular philosophy involved. It's let's get the job done.

INT: How would you characterize the Board of Selectmen in 1971?

AK: We had, as I say, four men and one lady, and the lady is a woman that I greatly admire. I think she was a little more liberal than we were, and the rest of the Board was fairly conservative.

INT: Fairly consistent with decisions, would you say?

AK: Yes. Decisions were fairly consistent. For example, the vote to deny the Green for a camping ground to the veterans was unanimous and was taken on several occasions, and I feel that way today. I think it was an inappropriate thing. I think it is inappropriate now, for a campground, not for a protest, but for a campground. There is a distinction.

INT: Lexington had, during the sixties, moved to a Town Manager style of government. How did that impact in terms of the role of the Selectmen?

AK: The impact was not immediate but what happened, it began to diminish the power of the Selectmen and it took some years for that trend

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to become established. But there is no doubt that the Selectmen of today, in my opinion, don't have the ultimate say that they had in the late sixties, and even in the early seventies when the Town Manager was first coming in. I can show you how that was even physically established. In 1971, when Bob Cataldo was Chairman of the Selectmen, he had a big beautiful office which I later occupied, and the Selectmen had three or four administrative assistants and secretaries. The Town Manager was across the hall in two rooms with one person. Now the situation is reversed, and you can just see that there had been a change.

INT: How were then the decisions usually made? You had an agenda. What was the process that Selectmen went through?

AK: The process was fairly standard. We had an agenda. We had information provided to us via the mail of whatever letters, what was going to come up. I used to like to do my homework. I would be in there because I felt that it helped. The Chairman was there a lot because that's the way it was done then. When I became Chairman it was a twenty-five hour a week deal, every day, and the decisions generally were by consensus. In this instance, on this weekend, we did get down to some votes that went three to two, or where the consensus was not established, but generally speaking you could discuss it and try to do what you felt was in the best interest of the town.

INT: In these days around this issue, in the late sixties, early seventies, what was the role of the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen?

AK: Chairman of the Board was the leader. He was the spokesperson. He was the most influential, and that's the way it had been, and that's the way it continued to be when I became Chairman. We would talk it out, and people weren't unreasonable or anything like that, and if you had a particular reason where you thought your idea was better, they listened. It wasn't autocratic; if you could prove your point, you won it.

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INT: During this time period, the Vietnam era, were there any attempts by townspeople to have the Selectmen indicate displeasure officially with what was going on in Vietnam? We are talking prior now to the Memorial Day weekend.

AK: There well may have been. In fact, I think there was, but I can't pinpoint anything exactly. I think there were, yes, there was a movement in the town of people who were vehemently opposed to the war and they started doing things, but I can't remember any specific instances, but I am sure that we were aware of that.

INT: Do you recall at all at Town Meetings where there was either a motion or a movement to have the Town Meeting, or the town, express support or opposition to what was going on?

AK: Again, I think there was. I don't specifically recall and I can't put it in exactly which time frame, was it before or after this incident.

INT: When was the first—getting to the event now that we want to focus on for a while—when was the first time that you learned about the Vietnam veterans' plans to march in Concord, through Lexington, and on to Bunker Hill?

AK: It would have been when preparing for the upcoming Selectmen's meeting which was the Monday before the Saturday of the arrests. I would say earlier that week I would have had a copy of the letter from the Vietnam veterans. I am sure you people have all that.

INT: I am not sure whether we do or not. Do we have that letter?

INT2: No.

AK: I will be happy to give you that.

INT: Great.

AK: This letter is dated May 20th. It is addressed to the Board of Selectmen, and it is a copy to the Board members and the Town Manager,

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and the Town Counsel, and this became an agenda item. From reading this, essentially, they outlined what they expected to do.

INT: Could you review, recapitulate, what they planned on doing?

AK: Yes. They said, “Dear Sirs and Madame, From May 28th to May 31st, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War in New England will be holding a symbolic march,” and they gave some details on that. “We will begin in Concord.” And they made several requests of the Lexington Board of Selectmen. One of them was to talk to the townspeople and to leaflet, to parade, and then the last two were the ones that we denied. The second to the last was, they wanted to stage what they called a “guerilla theater.” Are you familiar with guerilla theater?

INT: Yes.

AK: And they wanted to do it in the Center, and the Board at that time—we were willing to have them do it on a playground or something, but not in the Center because we felt that that had possibilities of disruption and/or safety problems that we just couldn't allow.

INT: Did you understand what was meant by guerilla theater? What were they going to do?

AK: What they were going to do was, it would be staged with certain veterans acting as American soldiers and others acting as Vietnamese, Vietcong or Vietnamese, and they would sort of jump out at them, and put their hands behind their back and tie them up and handcuff them, and they would do this while someone might be walking out of a store or something, and they could be startled and say, “What is this?” That was their guerilla theater. The intent of it, he told us, was to shock people. The intent was to shock. The other request they made was for the purpose of an overnight camping area on Saturday, either on the Lexington Battle Green or Tower Park. They made the request of Tower Park. They would have taken Tower Park at that point. Subject to conditions set up by the Police Chief,

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the Board did vote to allow the parade and the leafleting, and the discussion with the citizens, but they were denied the use of the Green.

INT: What was your initial reaction to the letter?

AK: When I first saw it?

INT: Yes.

AK: Probably somewhat the same reaction—if I were to put myself back there—that I would have today. I would have voted the same way as I voted then. In retrospect, now that it is all out, I would have given some serious consideration to allowing them to bivouac on Tower Park. Then there wouldn't have been this huge incident because at that point I think they would have had to take it because they were asking for it.

INT: So the initial letter said, either the Green or Tower Park.

AK: Yes.

INT: What happened then—what led to the Green or nothing? What happened to the Tower Park offer, I guess which actually led to the confrontation?

AK: Very good question. Okay. At the time when this fellow named Gross, Marvin Gross, I think it was, he came before the Board on that Monday. He indicated that these were the requests they were making and he also stated that they would accept the decision of the Board. So, as of then, we did not expect a confrontation. The Board voted to deny them bivouacking on either area. But the Board did not offer an alternative, and the rationale for some of the people was, they didn't ask for an alternative so we are not giving them one. Although, as I recall, on the guerilla warfare, or the guerilla theater, there was discussion—could you do it in one of the parks—and they said, no, because there is nobody there to shock, and it doesn't work.

INT: So the first vote indicated that you did not even consider the alternative. There was to be no bivouacking in the town whatsoever.

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AK: That's right. There was to be no bivouacking on either of those two spots. If they wanted to find a private place, then obviously they could camp. If they turned around and said, "Well, is there any public place?" we would have examined that, but they didn't, and it wasn't until midweek that we began hearing so-called "through the grapevine," or through the Boston papers, that they were going to stay. They were planning to stay, spend the night on the Green anyway, and so the possibility of a confrontation was beginning to form.

INT: What was the rationale of the Board for denying bivouac privileges on May 21st?

AK: For denying bivouac privileges on the Green?

INT: Well, there were two.

AK: Two spots.

INT: Two spots. Why was it denied?

AK: The Green was obviously because it's inappropriate according to the rules and regulations of the Selectmen for the use of the Green, and those regulations are pretty much the same today because I just got a copy and checked it.² The rationale—it's in the Selectmen's minutes—but as I recall, the feeling with Tower Park was that it was too close to the neighbors and it might have sanitary problems, and things of that nature. Remember, we were not expecting a confrontation, and I'll comment on that when I get asked the questions.

INT: So what happens next? You talk about the grapevine. It looked at though now, from reading the Boston newspapers and this grapevine, that there was something growing here.

² The bylaw, Section 25, reads: "No person shall engage or take part in any game, sport, picnic or performance on the Battle Green without the written permission of the Selectmen or other board having charge and control thereof, and no person shall climb upon, deface, mutilate or otherwise injure any tree, shrubbery, monument, boulder, fence, seat or structure thereon, or behave or conduct himself on the Battle Green otherwise than in a quiet and orderly manner in keeping with a respectful regard and reverence for the memory of the patriotic service and sacrifice there so nobly rendered." This town bylaw was in effect in

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AK: Well, we...

INT: Could you first identify the grapevine, your grapevine anyway, and then go on to what...

AK: Calls to the Town Manager and to the Selectmen's office from Boston newspapers and calls to some of us at home from people who said they were told these things. The Board held a special meeting on Thursday at the request of Mrs. Riffin and myself. We again unanimously voted to deny them the use of the Green. But then I—after some discussion—I made a motion that we instruct the Town Manager to meet with these people, and to offer them an alternative site, and the manager had already started looking into alternative sites. At that point [it] was the only time that the word “confrontation” actually—and it is in the minutes of the meeting—because we began to say, look, this thing could get out of hand. And again the Chairman made a comment there—or either he or I, I forget— about [how] they had told us that they would abide by the decision of the Board, and now we hear they are not. Lastly, we had trouble getting a hold of them anymore. This organization was very... It wasn't a case of they had an office somewhere you could call up and speak to their executive secretary or something. At this point we couldn't really find them. That motion failed to carry, three to two.

INT: When it did fail to carry, what was your reaction?

AK: I felt at that point that this thing had a possibility of getting out of hand, and I felt that if we could somehow diffuse the situation, it would be a proper course of action. I was unable to convince the rest of the Board to do that.

INT: In your mind, who was the other Selectman, first of all, who did vote with you?

AK: Mrs. Riffin.

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INT: Mrs. Riffin. In your mind, what was the alternative site that you would have offered them?

AK: There was Lincoln Field. There were several areas. The minutes of the meeting show that.

INT: You felt at that time that there was enough preparation so that—and enough information at hand—so an alternative site was a legitimate alternative?

AK: I think so, yes, and the Town Manager had spent some time, and he had three in mind. I remember Lincoln Field was one, and he had two others.

INT: After the motion to look at an alternative site was defeated, what happened?

AK: That was Thursday, and then again I think that the rumors or the situation began to develop where we were told, or where you were told, that they intended to use the Green to bivouac anyway. Four of the Selectmen met on Saturday, and discussed it again—what we felt we could do.

INT: Allan, so we had this meeting on Thursday night?

AK: Yes.

INT: The motion was—an alternative site was denied.

AK: Yes.

INT: You met on Saturday. Between Monday and Saturday morning, had there been any direct contact with representatives from the Veterans?

AK: As far as I know, no; although the Chairman and the Town Manager at the meeting on Thursday indicated that they had been attempting to contact these people, and to find out just what are your intentions officially, and they were not successful in doing that.

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INT: When you voted on Monday to deny the use of the Green and Tower Park, was there a representative from the Veterans there? Was Gross there?

AK: He was there. He presented their request. He was asked a series of questions, and from glancing back at the minutes it's obvious he was there for over a half hour or so. It was later in the meeting when—I am not sure if he was there when the actual vote was taken, or whether he had retired. I would have to check that item, but he was there, and presented—he answered questions and that's when we had the feeling that he would accept the decision of the Board.

INT: We are at Saturday morning now. Apparently there has been no contact officially, or even unofficially, I guess, with the leaders of the veterans from Monday through Saturday morning. So what happened at the Selectmen's meeting Saturday morning?

AK: I think by the time Saturday came the veterans had begun their activity in Concord, and I think there had been some contact then with some people up there either by the Police Chief or the Manager and we were told that their intention now was to stay on the Green.

INT: Sometime Friday evening while the Veterans were in Concord either the Town Manager or the Chief of Police...

AK: Someone, right.

INT: Do you know who specifically made contact?

AK: No, but by Saturday we were under the impression that they were going to bivouac on the Green regardless of what we did at that point.

INT: What happened Saturday morning at your meeting?

AK: Again a great deal of discussion on this.

INT: Just so that we have a frame of reference with regard to laws regarding meetings—it's the first time I have really asked this question—were meetings at this time open to the public? Were they

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supposed to be announced in advance? Was the Public Meeting Law in effect at this particular time, do you know?

AK: I am not sure the Public Meeting Law as we know it today was, but there were regulations that we had, but they were posted meetings. Usually our meetings were posted and public, and there would be a stenographer or someone there to take minutes. These meetings were gatherings in response to what we felt was a threat, and on Saturday, later in the day, there was just Mr. Cataldo and myself. The town offices were under construction so the Selectmen's office was in a trailer, actually, next to Cary Hall and there was that afternoon a group of townspeople [who] came and started banging on the door. They were saying, "What is going to happen?" Several police officers came along, and so we let some of them in, and we talked with them, and they—the people that were coming over then—were very upset that something might happen on the Green. It was in that afternoon that we applied to Justice McLaughlin for an injunction ordering them to obey the law and vacate the Green. That's essentially what it was. I am not an attorney.

INT: Who was present? Was there a formal vote taken by the Selectmen to apply for an injunction?

AK: No, at that point, it was Mr. Cataldo and myself, and we had to have an attorney, and it's interesting here. The Town Counsel was not available. He may have been away or out of town or something, and we picked up the phone book and called some attorneys we knew, and the first several didn't want any part of it. We ultimately got an attorney. I am not going to give you his name, but [one] who came down and made our case so that it was in an orderly fashion to be presented and it was taken to Justice McLaughlin, and he signed it.

INT: While you and Mr. Cataldo were meeting, were there any police officials present?

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AK: Sporadically, that would have been the Chief in and out, or something like that. As a matter of fact, the Town Manager was available there. Mr. Cataldo, [Police] Chief Corr, and myself did go to Concord Court and we met with Judge Forte, and in the event that there would be arrests, he wanted ...our intention was to talk to him, and we did talk to him.

INT: The citizens that came to the trailer did request to meet with the Selectmen at that time. Did they represent any...?

AK: I think the ones that as I recall came to the trailer there were very much pro the Vietnam veterans and they didn't want...they were apprehensive that something might develop up there, and they felt that it should not.

INT: Was part of their message to have you change your vote to allow them to camp at all?

AK: Oh, I...probably.

INT: But the primary issue, you are saying, was a safety issue.

AK: It probably was both. No, it probably was their primary intent to tell us to back off. This is the way I think it happened, you see.

INT: So you and Mr. Cataldo and the Chief of Police, or Town Manager went to Judge Forte?

AK: Yes. The Chief of Police was there. I am not sure if the Town Manager was there or not.

INT: After the legalities were finished, what happened? You left the Concord District Court. Where did you go from there?

AK: As I recall there was a gathering in Cary Hall. We invited some of the clergy and some of the townspeople who had been calling us, and we had a discussion and then we went over to the Saint Brigid's rectory, and by now the Vietnam veterans, the group of them, were in town and they were on the Green, and so we asked for their spokespeople to come to that

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meeting in the Saint Brigid's rectory. There were clergy, Selectmen, and four or five or three or four of the Vietnam Veterans, including Mr. Kerry [now U. S. Senator John Kerry].

INT: During this entire time period, and let's say during the late sixties, early seventies, what was the role of the clergy and the churches in Lexington as you saw it?

AK: Tough one. Their role was probably the same as it is today, to conduct religious programs, but there were some members of the clergy back then who were actively against the war in Vietnam and some of this group were the ones giving us some pressure to be careful about what is going to happen on the Green.

INT: What was your reaction to the clergy becoming so active in these kinds of issues, personal reaction?

AK: Personally? I didn't like it, and I am not talking about other clergy. I was talking about my parish priest because I know after the—as an aside, after this thing was over, a few weeks later, one of them gave a little dissertation at Mass about the intransigence of the Board of Selectmen, and, boy, I went after him after. I didn't go after him, but I went out and spoke to him afterwards and told him that I thought that he had reduced it to a one-sided simplistic situation, and that I didn't like it. I said, “Right now we are trying to pull the town together,” and I thought that his talk was unnecessary, and it wasn't the Monsignor. He was not the one. It was one of the younger ones; since then I have become quite friendly with this particular priest. He married one of my daughters, but I didn't like it. I didn't go to church that day to hear that.

INT: When you say that, was Father Casey the Monsignor?

AK: Yes.

INT: What was his role during all of this that you saw?

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AK: He was a big apprehensive and dismayed. He is a very learned man, a wonderful man, but obviously things were happening that were spinning a little bit out of control here, and the polarization after what happened in the town was the sort of thing that he—a man of his instinct and intelligence—he didn't like it.

INT: What clergy were present at the meeting at Saint Brigid's, if you can recall that?

AK: Monsignor Casey was there. It was his property. I think Father Crowley from the...and there were several others. I can't remember.

INT: What went on at the meeting?

AK: There was a discussion of the overall situation and where it stood. Mr. Cataldo did most of the talking. He was the—at least for the Selectmen—he was the leader. I said that Mr. Kerry was there, and toward the end I asked him if there was something—anything—we could do to diffuse the situation. He pointed his finger at me and he said, “You guys got yourself into this, get yourselves out,” and I'll never forget that. The point is, we didn't get ourselves into this. It was thrust upon us.

INT: What was your reaction after he pointed...

AK: I was very upset.

INT: Did you verbalize that?

AK: I...well, yes . I'm a nice guy. I don't swear or anything else, but I corrected him. I said, “We didn't bring this upon ourselves. You people thrust this thing at us.” It's interesting to note also that no lawyers were arrested on the Green because they are officers of the court and they all got off. There were six or seven of them on there, and I am glad they were there because they helped maintain... As another aside, before I forget, we knew that the Chief of Police had a few people around the Green or on the Green so that we would know what was going on. There was some

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drinking and there was some pot smoking, and this added to our apprehension of supposing this thing gets out of hand.

INT: So we had clergy at this meeting, the Saturday evening meeting, right?

AK: Yes.

INT: We had you and Mr. Cataldo. Anyone else from the Board of Selectmen?

AK: Mr. Bailey and Mr. Busa.

INT: So there were four of you there.

AK: Yes. Mrs. Riffin was out of town.

INT: Representatives from the Police Department were at this meeting?

AK: I don't think so, but I don't recall it specifically, but I don't think so.

INT: Was the Town Manager present?

AK: He was around all evening, so I would say probably yes, because we would have needed him for certain support. The result of the meeting, by the way, was that the Chairman went over to the Green around eleven o'clock at night and offered them—what he said was, “If you pack up here, we will go to Lincoln Street, and we will...you can use that to have your bivouac.” But that raised a huge, roaring vote, “No!” So the alternative site was finally offered, but it was too late.

INT: How was the decision made to offer the alternative site?

AK: I think the full majority of the Board, or the four people present, didn't like what was developing, were apprehensive that it might even go much, much further. The Chairman said, “Well, let's see if we can get them to move, and we can end the crisis.” I don't think there was a vote. I think it was a consensus thing. I really think that that's how it happened.

INT: Aside from remarks, were there other representatives from the veterans at the meeting Saturday evening besides Kerry?

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AK: Oh, yes, three or four.

INT: What was their argument to you at that time, or their points that they were trying to bring up to you?

AK: It was very obvious what had happened. What had happened is these people were looking actually for publicity. This was a political movement and they wanted it to go nationwide. The political movement was to end the war in Vietnam. They saw the confrontation, I'm sure, by now as a beautiful, wonderful means to get publicity. And that was it. See, we had been suckered in a bit, I think. There's no doubt what they wanted was publicity, and they had national TV here, and this was going...they had townspeople, and they had clergy who were going to be arrested if it went that far, and it would be national news. That is what they wanted. It was a political movement.

INT: At this meeting then, you had the four Selectmen. You had the clergy, and you had the veterans. What role were the clergy playing here?

AK: I don't recall the role of the clergy as being of great significance. I think several of them made some comments. The principle discussion was between the Selectmen and a spokesperson or persons for the veterans.

INT: Prior to Mr. Cataldo going to the Green to offer the alternative site, had that offer been made directly to the veterans at the meeting?

AK: I would have to say probably yes. He probably said, "This is what I am..." I mean, they might have said, "Well, we will have to see what our associates think of it." So I am sure that it was discussed and he went to the Green. We all went to the Green, and Mr. Cataldo did make the offer, and it was soundly turned down.

INT: Were the veterans, when you were meeting with them at Saint Brigid's, confrontational? What was their attitude? What was their mood?

AK: I indicated to you, confrontational, yes. They weren't going to have a fight in the dining room, but I mean when Mr. Kerry's point... See,

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they could rationalize “You guys got yourselves into this, get yourselves out of it,” but we couldn't without their assistance. They didn't say they wanted the publicity, but I knew. It was obvious. This was a political move and, boy, they hit the newspapers and that's why they were doing this. A confrontation at that point, at that time, was what they wanted. I am not saying they wanted anyone to get hurt. As it turned out they were very well disciplined, and so they wanted to do it correctly. But they wanted the confrontation in terms of being arrested and getting the resulting publicity. They wanted it.

INT: Do you think that was their motive all along?

AK: In retrospect? Yes. I think that when they originally came and sent the letter, if we had said that night, “You can't have the Green because it is inappropriate, but you can have Tower Park,”—and they had asked for that—that would have satisfied them, and they would have picked up whatever publicity they could going through the town. But I think by mid-week when all of a sudden they say, “These five Selectmen say you can't use the Lexington—historic Lexington Green—then, hey, who are these guys?” Then I think that the thought of a confrontation...and they controlled it very well. They did have attorneys and stuff. So it wasn't a riot, but we didn't know that at the time. At that time I think they wanted the confrontation because it would bring a great deal of publicity.

INT: Prior to your late meeting Saturday evening at Saint Brigid's, there was this open Town Meeting.

AK: Informal gathering, yes. As I recall in Cary Hall there was a meeting.

INT: Do you recall anything about that or the dynamics of what happened?

AK: Specifically no, but generally it would be yes, because, you see, we would have decided—look, we will get the clergy and we will get the

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veterans, and we will meet and see if we can resolve this. That attempt came out of that public meeting. We didn't have townspeople in the Saint Brigid's rectory. We had just the three groups.

INT: So your feeling was that that Town Meeting was very helpful because then...?

AK: Yes, I think it was a part of the process that was developing; but in retrospect, of course, it wasn't going to work. But at that time we didn't know that. So we did try, and when Mr. Cataldo made the offer at eleven o'clock at night it was a bona-fide offer that he—look, let's diffuse this thing, move over there, and we will give you whatever assistance we can, and it's over.

INT: The offer was made. The veterans voted it down. What happened next?

AK: We—the four Selectmen—retired to the Chief of Police's office I would say around midnight. I did notice that there was a contingent of police, out-of-town police, assembled in the circular driveway with riot gear. We meet in the Chief's office. The Manager was there. The Chief was not. He was out attending to his preparations. Now we had quite a discussion as to whether or not we should enforce the curfew, enforce the bylaw, or whether we should just say, “Well, the curfew has been suspended, and we will allow you to stay there.” I was of the feeling at that point, particularly for safety reasons, and secondarily for the fact that there were townspeople on the Green, that we should not make arrests. I was the second senior Selectman after Mr. Cataldo—I was in my second term—and I talked to Bob Cataldo at length, and I went back into his career and what he had done for the town—and he did a lot—and reiterated specifics; the building of the town offices, the beautification of the Center, things of this nature, and I said to him, “There's a possibility here that if arrests are made, that that's the thing that people might remember and not all the good work

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you have done.” I pointed out that there could be some pretty dire consequences. I found this, and this was dated 1:00AM Sunday; I had scribbled this out, and I presented it. What I—and it's grammatically poor—but I said I was presenting this as a thought for the Selectmen and something for the Chairman. He could go to the Green and say this, and see if it would—it would end the curfew, and so I wrote out:

“We consider that the Vietnam Veterans Against the War are occupying the Lexington Green without a permit and in violation of the law. However, in consideration of the safety of the many Lexington citizens assembled here, and in consideration of the safety of the Veterans themselves, we will authorize no arrests for this trespass. Good night.”

I suggested we just sort of back off. We discussed this, and Mr. Chairman—Mr. Cataldo—is a man of great conviction and he is a man of courage, and also he was brought up in the town and he felt that there should be some arrests, and it was he... It was a tougher decision for him to make than for me to say, “Let's back off a bit.” There were four Selectmen there, and so the existing vote to deny them use of the Green remained in effect. After about two o'clock, the discussion was over.

We called in the Police Chief. We asked him a few specifics about how he was going to handle this and he invited [us] to go out and listen to his charge to the Lexington Police officers, just about all of whom were on duty. He told them that there [would be] no nightsticks. The only officers to be allowed on the Green were Lexington Police officers. The others would be across the street—the out-of-town officers—and I was so impressed. He said, “If anyone...” he said, “By the way, you don't tap them on the shoulder and say, ‘You are under arrest.’ You don't touch them.” And he said, “If anyone becomes physical or resists, you back off. You back off. There will be no physical arrests made on the Green.” And they were able to do it. Actually what happened, the buses came up and the

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veterans lined up to get arrested, but we were all pretty nervous about the possibility of what could have happened. Luckily, they were well disciplined themselves, and the townspeople went along. They must have had good instruction on exactly how they were going to do this. Have you heard about the wounded veterans that were on the Green and how that was handled?

INT: Talk about it.

AK: There were fifteen or twenty Veterans in wheelchairs, and the Chief told me this afterwards. He told me that they were saying, “When are we going to get arrested?” and they said, “Well, we have to have a special bus for you. It will come, and we want you all to be over in a certain space. You can gather there.” So the arrests went on and then dawn came, and most of the people had been arrested and here were the fifteen or twenty in the wheelchairs. All of a sudden he blew his whistle, and every policeman departed. And they said, “Wait, you haven't arrested us,” and he said, “No way am I going to arrest a veteran in a wheelchair.” So he was pretty sharp.

INT: That prompts me to raise some other very deep questions here. You indicated that you felt that for Mr. Cataldo it was a tougher decision for him to go ahead with the arrests than it was for you to make this statement and to perhaps have the town back off. Why would you characterize it as a tougher decision for him?

AK: Because he then bore a responsibility, and this was a collective responsibility, by the way. I am not blaming anybody, but for him—and also he realized that this might hurt him personally in his political career—but he is, again I say, a man of conviction, and he felt that the bylaws had been violated and that he had an obligation on behalf of the town to stand fast and then enforce them, and that's what he did.

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INT: With regard to preparations for the arrests, when, to the best of your knowledge, did those begin? Apparently from your recollection here, everything was very well organized. Where were the out-of-town policemen called, for example? When was the notification, “Have buses ready,” made? Who was making these decisions with regard to transporting the people to the DPW garage? Who was making all these decisions? Who was involved in making these decisions?

AK: There were three people involved: the Town Manager, the Director of Public Works, Mr. McSweeney, and the Chief of Police. I am sure that the Chief of Police handled his [responsibilities from the] viewpoint in terms of the number of police officers. The Town Manager together with the director of Public Works I would say they probably set that up Saturday morning or so on how they would physically do this. And the meeting with Judge Forte was to further set up—if this happened—how he was going to handle the arraignment and things like that. He and another justice came in on Sunday morning and they set up courts, two of them, and they heard each case.

INT: Was the Board involved in, or were you aware of the buses being ordered, how the arrests would take place, or was the first time when you went outside and listened to the orders given by Chief Corr?

AK: We were aware of—in general terms—where they would be taken and in school buses, and things of that nature.

INT: You were aware of that.

AK: Yes.

INT: And when were you made aware of that?

AK: Probably Saturday, sometime Saturday. We were hoping that it wouldn't come to that, but...

INT: In your impressions of how Chief Corr carried out his duties and the role of the police—you felt they were very professional.

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AK: Absolutely. There were no heroes that day, but they came the closest to it. They did a magnificent job.

INT: During this entire time period, did you visit the Green yourself? Had you circulated on the Green while the veterans were there?

AK: I don't think so. We drove through town a couple of times; but no, I don't think I went to the Green until eleven o'clock that night.

INT: After the meeting—Chairman Cataldo had made his offer at eleven o'clock—you had gone back and you had your meetings now, and you had asked for reconsideration of the arrest, of not having arrests, and then the Chief went out and gave his order to his policemen. What happened after that?

AK: I can tell you what happened with me. What happened with the others, I am not sure. I went out—by now the out-of-town police officers were in a formation and they had their riot helmets on—and I went home, and I couldn't sleep. So I called the station and I talked to, I think it was Lieutenant Forten, and I said, “What is happening?” He said—and I can remember it—“Mr. Kenney, go to bed. No problem. They are lining up to get on the bus,” and I said, “Wow.” So I couldn't sleep. My family was down on the beach, and I got in my car around five o'clock in the morning, and went to Rockport.

INT: Did any of the other Selectmen go on the Green and observe what was happening? Do you recall that at all?

AK: I don't know, but I rather doubt it.

INT: So, it's Sunday morning. You arrive in Rockport. What's going on?

AK: There was quite a bit of publicity about this. It was on the radio and on the news and in the Sunday papers, things of that nature.

INT: What was your family's reaction to what was happening?

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AK: They always supported Dad [laughter]. They weren't sure where I was, but they would support me.

INT: Was there discussion at all Sunday with your family?

AK: Oh, I'm sure. I don't remember any particular way that it went, but there was discussion.

INT: Did anyone from the town get in touch with you in Rockport? Was there any communication with Bob Cataldo at this time?

AK: I don't think so. I think we might have talked by Monday, but not on Sunday.

INT: You come back to Lexington. What happened?

AK: Phone calls start coming in. I received letters and the people came and knocked on my door, and they were generally representative of two groups—those who strongly supported what happened and those who vehemently did not support it. There weren't too many in the middle. There were obviously some people in the middle, but they weren't knocking on your door. I have a couple of letters if you want them. I found these. I only picked out three of them that... I also have a statement that I made that Monday. We had a meeting on Monday, June 7th, open meeting, because we were petitioned by dozens of people who wanted to address the Board. We allocated them I think it was ten minutes apiece or something, and we had this meeting, and I made a statement speaking for myself, to the Police Chief. “Your fellow officers and men, I commend you on the calm, cool and courteous manner in which you carried out your obligations.” This is the paper. I read that:

“Your actions were exemplary and carried out in a truly professional manner. To the veterans and others assembled on the Green, I am grateful that you accepted the application of the law in a very peaceful way. I understand your sincerity of purpose and would only ask that you do likewise. To those who are concerned with justice, and to those who are concerned with law and order, I offer the following thought for your consideration, that is, that there

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can be no true justice without law and order; and, conversely, there can be no true law and order without justice. The two concepts are inseparable. To the people of Lexington, I plead that the time for recrimination is over. Now is the time for reason, understanding and compassion. We must join together and work constructively in facing the problems of the present and the future.”

and then I went on to our nation's leaders:

“I ask that you take note of this incident, which has so divided our town, and pray that you, we, and all Americans can work together with renewed vigor toward achieving peace.”

A couple of these letters—and I won't read them all—but it just exemplifies... I won't mention any names. “Dear Allan,”—this is dated June 1st. It says:

“You know, I have differed very sharply with the acts of the Board of Selectmen during the past week. I would have liked to have seen a more flexible and outgoing approach taken by the Selectmen, early, before the issue reached its confrontation. The basic purpose of this letter is to say that, while I happen to disagree most thoroughly with the policies followed, and some of the decisions made, I recognize that the Selectmen were under an extreme pressure and made a difficult decision according to their best judgment. There are obviously two sides to the question. I simply weigh the ballance very differently from the way at least the majority of the Selectmen...”

That was a pretty balanced letter I found, but then I am only... I have got another one. “Dear Allan, my husband and I want you to know how very disappointed we were in your vote,” and I got those, obviously, but the thesis here was, when the day comes that our town officials fail to uphold the law we will no longer have to fear sending our boys to foreign soil to die. We will be destroying ourselves from within. Then the last is from an individual who is currently still a town official. “Dear Allan, your speech Monday night was one that hopefully will direct us back to the basic issue

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and the need to heal wounds, and end the frightening increase in polarity within the town,” and then there was more on there, but I thought that was a good letter, and it was time for us collectively to take steps in that direction.

INT: Back to June 7th and open public meeting. What do you recall about that meeting.

AK: I even have a piece of paper with [a list of those] who spoke, and I just put pro, con, pro, con, and then maybe a few remarks. I could add them up, but I am going to guess that there were twenty or twenty-five people who spoke. The other thing I would like to point out, too, at some of the Selectmen's meetings immediately afterward something had happened that had never happened before, at least in my experience on the Board, and that is that there were some people so agitated and so concerned that the Selectmen had to become a little bit concerned for their physical safety. I remember one particular meeting in the board room upstairs—and there were probably forty or fifty people crammed in there—and we were going through our agenda, and finally one guy jumped up and he said something about, “Never mind all this talk about sewers.” And he threatened Bob Cataldo because he wanted to talk about his big issues, and the police Chief had to go over and escort him out. We had, for the next few meetings, police present; if not in uniform, at least police present just because the town was so—there were some people in town so upset that we, a collective we—we were concerned that the thing might implode or explode.

INT: Did that change? Did this event at all change the nature of the dynamics among the Board of Selectmen?

AK: What happened, the only other recollection I have directly here was a meeting, I think it was also June 7th. Mrs. Riffin offered a motion that town withdraw a suit against the veterans [the VVAW]—there was a possibility of a suit—and Mr. Bailey and I supported that motion, and that

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helped toward calming things down. Then we went about our business through the summer and things like that and Mr. Cataldo was still the Chairman; but unfortunately—at least I speak unfortunately, because I have the highest regard for him—he was not reelected, and he was not reelected because people organized against him who didn't like the stand that was taken on the Green.

INT: What happened with this? What was the suit and who had initiated it?

AK: The suit would have been a legal follow up to getting an injunction and then—or also you can bring suit against people who violate a bylaw—and there was a discussion on having a suit. We, the town, would be plaintiffs, and the motion was to drop it and that's what happened. The suit never got very far and it was dropped.

INT: There was something else going on around that time, a pardon petition. Do you recall anything about the pardon petition that was circulated and perhaps the town would...?

AK: I recall it, but vaguely.

INT: All right, so no specifics?

AK: No specifics, no.

INT: Was there anything during this time period directed toward the police and how they acted? Were there any complaints or accolades directed toward the police?

AK: The accolades would come specifically, I think, like the Town Manager and the Selectmen who appreciated—and concerned citizens—the professional way that they handled themselves so that there was not a riot. I don't recall there being a big animosity against the police because they were doing what they were instructed to do, and it was the policy-making people that had to accept the responsibility.

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INT: Was there any long term impact with respect to town politics at this event?

AK: Probably yes. It tended to polarize the town and I don't know exactly how you would classify it, but between people who were more liberal on side, people who were more conservative on the other, and that affected several of the next elections, and up until—it took quite a while for that to heal and go back down.

INT: You ran for reelection?

AK: I ran for reelection.

INT: What year?

AK: Let's see, I think it was 1974 I was reelected unopposed. I was reelected unopposed twice. I had to campaign the first time. The second time—both times I was reelected unopposed.

INT: You became Chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

AK: I became Chairman of the Board of Selectmen when Mr. Cataldo left and I remained Chairman for over three years.

INT: Did you feel you had any particular responsibilities with regard to what had happened to town politics at this time?

AK: By nature I am a bit of a consensus person. I felt that the best thing I could do at the time would be to attempt to decrease any of the polarization, attempt to be responsive to as many sides as you could, to generally cool it. I think that, if I were not giving that—and still do your job—but if I weren't giving somewhat of that impression, that I would have had opposition for reelection, and I did not.

INT: In retrospect, would you have done anything differently personally, and then maybe, you can go on from there?

AK: I wouldn't have done too much different, but specifically I think I would have thought about Tower Park, and urged the members to give them Tower Park, in retrospect. Hindsight is cheap, but initially if we

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had—that was their alternate request—if we had given them Tower Park, I think they would have had to take it because if they asked for it and we gave it to them, and then all of a sudden in the middle of the march they say, no, we are going to go to the Green, they would have lost a lot of their credibility, and that probably wouldn't have happened. So, that's the only real change I would make.

INT: What was your feeling as a veteran, seeing other veterans protest what was going on?

AK: I guess my personal feeling is I didn't like seeing it. I didn't like to see veterans protesting quite the way they were while we still had people over there fighting and dying. That's not to deny them their free speech or anything like that because I don't mean that, but I would have preferred pressuring your congressmen and your senators, and the President, and the people like that to try to end the conflict rather than doing things that could be filmed and then shown to prisoners of war, or something.

INT: As you reflect on some of the protests that developed with regard to the Gulf War and the issues now with regard to Korea—are you seeing any similarities, not perhaps in terms of how it affects the town, but in terms of the politics of it, and how you would react to it?

AK: There's no doubt there has been a significant national change. It will be a long day before you will get support for sending, in my opinion, troops to Indochina or Korea or somewhere unless our national interest is so threatened, and our policy of going there is so well determined and defined. Otherwise I don't think you will get the support, and I'll make another personal observation. I think what we are seeing right now today nationally is more of the liberals saying, we have got to get into Bosnia. We can't allow the genocide in Africa, and we have to invade Haiti, and it is more the conservative people like a Bob Dole that will come back and say, wait a minute. I don't openly support American troops unless I see a specific

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national interest to do so. So, it's come around a little bit, I think. That's a generality, and that's my opinion, and whether or not there is too much validity to it, I am not sure.

INT: Would you like to add anything at all?

AK: I think I have told pretty much what I...you have got most of it out of me, I think. I did have a note here that I wrote this morning and I want to emphasize that again. It's my "point four." I have the greatest respect for my colleagues on the Board. I did then. I do now. And in particular I felt that Chairman Bob Cataldo did more for the Town of Lexington than any other individual I have met and as I said before, I feel he is a man of great courage and conviction. I felt that the Board was deceived in a sense by representatives of the veterans group, and that what they really wanted was the publicity, and that they saw the confrontation and then they grabbed at it. In the end I would simply state that there was a no-win situation, and one which was put upon us, and it was fueled by the great wave of hostility against the war, and all of a sudden this thing came down and crashed on the Town of Lexington.

INT: Lastly, any thoughts about this project and what we are trying to do with it?

AK: I think it is an interesting idea. I can tell you my immediate thought when I was approached earlier. I was—and I don't think this has happened—but I thought, gee, these people may be out to get you to say something wrong, or to prove that you were wrong, and I don't think that's going to happen. But I think it is a good project, and when I saw your name on the group, I felt...I have known you and your football coach and things, and I think these other ladies here... you have been very fair, and that's a good feeling, and I will be interested to see what happens in 1995 or 1996 when this is presented.

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END OF INTERVIEW