

S. I wasn't going to do this but I -

S.

Jewish communities of Chicago and Glendale areas, way back at the turn of the century, almost everything you know about this man isn't true. The idea that Rickover grew up in this impoverished household and he struggled, isn't true. By the time he went to the Naval Academy his father owned two apartment buildings and a tailoring company. Now, he was not by any means a man of wealth, but he was an absolutely classic Jewish immigrant who had had some moderate success. There are still kin out there in Chicago - what I've done is gone back and I've worked with the Marie Sperticus College of Judaica, and one of their researchers and went back and interviewed people who lived on the block where Rickover was - oh, it's incredible stuff - and you get involved with his rejection by the Jews as well as the Gentiles, and that's one of the very classic problems that has to be resolved in dealing with Rickover.

Anyway, I've got a lot of stuff - I've gone through most of the Congressional testimony - the problem with Congressional testimony I was appalled to find out is that it gets changed and does not reflect what actually was said.

Z. Get's changed both by the witness and by the questioner, if he desires to change it.

Side A

S. So that it is not a valid historical record. I've gone into - again my real

concern is with the sources - I've gotten access to the entire Newsweek - all the copies that have ever been filed, all the memorandums to the record that have ever been filed by any of the correspondents - Lloyd Norman and people like that, and it's amazing stuff.

Z. Has anybody else ever caught on to the man behind the myth?

S. Not to the best of my knowledge. There is, I think - I probably have read every single clipping that has ever been written about Rickover - practically every single one. I've got something like 4,000 of them so ... almost nothing the public thinks or in fact to my best judgment what most of the people in the Navy thinks, has anything to do with what's really going on. I mean his manipulation of power, the way in which he engages in it, is as I say the reason I was interested always in interviewing you is that you and Nitze were almost the only people that ever caught him at his game. Everybody else - I mean, I, for instance - interviewed John Warner at some length who told me with absolute sincerity - told me on 2 occasions, once at a dinner party and once at a private interview - that he was convinced that he fully understood Rickover and Rickover came to him for advice and that he felt that he was of the major moves behind Rickover's thinking. Now ..

Z. Now, that John Warner...

S. And you find dozens of people like this who really believed that they understood what was going on. I've had long discussions with Admiral Jimmy James, who succeeded Rickover in the Electronics Division of BuShips, and he doesn't even to this day realize what happened.

Z. Did Rickover have sisters or brothers?

S. He has a brother, whom I've never been able to track down or at least appears he had a brother. That's one of those -- I haven't been able to find him - but there is mention earlier on that he had a brother.

Z. At the Naval Academy I've understood he was fairly vigorously dealt with -- he had a rather unhappy Naval Academy - does that check with your perception?

S. He had, I think, an unhappy - yes - because he is an unhappy person. He did not have an unhappy naval career for the reasons that he says he had an unhappy naval career.

Z. I mean, not persecuted.

S. ...When Clay Blair was beating the drums for Rickover in the anti-Semitism charge when there was the possibility of his being accepted for Flag Rank - Rickover stopped being a Jew - Judaism was a racial fault rather than a religious one - back in the '30's - and yet he never you see - this has never surfaced publicly. He's not a Jew, he hasn't been a Jew since you were a little ...

? Well, a Jew is what certainly says is a Jew.

S. He's a practicing Episcopalian ... Unitarian church - and was at that time and yet was perfectly willing to go up to Capital Hill and detail how he was anti-...ues, I'm sure there was some anti-Semitism, but there was other -- I went back into the Class of '22 and the Class of '23 and for instance I interviewed Admiral Burke on the subject, and there were other Jews in the Class - there is, sure, there's latent anti-Semitism and certainly was in those days in the Navy, but Rickover's problems don't stem from anti-Semitism, they stem from a very difficult personality. I went back and interviewed men who served with him on the Nevada, and the New Mexico, when he was an Ensign and a Lieutenant, and who didn't like him then, and the problem had nothing to do with Semitic prejudices, it was just simply ...

Z. He was a nasty little man and he had much to be nasty about.

S. Yeah.

Z. I had a fellow who worked for me years ago in BuPers, retired Comdr. Ellis Peters, he was retired and a civil servant by the time I knew him, who had served on the same ship or sister ship, I've forgotten quite which with Rickover, when Rickover was Chief Engineer, and said that Rickover was noted as one of those who improved his engineering mark by cheating on the fuel consumption calculations.

Z. Apparently, he has always been the kind to cut corners....

S. Well, he did worse than that. I mean, the true story .. a true story ..

that I know to be correct 'cause I talked with one of the Inspector Generals before he died who got involved with this thing was when Rickover was aboard the New Mexico, he was the Assistant Engineering Officer, and the Engineering Officer was a sort of charming, delicat, who never worked around the Navy and he sort of left all of the work to Rickover who was very happy to work, and this was for Admiral LaTossics .. he was the admiral then, and he was aboard the sister ship, whose name I can't think of at the minute, so Rickover determined that he was going to win the Engineering "E" so what he did was he took every other light bulb out, and he put in 25W bulbs where they already existed, and he turned the heat off, and welded up the showers so there were only 3 holes. And nobody knew about it, cause nobody paid any attention to enlisted men in those days, until Admiral LaTossics decided to remove his flag over to this ship and his food deteriorated rather markedly, so he finally called his steward in and said what's the matter, and the steward said in effect - no heat no food. And he said, "What do you mean, this is the United States Navy Ship, we look after our men," and he said, "Nope" so they went into the crew's spaces and it was like a tomb - first of all it was very cold and dank, and second of all there weren't any lights, just sort of pale yellow glows. Now Rickover did win the "E" but the Admiral made him put all the light bulbs in and unweld the showers and lot of other things.

Side A

Z. Part 2

The other side of this story was that he was handing out coffee at the fuel

piers and getting more fuel than was logged in so that again made his Engineering "E".

S. "E". I hadn't heard that one. You mean he was giving coffee and they would sort of look away and a few more gallons would get pumped in. I hadn't heard that one. But there is an awful lot of misinformation, for instance...

? Was he the only Navy Officer who ever did corners like that..

Z. No, I'm sure every Chief Engineer tried to figure out ways to out corners, but the extreme to which he went is typical of Rickover.

? I really do think that's the point, that he is not unique, he's just extreme.

Z. Well, it's like ... every President has shaved the law but Nixon was extreme.

S. Except that I would say this: My feeling is that Rickover is essentially a broker of power, and only secondarily a Naval Officer. He would have been the same kind of personality had he been a Rabbi. He settled .. he understood very early on - you can see this from interviews with people the few times he would open up to anybody.

? There but for the grace of God goes Baroque court.

S. Yeah, that he decided early on that the success, his change for success, lay in entering into a strictly hierarchical organization because hierarchical organizations tend to look toward the top, and if you go outside and around you can cause the organization to turn itself inside out.

S. From the beginning that's what he did.

Z. Well, he was a man who really lived on the edge of madness, dreaming for his opportunity and was fortunate enough to have his madness become a reality by pushing this nuclear program at just the right time and then getting Congress to create this myth with him. He isn't I have heard from several nuclear scientists, a particularly brilliant nuclear engineer. He is just a power who knew how to work the system.

Z. Well, this was the perception that I had of him when I went to work for Paul Nitze and I began to watch what he was up to and keep Paul Nitze informed. Admiral McDonald, who was then the Chief of Naval Operations, shared this perception but felt powerless to do anything about it, and we began to get enough evidence that Rickover was on the Hill feeding these questions, etc., that it was clear to Paul Nitze that this was a flagrant violation of the principle of civilian control, and therefore ..

? What was?

Z. He would be ordered to do something and he would get the directive to feed it by getting over to the Hill and getting them to threaten investigations or getting them to ask the kind of questions that would undue the directive and getting pressures to bear on Senator Pastore, others Carl McNamara, and Nitze, and so Paul Nitze concluded - once he really understood the nature of the operations - he was kind of a

courageous guy who concluded that the guy had to be fired. So he went to McNamara and over time, over weeks and months of discussion - and citing circumstances, McNamara became convinced, and so McNamara said "We will fire him, I will tell Mr. Johnson that we're going to" and Mr. McNamara came back twenty-four hours later and said "there's a little change, we're not going to fire him." LBJ had approved it, the announcement was to be made while I was Assistant to Paul Nitze, and then somehow or other - Rickover had spies in every office - he got a sniff of it and Everett Dirksen and others had Johnson on the phone and it came undone like that, the whole.....

S. Mendel Rivers, I think, played a role in that, because I interviewed one of his former staffers, he was one of my great losses, my problem was that ... he was dying --his widow was a friend - his wife was a friend of a good friend of mine - and he set me up when he was sick - you remember before he died - I heard that much of it and then he died and I was never able to get any more.

Z. Mendel Rivers told me, after I became Chief of Naval Operations, that that son of a bitch McNamara tried to fire Rickover and I got his cart fixed.

S. Do you remember the meeting with Senator Jackson and Hollifield and others that Mr. Nitze went to where they backed down, they had agreed to support Mr. Nitze relative to Rickover and when they got there Rickover was setting in the room and they engaged in the debate which ended up by Jackson absolutely turning around

just lying about the former agreement?

Z. No. If this happened, Steve, this happened the second time after I left him for -I was selected for Flagank and went to sea, Paul Nitze again got the correlation of forces, as we commoners like to say, in such a position that he thought he could bring it off and I was told when I came back by him that again the deal broke down but I wasn't aware that it involved thisI'd be very surprised if Senator Jackson lied about it, he ... I consider him a most desirable member of the Senate.

S. So do I, but he got taught..I don't know if I have the right reference here - the other things, I had asked people for when you were serving, is I would like to talk with Mr. Nitze but I didn't think he would talk unless somebody made it clear you know that I was not going to engage him in something he didn't want to get engaged in.

? Did you ever get to Carl Vinson?

S. No. Let me tell you that the Congress is so fearful of Rickover, they have the most amazing symbiotic relationship...

? Wilson doesn't know anything to be scared of any more.

S. No. When I went up to talk, you'd be amazed, there are staffers who no longer work on the Hill, who worked for instance on the sub-committee on Atomic energy, who won't talk.

Side A

Z. Steve, are you aware that Rickover is the guy who turned this fellow, Klobe, the publisher of a New Hampshire newspaper loose on me?

S. No. that I didn't know.

Z. Well, I've been told by two people that's how it came about. Klobe, you know is a notorious right-wing nut and he's in fairly steady communication with Rick, and when Rick early on decided I was going to take him on, that was one of the things he did. So you know this is kind of systematic/^{way}how he operates.

S. No. You never see anything directly. Almost never. And when you begin to read Rickover is the absolute master of writing memorandums. He will write it in such a way that everybody will interpret it one way but when you really push him up against the wall there's just that one millimeter of difference in the interpretation of the word.

? I was just thinking that the easy way for you to write your book is just take that 1200 page Robert Moses book that just came out and change all the Moses to Rickover.

S. That's truer than you know.

? Moses is exactly the same kind of guy ..the master build drafter..can stick a paragraph and get it through the legislature and all of a sudden two years later it turns out this paragraph gives Moses unlimited rights to anything he pleases.

? And nobody knew that, observed that, dependent clause at the time, also just as vindictive.

Z. Who told you this story of Nitze?

S. I tried to find out. I've got it in the notes here but it is absolutely, I feel like I'm involved in a spy program. Honest to God, it is like a detective story and you go around and you pick a fact up here, it's real investigative reporting in the true sense of the word. I go to people and I say, "Can you verify this," and they may not verify it but they'll say "Well, I don't know but you might talk to so-and-so," then I go and talk to so-and-so. I kind of behind times because for the last year and a half I haven't done very much. I will try to find it but I have it here somewhere.

? Why did Rickover choose the Navy as a career?

S. Well, I think he choose it, and I think I can support it, because he was a Jew seeking similation and that was the most wasp of all services. You can't ever forget about that.

Z. How can you constantly recruit men who have men
who have articulate ...

S. I don't think he articulates it, but what you can check - see, now I see your point, if come out before me and you put all this in, you're going to steal all my good stuff, but the way I think you can support this.....

? That kind of thing has nothing to do with us at all.

S. ..Is that for instance, you contract, it's a continuing theme in his life, I can't prove it. I think I can substantiate it to a point where it becomes a very probable conclusion. For instance, the dearth of Jews in the early selection for serving on nuclear ships, the conversion factor, the fact that he plays off anti-Semitism and yet he's got an incredible relationship - you went through his interview technique -

Z. Did you read my

S. Yes, you gave me a copy of that - one of the things that strikes me is that Rickover at once chooses sort of Arrow shirt types, if you see what I mean, clean all-American boy, rather - you would think that a Jew would - who got into a position of power, as often happens - would try to make it easier for others who generally suffered from anti-Semitism but Rickover doesn't do that. What he does is then he at once tortures them and yet they are the only kind he will accept. I can't tell you exactly because there's too many little details, but it's well into the years of the nuclear program before a Jew was ever selected.

? Let's say it was very rare right after the first World War for a Jewish middle class kid from a big city with a father who was businessman - a small businessman - to choose the military as a career. It was a very peculiar thing for a kid situated like that to do.

Side A

S. Well, what he currently claims - see that's why I told you that almost everything you know about him isn't true. What he currently claims is that his family had no money, and that in 1922 or 1918 - that if you wanted to go to college and you came from an impoverished Jewish family that you got a better education among the military academies. But you see, I thought that is perfectly plausible, like everything else it is plausible, but I went back - I dug back into Chicago, I dug back into the city records and found out everything that the Rickovers owned. And it turned out while, like I say they were by no means well to do, they could easily have afforded a college education for him. He has also by the way - again it just occurs to me - I will have to look back on this because I have never been able to find it, I think he had a sister, but I'm not sure about that. They don't enter her into the story so I've never tried to go back and dig them up. I have gone back and talked to people on his block, because I felt there was a hole..

S. Let me tell you a story to illustrate what I am driving at. In Chicago at the turn of the century if you wanted to be accepted in the Jewish community, quite to what one would think, you did not become an intellect you became an athlete, that was the main road to assimilation and the way you knew you'd made it was - they used to live in small little brownstone or buildings and had little park benches out in front of it - benches in front of the houses, and the girls would eat (what the lady who told me this story who knew Rickover when he was a boy)

she called pollyseeds, I didn't know what polly seeds were and neither did she, but it's sunflower seeds, used to feed pollyparrots - and the girls who liked the boys that were successful and accepted in their community, the boys would a promenader, the boys would walk around the block, and the girls would invite you to sit down and eat polly seeds and no one ever asked Rickover to sit down and eat any seeds. Consequently, you get the things that Jews stretched the intellect but in fact in Chicago that wasn't true. I thought it was true but I went back and read a Ph.D. thesis of similation of Jews in Chicago and then I talked with the College of Judaic out there, and that isn't true, that it was essentially an atheletic process - He was not a good sportsman and so he gets estranged - South Side - he is estranged not only from his own community but because there was real baufercation between the Gentiles and Jews in Chicago at that time, from the community that he wanted to belong to at that time, so he's caught in the thing of rejecting the people who don't have power and yet not being accepted by them and seeking to make contact with those who do have the power and yet being unable to do this. And I think that's one of the reason he chose the Navy, because he understood, and there's evidence of this in his high school period, that the way to get ahead is - you may not be liked but you get power. And it demonstrates itself, for instance when he was in the Naval Academy he would help

other students with their examinations, help them study for their marks - they would gain a sort of dependency on him, and yet they wouldn't accept him and he would never allow himself to feel in any way dependent on them. And he did this even when he went aboard the ship, he used to sit (I was told by one man who was an Ensign with him and then a Lieutenant) in the Ward Room and study up all the engineering books, and help the other men who were going to do this and yet he would never ask them a favor, he would never become in any way dependent on them. And when it became time for him to do something he would go and pull in his credits. So, this starts with a 20-21 year old boy, I mean he was remarkably formed, I would say. He held you in his brief things that he alludes to in his biography or biographical material that he was very unformed, that he just sort of got into the Navy because that is where he got a free education. I don't think that's true. I mean he went out there all by himself, studied in a preparatory school for the Academy, took the examination and he went and his father went to a Jewish Congressman from the South Side of Chicago and they worked very hard to get him into - not West Point - but into the Naval Academy. Very interesting - from the beginning you can track this, he gave up command at sea - the one thing that naval officers - you know when he was in line for command at sea, he was a Commander, had 15 years in the Navy, was given the U.S.S. Finch - a rather sorry minesweeper - and he gave up command at sea to become an EVO because he had determined that he wasn't going to go

anywhere and his normal course would be rotation to shore and get out. In the middle of his tour (it was the only time I've ever been able to find an example of that in that whole period, in that whole , where a man served three months as a Commanding Officer and voluntarily asked to be relieved from command so he could go into a restricted line.

Z. I have always heard that he had had difficulties with the ship.

S. I went back to where they logged - I heard that too, and I can't find -

I went back and got the Finch's logs out, those big grey-green books -

Z. No indication of a collision or anything like that?

S. No, it was obvious that Rickover was marked for the early retirement pond,

she was out in the Asiatic waters and she was not a very good ship; her main

function life was towing targets, so it was obvious he didn't get a very good

ship, cause most of his classmates or at least the men of the same line at that

time were getting destroyers. It was clear after 15 years that he wasn't going

anywhere in the Navy. So he voluntarily gave it up.

? This was pre-World War II, wasn't it?

S. Oh, yes. Finch

Z. He claims, I believe, that he had command of a submarine at one time.

Z. Is that correct.

S. No, that's not true. He served aboard two, the S-3 and the S-43. He did

Side A

receive a medal for bravery - he lept over the side of the submarine and saved a man who was drowning. And he was also involved in putting out a fire, which was very interesting.

S. Lavalette was his first assignment and then he went to the Nevada. One of my questions is "Was he really pressioned? Did he really anticipate nuclear power or did he see it as an idea whose tide he could ride. There was nothing in his early years and in fact he has made a very conscious effort to surpress true credit that should have gone to Ross Gunn and Philip Abelson, who is now the president of Carnegie Institution. They were the ones who did the early work, in fact, if it hadn't been for General Boland, the Navy would have had the first operational nuclear reactor. They were within a month, at maximum, of creating a nuclear reactor which from the very beginning they had designed to go on a submarine.

Z. Who had?

S. Philip Abelson and Ross Gunn and they had it up at the Philadelphia Naval Yard and nobody knew anything about it. And when General Boland heard about it - when Roosevelt made him the head of what later became known as the Manhattan Project, he went specially to Roosevelt and said "Either you give me all of it or I won't take any of it. You've got to shut this Navy project down."

Z. I thought the Manhattan Project was Groves.

S. Groves, I'm sorry. Excuse me.

Z. Did Rickover get assigned to work on nuclear power or did he seek it out?

S. Ah, that's even more tricky. He worked in the Electrical Division of BuShips and the great luck of Rickover's life was meeting Admiral Mills. That was his great master stroke.

Z. That was one of our most distinguished Commanders of the Bureau of Ships.

S. Mills was terribly impressed with Rickover because he did a variety of things extremely well, although there's some evidence he didn't do so well after all, he so over-ordered that he couldn't have done poorly, and in those days - nobody checked - this was during the war years - nobody checked very closely on requisitioning certain items and so Rickover was in charge of electrical materials and he just over-ordered everything to such an enormous extent that he always had enough in the pipeline. You know if you order 10 things and the pipeline only needs 2, it's pretty hard to fail. But Mills was very impressed by him. And after the war what happened was they went up to Mechanicsburg and they found that Rickover had enough electrical supplies up there to fight a war for the next forty-five years and, that in fact,

Z. That means that someone else didn't get something..

S. Exactly, which means, in fact, as they tracked back that there were other serious deficiencies in other areas because Rickover would go up to contractors

Side A

and he would say to them, like General Electric - "this is a secret project,

you got to produce this, and you got to stop whatever else you're doing and do this."

He always spoke like Haldeman, ex cathedra at all times, and they would stop what they were doing and begin doing what he wanted them to do and consequently...

Z. This was before he was on nuclear propulsion?

S. Oh, yes, years before that. The real work on nuclear propulsion began in 1939 when Admiral Bowen, Fermi and Captain Hollis Cooley, who I've not met yet, and Gunn, who is dead, began studying potential uses of nuclear fission as a weapon and for submarine naval application.

Z. Now, here you said Gunn.

S. Ross Gunn.

Z. Now, that's different from Groves.

S. No. What happened was they set up the work and they began working in the Philadelphia Navy Yard and they started from the very first day devising systems - trying to devise a nuclear propulsion for submarine .. the logical thing. You know everyone made a great deal about the thing that Rickover built the first test reactor in a submarine, same circumference as a submarine, well that's exactly what they tried to do, and this was pre-Chicago reactor and they came - according to Abelson (who is a man, I believe Abelson, he's an impeccable scientist, you-know he's over here .. he's an older man now, I'm very impressed

Side A

and he is extremely helpful for me) and he said they were just within an ace of perfecting this thing, and Roosevelt decided to put the big push on atomic energy and so they went and they said, "Look, you've got to close this Navy project down, either we put it all into one thing or ..." It was purely the Army jealous of the Navy. It was one of those kind of things, and so Roosevelt specifically ordered that the Philadelphia Navy Yard project be closed down.

? Was this Philadelphia project going along before the famous Einstein letter to Roosevelt?

S. Yes, all this took place before the Einstein letter to President Roosevelt about developing the atomic bomb. Abelson is one of those great tragic figures in science. He's been zipped out about 3 times of the Nobel Prize.

? He's a physicist.

Z He's had bad luck probably because he concentrates on the substance.

S. Yes, he's pure science. I asked him if he were bitter about this. For instance they were going to call their ship the Nautilus, and when the first ship was made it was called the Nautilus and I said, "Were you all invited to the launching?" and he said "No" and I said "did it hurt your feelings" and he said "It didn't hurt mine because I am a pure scientist." It hurt Dr. Gunn very deeply. When the Navy was writing the official history of nuclear energy, Rickover went

back and made them delete all reference to Abelson and Gunn. And they've never received any credit. In fact, there was a Bill introduced

Z. You can see, Bob, why I have such a special thing about it.

S. Yes, there is considerable evidence that Rickover was indirectly pressuring the Navy not to recommend these men for recognition for work they have done. This may, of course, be simply another case of overreaction by the Navy to Rickover's long and awesome shadow. In any case, a Bill presented by Rep. Charles S. Cubser, Republican, California, in June '64, to honor Gunn and Abelson, House Resolution 206, was not specifically supported by the Navy. In fact, then Rear Admiral C. B. Jones, Chief of Legislation, opposed its passage on Rickover's emeritus. It was defeated, of course.

? One of the curious things for me is that one gathers, I gather anyway, that Rickover is still just as unpopular in the Navy as he ever was when he was an Ensign. Nobody really likes him.

Z. No, but a lot of people are afraid of him. You see he goes on forever.

A given C&O has a 4-year watch, but a young Lieutenant Commander, he can survive McDonald, or Moorer or Zumwalt, or he has to do is hunker down and go someplace for a few years, but he can't survive Rickover. Furthermore..he knows that Rickover has the kind of institutional memory that will be after him to the end of the seven seas where he knows that the rest of us don't carry vendettas.

Side A

S. Even into private industry. If you have nuclear training and try to get a job in private industry and you have offended Rickover's sense of majesty, he will get you fired, and I have cases of that. He will pursue into private industry and tell them, "either you get rid of this man or I will declare your yard unsafe." That's this double hattedness you've got to always keep in mind; he literally writes memos to himself.

Z. We have a sort of case history of this in the Swanson episode.

S. I would like to hear about the Swanson episode. I don't quite know how - this is sort of a large ..

Z. What I will do, Steve, at the proper time is to give you the paper work on it - it's not classified - but the essence of it is that this fellow, Captain Swanson, was recommended to be relieved by Admiral Gooding, Commander of the Ship's System Command, to Admiral Kidd, who came to me and said, "We got an incompetent Commanding Officer, not quite bad enough to take action against him, but we would like to go ahead and move him on early" and based on that I indicated contest. Then I got a letter from the Captain's wife which was beautifully written and really laid it on the line to the extent which he was being persecuted.

Then Admiral D , SINC PAT, and Admiral Cleary, SINC PAT Fleet called me and said,

WAVE #

"Look, we know this guy and we've been watching him, he's being skewered
by Rickover," so I then sent the Inspector General, Vice Admiral Johnson,
out, one of the few senior officers who has the courage to stand up to Rickover,
you hear a lot of people poor-mouthing Admiral Johnson, he's a man of ...