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Description of document: National Security Agency (NSA) Oral History of Paul F Childress, photo imagery expert, NSA OH 1988-16, 1988

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National Security Agency  
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[Online Request Form](#)

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NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY  
CENTRAL SECURITY SERVICE  
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-6000



Serial: MDR-114539  
29 June 2023

This responds to your request of 25 June 2022 to have the Oral History of Paul F. Childress, NSA OH 1988-16, reviewed for declassification. The material has been reviewed under the Mandatory Declassification Review (MDR) requirements of Executive Order (E.O.) 13526 and is enclosed. We have determined that some of the information in the material requires protection.

Some portions deleted from the document were found to be currently and properly classified in accordance with E.O. 13526. The information denied meets the criteria for classification as set forth in Section 1.4 subparagraph (c) and remains classified TOP SECRET as provided in Section 1.2 of E.O. 13526. The withheld information is exempt from automatic declassification in accordance with Section 3.3(b) (3) of the Executive Order.

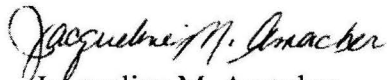
Section 3.5 (c) of E.O. 13526, allows for the protection afforded to information under the provisions of law. Therefore, the names of NSA/CSS employees and information that would reveal NSA/CSS functions and activities have been protected in accordance with Section 6, Public Law 86-36 (50 U.S. Code 3605, formerly 50 U.S. Code 402 note).

Please be advised that the responsive document includes other government agencies' information. We have consulted with the other government agencies and have protected their equities with the other government agency (OGA) redaction code.

Serial: MDR-114539

Since your request for declassification has been denied you are hereby advised of this Agency's appeal procedures. Any person denied access to information may file an appeal to the NSA/CSS MDR Appeal Authority. **The appeal must be postmarked no later than 60 calendar days after the date of the denial letter.** The appeal shall be in writing addressed to the NSA/CSS MDR Appeal Authority (P133), National Security Agency, 9800 Savage Road, STE 6881, Fort George G. Meade, MD 20755-6881. The appeal shall reference the initial denial of access and shall contain, in sufficient detail and particularity, the grounds upon which the requester believes the release of information is required. The NSA/CSS MDR Appeal Authority will endeavor to respond to the appeal within 60 working days after receipt of the appeal.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline M. Amacher

Chief

Declassification Services

Encl:

a/s

~~TOP SECRET//RUFF//20204120~~**OHNR: OH-1988-16****DOI: 6 Dec 1988****TRSID:** **DTR: 12 Mar 2004****QCSID:****Text Review:****INAME: CHILDRESS, Paul F.****Text w/Tape:****IPLACE: NSA, Ft. Meade, MD; DEFSMAC Office****VIEWER: TUCKER, Helen; unidentified Colonel; FARLEY, Robert D.****[Tape 1, Side 1]**

**Farley:** Today is 6 December 1988. Our interviewee: Mr. Paul F. Childress. Mr. Childress joined the National Security Agency in 1977 after serving a number of years at the National Photo Interpretation Center [NPIC] as a photo interpreter. He is considered a photo imagery expert and provides photo imagery support to analyst and watch officers in DEFSMAC. During this interview, Mr. Childress will recall his experiences in both the NPIC and the NSA. Interview is taking place in the DEFSMAC area (1-2m) NSA, at Fort Meade. Interviewer: Bob Farley with Helen Tucker of DEFSMAC. Mr. Childress desires that the single cassette be classified TOP SECRET RUFF. And this is NSA Oral History Interview number 16-88.

**Tucker:** [TR NOTE: Audio cuts out; when it resumes, Ms. Tucker speaking as follows:]... You talk softly (5-G). [TR NOTE: She appears to be commenting on the sensitivity of the microphone.]

**Farley:** [TR NOTE: Addressing Ms. Tucker:] It's very sensitive. It's beautiful, the recording of it. [TR NOTE: Now addresses Mr. Childress:] Paul, what we wanted to talk about is your relationship to DEFSMAC. Your background. Your career. I understand it's imagery. And this is one of about a dozen interviews we've done, preparing Helen to write the history of DEFSMAC. Talk at any level you want. We have the TKs and the VRKs and all the clearances. If you think that something is too sensitive - if you can clean it up a little better; sanitize it so Helen can use it to work into a history - then we can use it over in the historian archives for later on for some researcher or historian to use. So Helen, if at anytime I'm not pursuing the exact line of questioning, please jump up and comment on anything that you want. So Paul, what we'd like to do is pick up a little background. Go back as far as your late teenage days, your high school days, military days, and then we'll gradually (4-M). [TR NOTE: Audio cuts out momentarily.] You were at NPIC for a while?

**Childress:** Yes, I was. However, we called it NPIC at that time, too.

**Farley:** Okay. Whatever it is now.

**Childress:** Yes, right.

~~Derived From: NSA/SSSM 1-92~~~~Dated: 20041125~~~~Declassify On: 20204120~~~~TOP SECRET//RUFF//20204120~~

**Farley:** But if you can pick that up, and then we can spend a little time on your assignment at NPIC with the bulk of the time when you were associated with DEFSMAC

**Childress:** Well, I guess, to start out... I graduated from high school in June of 1951. I immediately applied for a government job. (2-3B by interviewer moving). I guess you could say I came from a poor family, so I couldn't go to college. I applied for a government job at the Army Map Service over on (B% McCulky) Boulevard. I was selected due to my background of drafting and knowing some map work through high school. I guess you could say I was hired before I graduated from school, so we had to wait a couple of months. They picked me up in June of '51. I went to school at the Army Map Service for about 3 months. I passed the course there, so I was hired by the federal government then. I continued on with my employment for about 4 years. I wrote some of this down to give you some dates.

**Farley:** All right.

**Childress:** [TR NOTE: He coughs.] I continued on at the Army Map Service until about January of 1955. I left the Army Map Service then and went to the Office of Naval Intelligence in the Pentagon.

**Farley:** What sort of a job, Paul?

**Childress:** Research work. Photographic type research work. I worked in the Office of Naval Intelligence [ONI] since November of '55. About a year later in 1956, I transferred to the ONI Foreign Intelligence Division which we did a little more types of research for items such as missile work, electronic equipment, ships, submarines. That type of equipment. I worked in ONI until about January of 1962 which that particular office of ONI was absorbed by then the Naval Photographic Interpretation Center. Now that was called NPIC [too] - but that was the Naval Photo Interpretation Center over in Suitland, Maryland. I worked at the Naval Photo Interpretation Center until it changed names. It changed names to Naval Reconnaissance and Technical Support Center in about 1965, I believe it was. I continued my work there as a supervisor of intelligence research work. I did some photo interpretation work. And most of the work that we did there was photo interpretation of missiles, submarines, aircraft, electronic equipment

**Farley:** Yes.

**Childress:** In February of 1977, I was hired by the National Security Agency, Fort Meade. The main purpose or the reason why I was hired here was at that time, there was a new satellite bird that went up. They needed someone in DEFSMAC at that time that knew a little bit about the bird. At that time, we had done a small amount of work with the photographic imagery that was received from that at the Naval Reconnaissance and Technical Support Center.

**Farley:** KH what?

OGA

with the new bird up did help me quite a lot when I first came onboard here. And from there, I guess you'd say I became the DEFSMAC Photo Coordinator or Photo Interpreter or what have you.

Farley:

Childress:

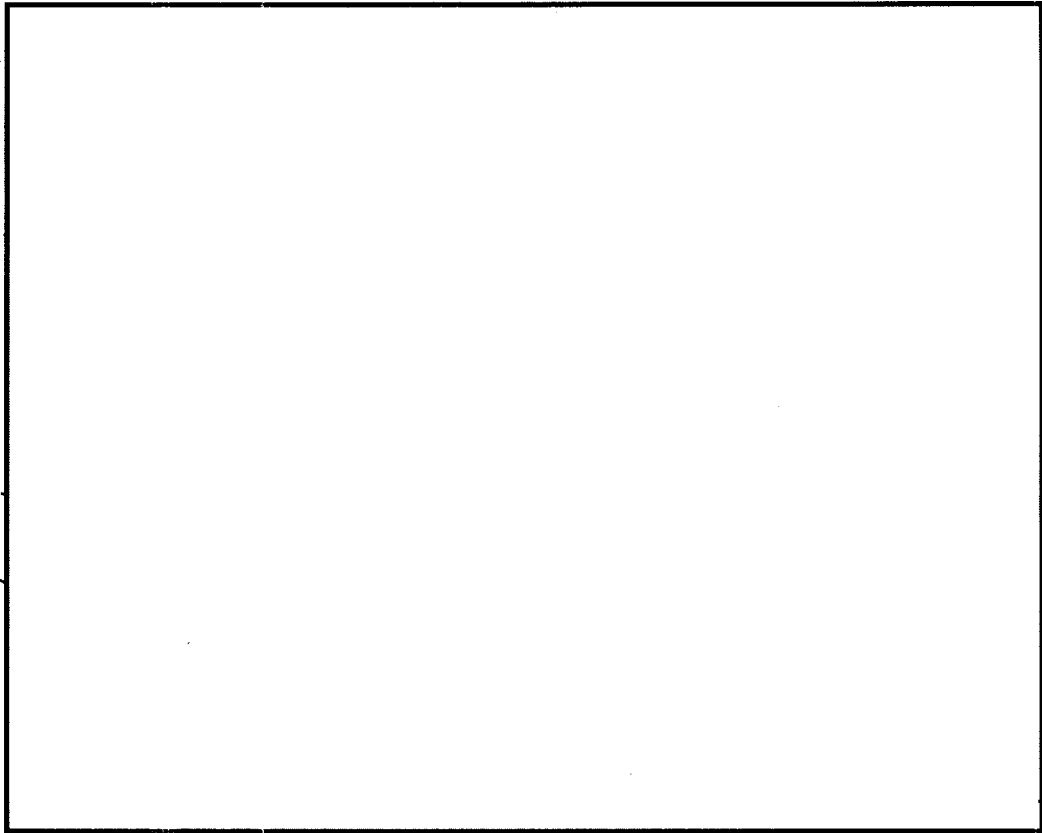
Farley:

Childress:

OGA

Farley:

Childress:

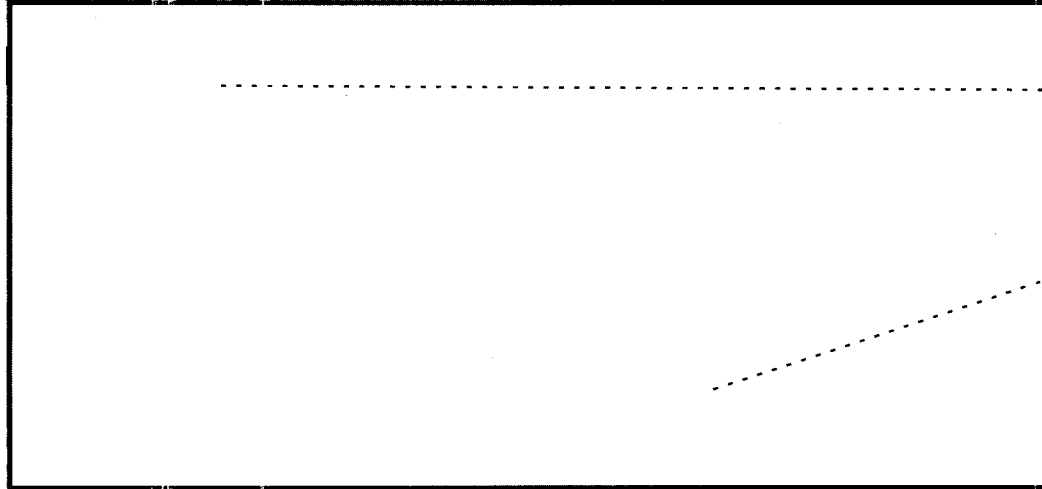


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Farley:

Childress:

Okay.



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Farley:

Ah.

Childress:

This way he knows exactly what target to look for.

OGA

**Farley:**

[Redacted]

**Childress:**

[Redacted]

OGA

**Farley:**

Great.

**Childress:**

[Redacted]

OGA

**Farley:**

Sure. Paul, what is your daily routine? Do you walk through and talk to the various analysts in DEFSMAC and say, "What do you need or what are short on or what can we do to help you?"

**Childress:**

Well, I do talk to the analysts everyday to find out a lot of their needs. Yes, a big portion of it is when I come in in the morning I come in early

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[Redacted]

OGA

happen to be there that morning. I make sure he gets that information. I'll talk to him daily to find out what he's interested in.

[Redacted]

**Farley:**

Yes. Are there specific areas that you keep constant coverage on? I'm

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OGA

**Childress:**

[REDACTED]

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**Farley:** Of course.

**Childress:**

[REDACTED]

**Farley:** I would guess it's 85 percent Soviet Union and 15 [percent] the rest of the world or is that...?

**Childress:**

[REDACTED]

**Farley:** Quality of photography excellent?

**Childress:**

[REDACTED]

OGA

**Farley:** My gosh!

**Childress:** So the imagery right now... Yes, definitely is improving.

**Farley:** That tremendous?

**Childress:** Quality is tremendous now, [REDACTED]

**Farley:** I'm thinking back to the KH3s and 4s. I mean you couldn't really understand what was on the (1-M). [REDACTED]

OGA

[REDACTED] [IR NOTE: Laughter].

**Childress:** No, quality has really improvec. Now of course it'll be improving all of the time. [REDACTED]



[Redacted]

Farley:

[Redacted]

Childress:

[Redacted]

OGA

Farley:

That's what I was going to (2-3M). I'm glad you answered that. I didn't know how to ask it. [TR NOTE: laughs while talking.]

Childress:

Okay.

Farley:

Yes. Did they get back? Or are they back tomorrow?

OGA

Childress:

No, they're due back this evening I believe at six o'clock already.

Farley:

Oh, is it? Yes, okay. Good. Helen do you have any questions (1-2G)?

Tucker:

[Redacted]

Farley:

Is that right?

Childress:

[Redacted]

Farley:

That's mighty good.

Tucker:

[Redacted]

Childress:

[Redacted]

Tucker:

Childress:

No, no. [TR NOTE: He chuckles.]

Tucker:

More or less back when we first started the imagery program (3-4G).

Childress:

Right.

OGA

Farley: [Redacted]

Childress: [Redacted]

OGA

Farley: [Redacted]

Childress: Yes, sir.

Farley: Yes.

Childress: (1-B) that's been my experience. Now I haven't done PI work as per say for somewhere around 11 years now since I left the Navy. But, back at

[Redacted]

Farley: Paul, what's your batting average in for instance alerting an analyst that

[Redacted]

OGA

balance at all or is it pretty much the same?

Childress: Well, yes. I would say that would kind of go back to one of the questions we had before or something I discussed before is our ad hocs that go in.

[Redacted]

Farley: Okay.

Childress: [Redacted]

Farley: All right.

Childress: [Redacted]

Farley: I see.

Childress: [Redacted]

Farley: Yes. Paul do you have any incidents or events that are most outstanding in your memory? Those of which you are most pleased?

Childress: Well, no. I guess I'd just say that the most pleasing thing that I have to say probably in (1-B) this particular job is one of the finest that I've ever been in because it keeps you abreast of just everything that the Soviets, the Chinese and now the Third World are doing. It gives you an insight of what comes down the pike and also what really they have now and whether the newspapers are lying or whether they're telling the truth. [TR NOTE: Laughs ]. So it's extremely interesting to come in and be I'd guess

you say, "up on" almost the world situations everyday. That's one of the finest thing that I think makes this job extremely interesting.

**Farley:** Oh yeah, you're certainly on top of it.

**Childress:** [Redacted]

**Farley:** Do you have any helpers in the photo interpretation area?

**Childress:** Not really. I have one young lady, a Miss [Redacted] that takes care of the files for us. Now we keep a tremendous amount of photography and documents that pertain to imagery on file mainly because we use a lot of them for briefing boards and briefs that we may

[Redacted]

OGA

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**Farley:** Yes. Paul, would it serve any purpose at all to retain or maintain all your photo files and deliver them to the archives at some distant future date?

**Childress:** Well, I would say in some cases some of them would be. They should be screened probably more often than we get a chance to with only the one young lady there being able to do that. And they should probably be screened with someone that has a little more of a background in the world

[Redacted]

have become obsolete in a very quick time.

**Farley:** Okay.

**Childress:** [Redacted]

**Farley:** Yes, like the Cuban Missile Crisis. Right?

**Childress:** Yes, right. Yes.

**Farley:** Yes, we went through the building of all these sites...

**Childress:** Sites, yes.

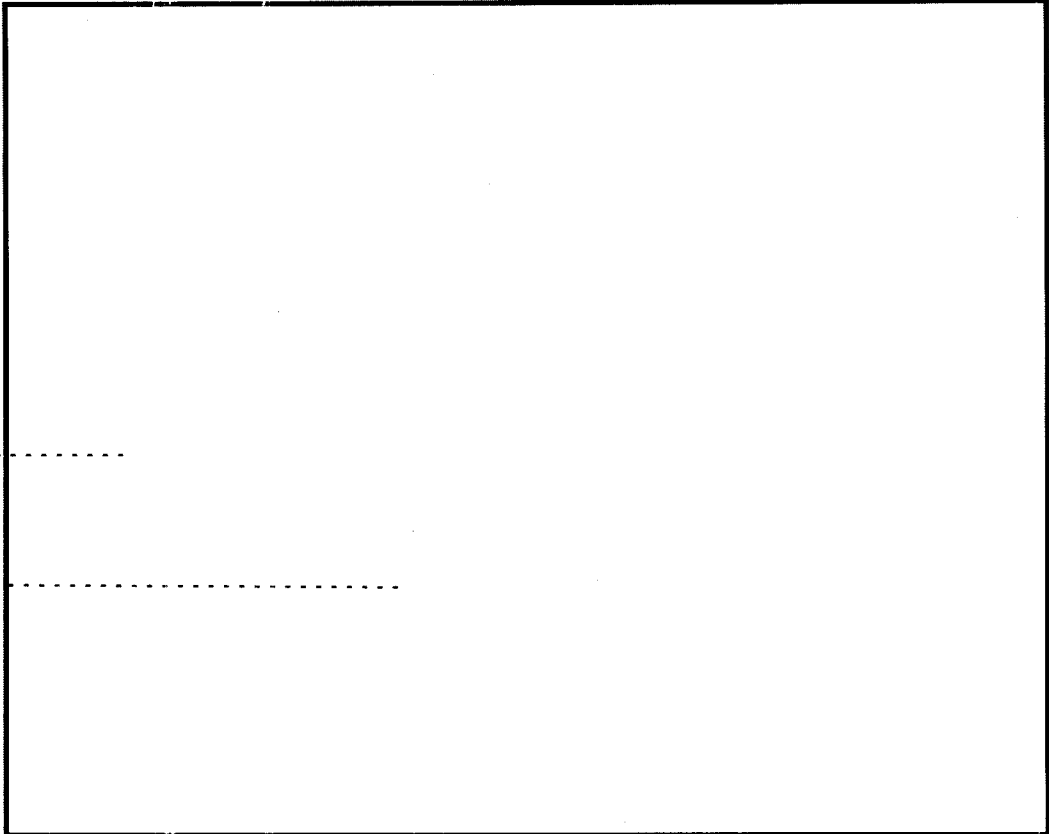
**Farley:** Colonel, do you have any questions?

**Colonel:** [TR Note: Unidentified colonel addressed by Farley. Probably joined the interview during the missing portion of the recording.] Just an educational one. What's the difference between DEFSMAC's requirements that are

[Redacted]

**Childress:** [Redacted]

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OGA

OGA

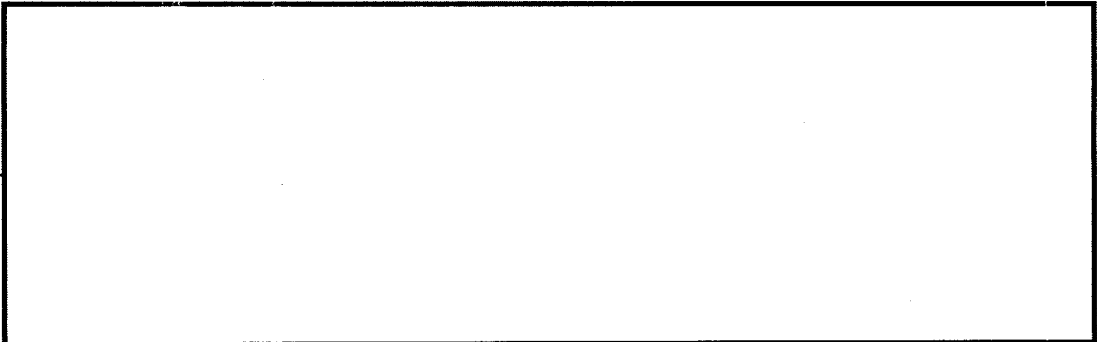
**Colonel:** What percentage of the (3-4B) are included in there? Just one or two sites?

**Childress:** Yes, sir, there's only one or two...

**Colonel:** [TR Note: Audio too weak to hear.] (XG)?

**Childress:** 

**Colonel:** Do we have any standing requirements that (1B) DEFSMAC has on the books?

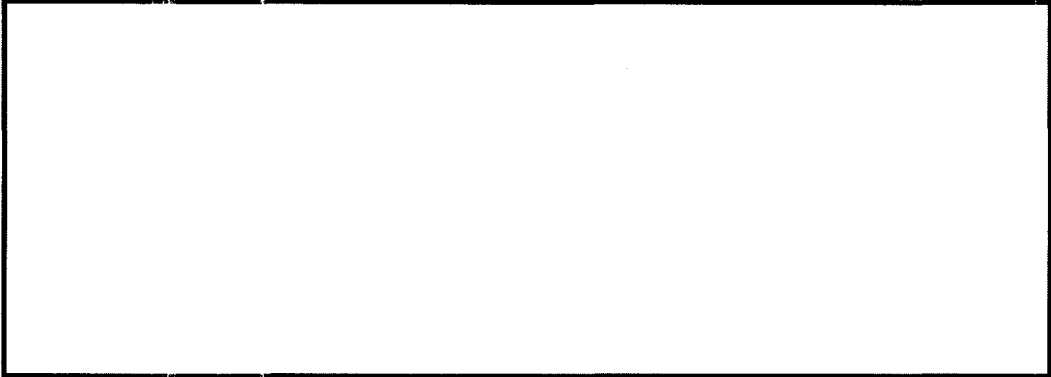
**Childress:** 

OGA

**Colonel:**

OGA

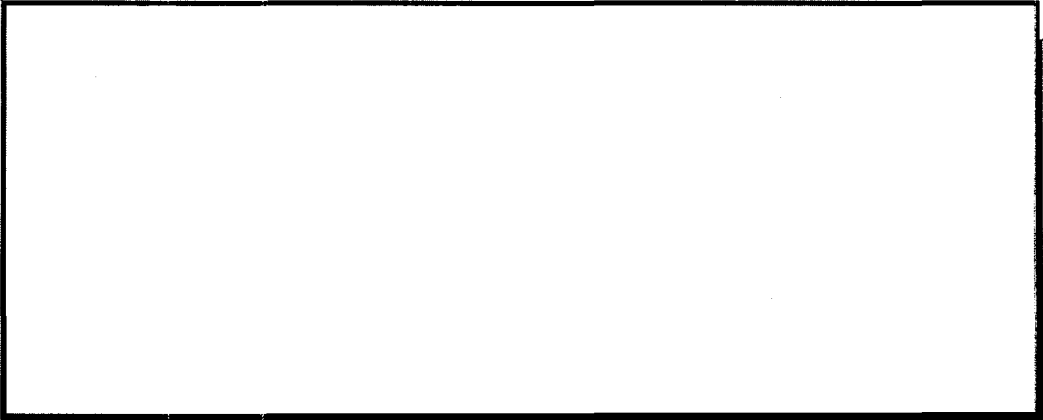
**Childress:**



**Farley:**

Paul if you were to (1G) a major problem or a series of problems that entail your operations, what would they be?

**Childress:**



OGA

**Farley:**

Right.

**Childress:**

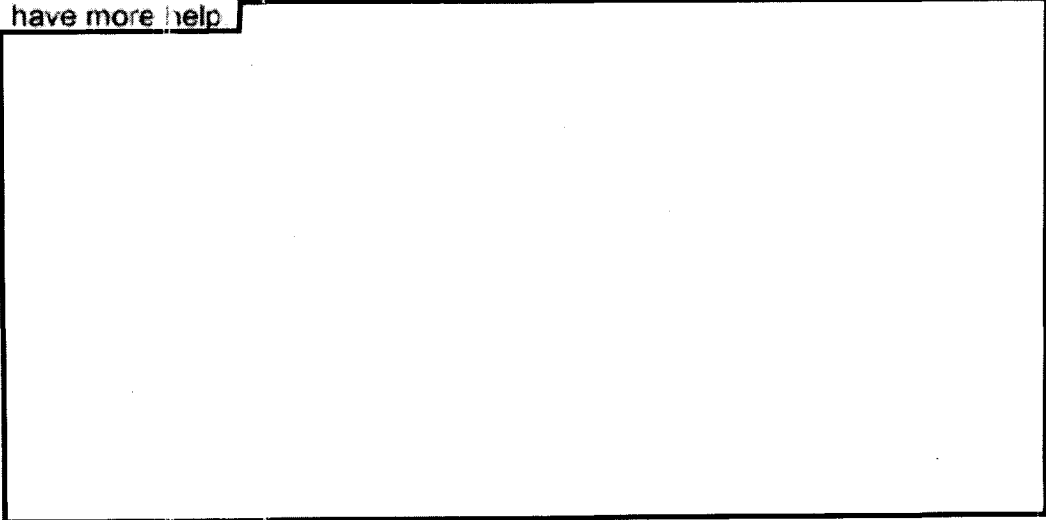


**Farley:**

Of course. But any problems related with your job specifically? Lack of help?

**Childress:**

Well, when you say lack of help, I guess everybody says they'd like to have more help.



**Farley:** Yes.

**Childress:**



**Farley:** That's what I was thinking. Sort of more photo analysis rather than interpretation. So a little progressive.

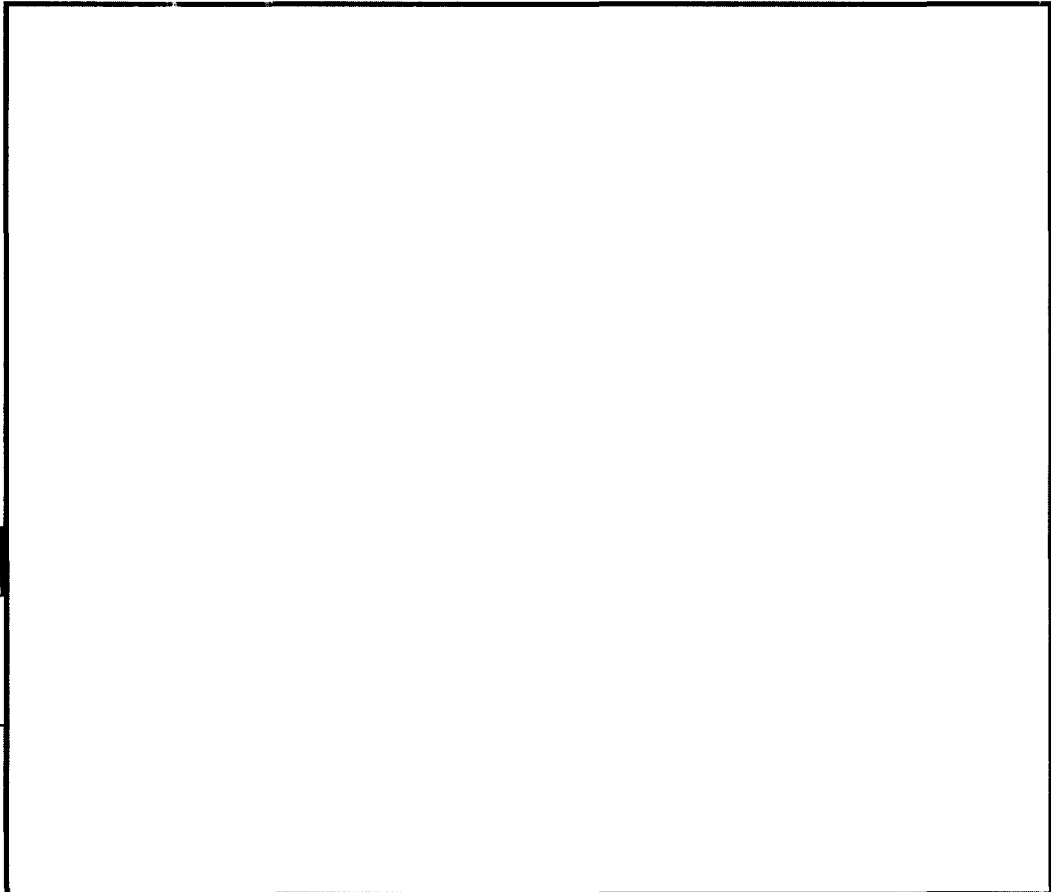
**Childress:** Sure.

**Farley:** Study on it. Helen?

**Tucker:** One thing is the acceptance of the interpretation. I know when it first came out, there was some resistance to it because the people that could see it with the naked eye could not discern what it was the analyst was talking about. I know it's been over come and the imager is a lot clearer now but (2-3G) trouble.

OGA

**Childress:**



OGA

**Farley:** Oh, yes!

**Tucker:** And it's pretty well respected?

**Childress:** I would say it is. Definitely, yes. I think it's relied on pretty well, especially

in DEFSMAC.

**Farley:** Well, they're suppose to be the professionals, so it shouldn't challenge them very often.

**Childress:** No, we don't really. [TR NOTE Farley laughs.]

**Tucker:** Well, the other question... Some time ago they were talking about using the machine interpretation rather than the analyst (1-G). How did that ever work out?

OGA

**Childress:** [Redacted]

OGA

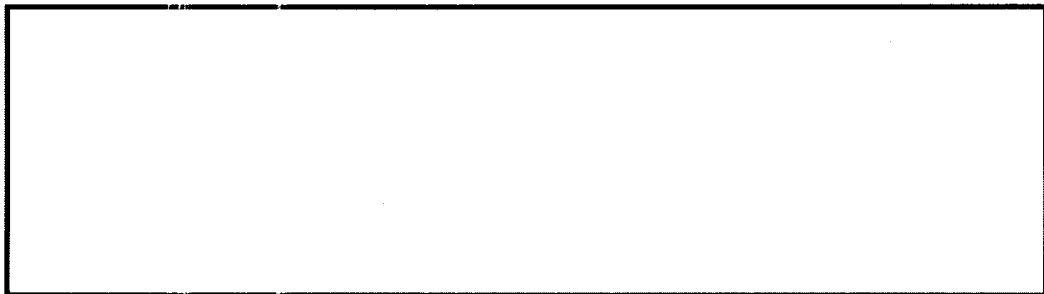
**Tucker:** [Redacted]

**Childress:** [Redacted]

OGA

**Farley:** Yes.

**Childress:** [Redacted]



**Farley:** Yes.

**Tucker:** Okay, then my next question is... You get the information (1-G) now. You

OGA

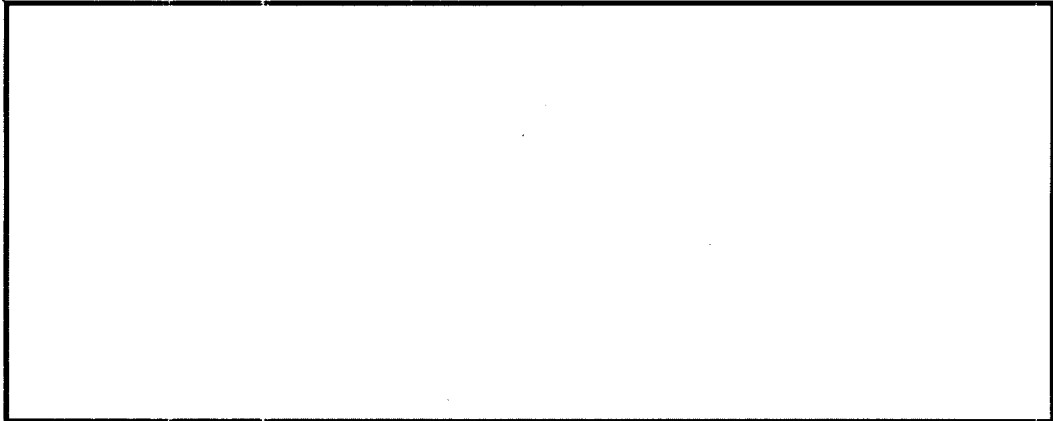
[redacted] Used to be we had to wait for a courier to bring it down and the buckets were (3-4B by Childress speaking).

**Childress:** Yeah, KH-4 and the KH-9... The KH-9 was what they called a search type camera. That would be up for somewhere like 120 days if I remember right. The KH-4 I think was up for somewhere around... It could be up for 30 to 60 days. Most time around 30 days. (1G) imagery that was taken from a satellite and it was kicked out then and (1-2G). From my understanding, the Air Force, as the film was being dropped down, they would fly by with a rcraft and snag it. Now that would usually taken around... If a picture was taken over the Soviet Union, say in (B% [redacted] 30 days later we would get that film and the PI would read it out. So you're talking something that happened 30 days prior.

OGA

**Farley:** Yes.

**Childress:**



**Farley:** Yes.

**Childress:** But, yes, definitely we had... When Mary Fairy [Ferry?] was here, photography was somewhere in the neighborhood of 30 to 40 days after it was taken that we would get the results.

OGA

**Tucker:** (XG; very faint audio.)

**Childress:**





EO 3.3b(3)  
OGA  
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**Farley:** That's great.

**Tucker:** Okay. Now, Paul, have you personally spotted anything that maybe could be (5-6G)? That could be a significant discovery of something or just alerting some people to some unusual activity (3G)?

**Childress:** [Redacted]

**Tucker:** What we're doing is giving them a tip-off.

**Childress:** [Redacted]

OGA

**Farley:** Excuse me, Paul. [TR NOTE: No audio for about 8 to 9 minutes.]

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

**Farley:** [TRNOTE: When audio resumes, Farley is in mid-sentence as follows:] (1G), we're doing fine.

OGA

**Tucker:** [Redacted]

**Childress:** [Redacted]

**Farley:** Yes. More questions, Helen?

Tucker: No, that's pretty well about it

Farley:

Childress:

[Redacted]

OGA

Farley:

[Redacted]

OGA

Childress:

Farley:

Childress:

[Redacted]

Farley: Great. That's good news.

Childress: Yes, it is. It really is.

Farley: [TR Note: Laugh.] Helen, I don't have any more questions. Colonel?

Colonel:

[Redacted]

Childress: Well...

Tucker: Let me just say that we're not going to coach you! [TR NOTE: Laughter.]

Childress:

[Redacted]

OGA

Farley: This is an old controversy.

Childress:

[Redacted]

Tucker:

**Childress:**

[Redacted]

OGA

**Farley:**

**Tucker:**

**Childress:**

[Redacted]

**Farley:** Good confirmatory information, right?

**Childress:** Yes.

EO 3.3b(3)  
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**Farley:** Good. Colonel? [TR NOTE: No audible response.] Helen, what do you think?

**Tucker:** Is there anything that you (2-3G) suggest for improving the operations?

**Childress:**

[Redacted]

**Farley:** Any personal observations or any things you want on the record for the strands of the future?

**Childress:** No. [TR NOTE: He laughs.]

**Farley:** Any guidance you can give to the young kids coming along? [TR NOTE: Laughing].

**Childress:** Well, like I say, the only thing is I personally in my - I'd guess you'd say thirty-seven years of working for the government - it's coming to DEFSMAC that's probably been the finest thing that's ever happened to me. I've really enjoyed working at DEFSMAC.

**Farley:** That's great.

**Childress:** And it's a lot of fun to find out what goes on in the world. What goes on in the real world!

**Farley:** [TR NOTE: Laughs.] That is so right. Any final questions, Helen?

**Tucker:** No, [TR NOTE: audio fades]

**Childress:** Okay. Thank you.

OGA

**Farley:** Paul, again, thanks very much. I'll reclassify this single tape.

**Childress:**



**Farley:** Sure. That's as tight as you want it? Is that adequate?

**Childress:** I would think so. Yes, sir.

**Farley:** All right. We'll leave it that way. Thanks very much for your time, Paul. It's most enlightening to me as well as enjoyable. And we learned a lot.

**Childress:** Thank you.

**Farley:** Okay. Don't tear your tie there (TR NOTE: Childress is probably removing lapel microphone).

**Childress:** That's all right.

**Farley:** Thanks again. We'll see you later then.

[End of Interview OH-1988-16-CHILDRESS]