



1-24-1973

## Earl R. Uhlig (January 24, 1973)

C. Richard Arena

Follow this and additional works at: <https://poetcommons.whittier.edu/nixon>

---

### Recommended Citation

Arena, C. (1973). Earl R. Uhlig (January 24, 1973). Retrieved from <https://poetcommons.whittier.edu/nixon/299>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Projects at Poet Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Richard Nixon Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Poet Commons. For more information, please contact [library@whittier.edu](mailto:library@whittier.edu).

Oral History Interview

with

MR. EARL R. UHLIG

January 24, 1973  
Timonium, Maryland

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Earl R. (Roosevelt) Uhlig, I believe you said named after Theodore Roosevelt.

UHLIG: That's right.

ARENA: We are in Mr. Uhlig's residence in Timonium, Maryland. Today's date is January 24, 1973, Arena interviewing. Mr. Uhlig, from the standpoint of getting a background of your own life, could you tell us where and when you were born, and a brief capsule of your formal education, the highlights of your career from the standpoint of your main career thrust, and what you are now doing, which I believe is teaching, as we were mentioning off the tape?

UHLIG: Yes, Dr. Arena. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 30, 1913, of a German father and a West Virginia mother. I received my grade school education in the public school system of Baltimore. In the high school there was what is known as an enriched course or an advanced course in which the student, during the four years of his high school, takes his basic high school work in the first three years and then studies under either masters or doctors in his fourth year. He then goes into the second year of college, getting a sufficient number of college credits to be able to pick up in the second year of college, due to this enrichment in the high school system.

ARENA: Since that's being done today and I think several people think it's a new idea, do you recall if that was given a particular name?

UHLIG: It was called the A course in the Baltimore city high schools. There were two all-male high schools which gave such courses, one a technical school in which the preparation led primarily to the engineering field, and an academic high school, generally preparing for either the professions or the teaching area of life. I went through the academic high school in this A course. That was in 1926 to 1930. I had hoped to become a surgeon, but unfortunately 1930 was a poor year for economics. My father was in somewhat straightened circumstances by reason of the fact that he was a governmental employee; and secondly, he had what appeared to be cancer of the tongue and was taking radium treatments three times a week at fifty dollars a treatment. So I did not get to college right away. I went to work with one of the local banks for what ultimately developed to be six years, and studied at night. The first year I had a half scholarship to play football. But I couldn't make the grade economically for the other half, so I took banking, and then decided I wasn't going to be a banker. Thereafter I went to college at night at the University of Baltimore, where presently I'm teaching. I subsequently graduated and got my Certified Public Accountant degree by passing the State Board Examinations.

ARENA: Was your college education completed, then, by attending in the evenings?

UHLIG: Attending the evening school, yes. I then left the banking field and went with the Certified Public Accountant firm of Haskins and Sells, which was one of the world's largest firms, and I went with them because they had the better clients. I felt that by, in essence, serving an apprenticeship in this field, I would then hope to use it as a stepping-stone into management, thus I would be much better off by going with one of the larger firms, despite the fact that the dollar compensation was less than if I had gone with a smaller firm or had gone into industry. I stayed with them a little over four years and then accepted the controllership of Sinai Hospital in Baltimore [Maryland], hoping to do something toward revitalizing institutional accounting. I found, as I've humorously said, that it was a good thing that I was in the hospital, because I beat my head up against the wall until the blood ran down in my eyes, and I decided that that was not what I was going to do. Then I went for a short period of time with the General Motors organization as a special assistant to the controller of the Fisher Body Division here in Baltimore.

I left them to go with the old Glenn L. Martin Company, an airplane manufacturer that had its origins initially in Santa Ana, California. The company subsequently moved from Santa Ana to Cleveland [Ohio], and from Cleveland into Baltimore, because Mr. Martin had a concept of flying boats which was new, and he wanted to move to, one, a place where the water was generally ice-free all winter long; and two, near to Washington, which was at that time the headquarters of the buying of aircraft. Going with the Glenn L. Martin Company as chief cost accountant,

and rapidly moving up to chief accountant, I proposed to them a concept of controllership which Mr. Martin subsequently endorsed. In 1942 the concept was implemented and my then superior, the assistant treasurer, was made controller and I was elected assistant controller to set up such a program.

Now, this is interesting from background only because of the fact that as we move along it will explain the reasons why I met then Lieutenant Commander Richard Nixon. As we built this controllership function inside the Martin company, I took on additional responsibilities, including the negotiation of contracts with the government, both from a financial standpoint as well as from a terms standpoint. During the days of World War II the government passed what was then known as the Contract Settlement Act of 1942, and then I think it became the Contract Settlement Act of 1944. Under this Contract Settlement Act, the government would establish ground rules by which, when a war or defense-oriented contract between the United States government, the Federal government, and a defense contractor was terminated for the convenience of the government, would be outlined the basis of settlement. That was why it was called the Contract Settlement Act of 1942 and 1944. During the early part of 1945, it became clear that we were moving downstream toward the probability of some substantial contract terminations for the convenience of the government. Associated with what was then the Bureau of Aeronautics, an arm of the Navy Department, were all types of technical personnel--engineering, production control specialists, draftsmen, contract specialists, legal specialists.

At the instigation of the Bureau of Aeronautics legal representative, who was then Lieutenant Commander Richard Nixon, the company began to negotiate with him (I, on behalf of the company) the basis on which we would settle the contracts of the Glenn L. Martin Company, at such time as there were or may be terminations of these contracts for the convenience of the government.

Is there anything you'd like to ask me, or do you want me just to . . .

ARENA: Well, let me do this: From the standpoint of the overall picture, did you remain with that company, until about how many years, and when did you--again, for the record--get into your present profession, which is college teaching?

UHLIG: I subsequently became controller of the company in 1949. As we then grew into some commercial aircraft, losses on which pretty well caused the company to come financially to its knees in 1952, we had a very substantial reorganization of the management, in which Mr. Glenn L. Martin was made honorary chairman of the board, or chairman emeritus of the board, and new management personnel were brought in from the outside. In 1955 I was elected vice president of finance of what then was known as The Martin Company, and retained that position until we merged the Martin Company in 1961 with the American Marietta Company, the merged or consolidated company then becoming known as The Martin Marietta Company.

ARENA: There would be a dash between Martin and Marietta?

UHLIG: Oh, initially there was, but then by amendment to the charter or the by-laws, and the filing with the state, we pulled the dash or the hyphen out of the interior there, so it just became Martin Marietta Company. In 1962 the headquarters of the company was moved to New York and I was asked to continue with the defense part of the organization, which I did until February of 1969. I had intended to move into the academic field, teaching finance, accounting, business-oriented subjects. At the request of the Fairchild Engine and Aircraft Company, I accepted the vice presidency of that company to help them with their banking and financial relations until such time as the problems which they had at that time were solved. I left the company, now known as Fairchild Industries, in January of 1971 and traveled to Australia and Europe during that spring, having accepted an appointment as associate professor at the University of Baltimore.

ARENA: As you know, sometimes these universities have branches all over the state. Would this be the University of Baltimore of the State of Maryland, and is it located right here?

UHLIG: No. The University of Baltimore is a private institution. It is not a part of the state college system, and I am with the private institution, the University of Baltimore.

ARENA: Would you give its address?

UHLIG: The address of the University of Baltimore is 1420 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.

ARENA: Thank you. And just to be sure I have your status correct--and when I say I, of course, I mean the reader, those who will study this interview in the future--were you a civilian yourself during that period when you knew the President in Maryland? Or did your job entail some special function with the government, or was that strictly a civilian position you held?

UHLIG: Strictly a civilian position with an industrial company who were at the time solely devoted to the manufacture of war materiel, aircraft and war aircraft accessories.

ARENA: Were you, though, working along side--besides President Nixon--those who did represent government people, either with a company, or was it equals working together, on a cooperative basis?

UHLIG: Technically, Dr. Arena, these situations developed with respect to defense contractors. They are under the

surveillance of, or are known as, a Navy facility, an Air Force facility, or an Army facility. The military or defense department service, that has what is technically known as cognizance over a plant, has a top man in their organization, a military man. Usually in the Baltimore area, for example in the Glenn L. Martin Company, it was under the surveillance, as I recall it, of a Navy captain. He had, beneath him, both civilian and military personnel who were Navy--either uniformed or civilian--employees.

ARENA: And that categorized your situation, too, I see, and that was your situation with your company.

UHLIG: No. I was individually employed by an industrial contractor. I was not a Navy employee.

ARENA: But the company had some special relationship with the Navy.

UHLIG: The company had the special relationship because of the fact that it was turning out a considerable number of Navy aircraft.

ARENA: In tying this in with President Nixon, what I had in the back of my mind was that this may have called for a delicate human relation situation, where a civilian was coming into contact with the Navy, Navy personnel, which of course, would represent President Nixon. And to whatever extent there was any special problems, or any special situation, would you discuss that, not in the sense that you are going to describe a problem, but do you recall your relations with the President because of you being a civilian and his being in the Navy? Did that create any special situations, and how did he act in that period?

UHLIG: The special situation that arose between Lieutenant Commander Nixon and myself was by reason of the fact that we were negotiating, he as a representative of the Navy Department and I as a representative of the Glenn L. Martin Company, the defense contractor, to wind up with a contract which would spell out the ground rules of the settlement of contracts which would be terminated for the convenience of the government. In other words, the government no longer needed these sinews of war and would cancel the contract. If the government canceled the contract in midstream before having received all of the aircraft and the spare parts, then it would owe the contractor for his work that he had performed and which was not delivered. These would be any place from the bits and pieces of the raw material on through the various production processes up to practically an entire aircraft. Then the government would owe the defense contractor the moneys that the contractor would have invested, plus some reasonable profit for his efforts that had



not, because of the termination, come out of the pipeline as completed aircraft or completed spare parts.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if President Nixon was then assigned just to your company, or was he handling those legal aspects for other companies as well, or do you know?

UHLIG: To the best of my knowledge, I'm something like about 90 percent sure that Mr. Nixon's sphere of responsibility was the company to which he was then assigned, the Glenn L. Martin Company.

ARENA: About how long a period of time is involved here, from the standpoint of your working with the President?

UHLIG: I would say several months, off and on. It was not a full-time negotiating thing. We would start and stop and we had some of it typed up and we edited it and we blue-penciled it and we'd go ahead with some more. It would be an off-and-on proposition over, I would say, several months.

ARENA: Did it ever involve any personal, we'll say, extra-business relations, going to lunch with him, meeting his family or vice versa, his meeting your family? Did that situation ever come up?

UHLIG: No, Dr. Arena, it did not, for two very good reasons: One, there were basically no social fraternizations between the company's employees and the military employees.

ARENA: As a policy.

UHLIG: Right. And secondly, I had generally made it a practice not to become socially involved with my employees and my employer.

ARENA: Could I ask you this: From the best of your recollections, describe his personality, if you can separate it, because I will go into the other side; separate, we'll say, the business and the competence and the legal side of the man with just the man. How was he to deal with, patience-wise, manners, courtesy, the nontechnical side of your relations with him, as much as comes to mind.

UHLIG: Well, the nontechnical side of my relations, I think, were those of an individual that is in a working relationship; the man himself was not what you would call a warm man, but with both our practice of nonfraternization, we did not have an opportunity. Now, we may have gone to lunch in the company cafeteria or the officers' cafeteria from time to time, but if we did so it is not an event that would have stood

out vigorously in my mind. It would have been a normal kind of thing. We were working; lunch time came about and we picked up and went over and had lunch and came back and did something else and then separated.

BEGIN TAPE I SIDE II

ARENA: Did you want to add something to that last point?  
Excuse me. The other question would be, of course, what do you recall of him from the standpoint of his competency, bearing in mind others that you may have met in the same position over the years, either before or since?

UHLIG: Well, Dr. Arena, the best way to illustrate something like that might be an anecdote. As a result of our technical efforts, we brought this contract to completion, and I as an officer of the company was empowered to sign this contract. But Mr. Nixon was not empowered to sign. He was not what is known as a contracting officer. The contract would have had to be signed by a contracting officer who was physically located in Washington. Having brought the contract to completion, we made arrangements to go to Washington to have it signed, and I told him I would pick him up in my automobile and drive to Washington and get the contract signed. It so happened that the morning that we were scheduled to drive to Washington turned out to be V-J Day.

ARENA: So you were with the President on V-J Day. Were you going to meet him?

UHLIG: I met him. We drove to Washington and went to the Navy Building. There was no one there in the Navy Building except the unfortunate security guards to guard the entrances.

ARENA: Unfortunate in that they had to miss the celebration, you mean.

UHLIG: Yes, unfortunate in that they had to miss the celebration. Mr. Nixon was quite upset because we couldn't find somebody to sign this document, and he got on the telephone and called several people. The more people he called the more angry he became, because he couldn't get anybody who would say, "Yes, come on out and I'll sign it." So we came back, and I can recall that he was, I think appropriately, upset about the whole thing. Here we'd worked on it and brought it to a conclusion and we hadn't been able to find anybody to sign it, because fortunately, it was V-J Day.

ARENA: I can't resist this: Did anyone decide, or did the question come up of stopping for a beer to celebrate?

UHLIG: No, nothing came up about stopping for a beer to celebrate.



ARENA: It was business to the end, then.

UHLIG: That was it. We got in the car and came home and went our separate ways. Unfortunately, the contract never did get signed, because the next day government began again, and they decided, "The war's over so we don't need any of those aircraft." And so they terminated all the contracts, and since we didn't have the contract which was the basis on which we would settle signed, we couldn't use it as a document for the means which he and I had spent a number of hours putting it together.

ARENA: That's very interesting.

UHLIG: I think we would probably both look back on that with a little laugh and enjoyment. Having brought this thing to a conclusion, lo and behold, the thing that the world looked for, the end of hostilities, was the reason why the thing that we had worked on fell to pieces at the last moment.

ARENA: Is there any other anecdote of any type? I can't think of anything that could top that V-J Day anecdote, but is there anything else that comes to mind?

UHLIG: No, nothing that specifically comes to mind. I found Mr. Nixon a very competent and devoted individual. As we worked on these things together, he had a single-mindedness of purpose. I believe that he had considerable ability, a means of expressing himself and a technical capacity that I thought was better than most of the military personnel with whom I had theretofore been associated. I was very well pleased with his capacity and the technical relationships which we had. Now, I'm not a lawyer, but by reason of the fact that these things which we were working on had to do with the financial reimbursement of the company and the financial reimbursement of the company was my particular bailiwick, we worked together in bringing this contract to a completion. I had a very fine feeling that he was a very competent individual, very competent, and I believe one who had a considerable devotion to his work.

ARENA: Before I do bring this interview to a close, I just want to be sure; is there any subject I have not raised, any question I have not raised that you would like to bring up yourself at this time?

UHLIG: Just a couple of things.

ARENA: Certainly.

UHLIG: Subsequent to our work and the fact that it fell apart at the last moment, Mr. Nixon mentioned to me that he was going to go back to California and was going to

leave the military service, and he did not tell me, but subsequently you knew why he went back to California, because he then ran for Congress, as he had resigned from the service and his resignation was accepted.

After he became Vice President, Mr. Nixon used to go to a little place along the Maryland seacoast called Ocean City. He went, as I say, incognito. My family--my wife and my children--used to spend a couple of weeks there at the ocean as a vacation. I ran into him once or twice down there, and we sat down on the beach and chatted for a few minutes, reminiscing about old times. I subsequently ran into Mr. Nixon again while he was Vice President and I was chairman of the finance and tax committees of the Aircraft Industries Association. The board of governors of the Aircraft Industries Association used to meet twice a year, once in the East and once in the West, or someplace like, maybe, Arizona in the wintertime. I met the President, who was then the Vice President, who came down on an invitation to address the board of governors at a luncheon meeting, in an off-the-record type address. And we again renewed acquaintances and laughed about V-J Day. That's the last time I personally have seen him, and I can't recall when that was, but it was when he was Vice President.

ARENA: Were there any written records between you, any sort of correspondence between you during all of the time you've known him?

UHLIG: None at all, nor would there normally have been.

ARENA: Except, possibly, for those contracts. Whatever there was in the way of written material, including possibly his and your own reports, together, would they be with the Navy, would you know, or were there no such things?

UHLIG: I could not tell what became of the Navy file.

ARENA: You, yourself, have none.

UHLIG: I have none. Anything that would have been in the then Glenn L. Martin Company, subsequently The Martin Company, files would have probably, by reason of its non-signing by the Navy, ultimately been destroyed after a normal period of time in a records-retention or records-destruction program.

ARENA: Mr. Uhlig, I want to thank you very sincerely for allowing me the privilege of this interview, for going back over this period, and I know my fellow historians share in this act of appreciation. Thank you very much.