The first question would be how did you and Mr. Baker become friends?

GEORGE H.W BUSH: Jimmy Baker and I have been friends for a long, long time. We go back 36, 37 years, I think. We became fast friends when he became my tennis partner here in Houston, Texas back around 1960 or so. And then we’ve been at each other’s sides through personal ups and downs and through political ups and downs for a long, long time.

Q: When did you first work together politically?

A: Well, I think probably in 1964. Jim had been a Democrat like almost everybody else in Texas in those days. And he helped me in my abortive run for the United States Senate in 1964, where I got trounced by Ralph Yarborough in the Goldwater election year. Then I decided to run for the US Congress in 1966 and again Jim was extraordinarily helpful then. And we’ve been in cahoots ever since.

Q: Can you describe that rapport that you developed then? What it was like to work together.

A: Well, it’s hard to put it in terms of black and white. I mean, how do you describe friendship? How do you describe trust? How do you describe respect? And all of these characteristics really embody our personal relationship. And so I don’t know if there was one particular thing that got us close together but we just hit it off from the very beginning. I’m a little bit older than he is but he shows no respect for that. And we’re just friends. Friends. That’s what matters in life, too. I’ve been up and down the political hills and I was in private life and I was in the war and friendship is a lot of what life is about and Jim Baker is my close personal friend.
Q: Did that trust help you in implementing what your visions were at the time? Was this part of what you looked for?

A: Well, there’s no question that trust is a very helpful ingredient in a relationship such as Jim and I had when I was President of the United States and he was Secretary of State. When you trust a person then you are perfectly content to let him carry the ball on certain key issues, not worry about whether he was going to be in sync with you. And so it was not -- it was trust but it was even more than that. Jim Baker was one that could come into the Oval Office, and he could do that, but then once there say exactly what was on his mind. Tell me if he agreed with me, tell me if he differed. And when he differed I knew he wasn’t doing it to be contentious. I knew he was doing it because he honestly felt I was making a mistake, screwing it up one way or another. And he had the confidence and he knew he had my trust so he would level with me. And that is a very important thing for a president to have, a trusted friend.

Q: We’ve heard this time and again from so many people that we’ve interviewed. Dick Cheney said how lucky he was to be able to work with you and Mr. Baker and Brent Scowcroft. Time and time keeps coming up that you seem to build teams based on trust and loyalty. Is this a key to your success?

A: Well, I don’t know about the success but it’s certainly a key to the way I like to operate. And, you see, I was blessed with a strong national security team. Dick Cheney and Baker, Jimmy Baker, could disagree on some critical issue, but then they’d sit down with another trusted friend, Brent Scowcroft. They’d iron out many of the difficulties. And then if they couldn’t work out the difficulties, the National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, would either bring them into the Oval Office or they’d come in on their own
for private meetings. And they’d say, “Here’s an impasse. Your defense feels strongly about this, state feels strongly about that. And you have to decide that, Mr. President.”

But when I made the decision I knew that neither Dick Cheney nor Baker would go off in a sulk, that they would recognize that the President had the final call and then they’d go on about their business. But that didn’t always happen in other areas and some of it is because I think there was not the mutual trust that existed between Baker, Scowcroft, Cheney, Colin Powell, and Bob Gates out at CIA.

Q: We hope to interview Mr. Scowcroft later on. We haven’t made that approach yet but we’re hoping to. We’d love it if you had a comment about him.

A: Well, Brent Scowcroft was as close to me as anyone in Washington. He is the unsung hero, if there is such a thing, in our administration, because he didn’t have the visibility of the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense. He was behind the scenes, quiet, the perfect National Security Advisor. The perfect honest broker but brilliant in his own right. So he’d say, “Here’s the position for the Secretary of Defense. Here’s the position of the Secretary of State. Here’s what the intelligence people say. And you have to decide.” And I’d say, “Well, Brent, what’s your view?” And he would always give me an honest opinion. I never thought he was going to tilt one way or another because of friendship or because of politics towards any cabinet member. And he exemplified the finest in how the National Security Council system should work. He’s the best, the greatest.

Q: We had that same feel from Condoleezza Rice. Just the highest respect.

A: Well, everybody that worked with him felt that way. Honor, integrity, but always, always fair.
Q: May I ask about this incredible experience level that... I mean, you built this incredible team and yet you all seem to have known each other for a while. Experience at that level, having your cabinet members, that experience, and then working with you...?

A: Well, I think experience does count and I was teased, sometimes ridiculed about being a résumé candidate. But my experience in this field went back not just to being a member of Congress, where the experience was peripheral, but in the United Nations, as ambassador in China, as director of Central Intelligence, and then as vice president for eight years. And during those different incarnations, I would meet and work with key people. I’ve worked with Colin Powell when he was President Reagan’s National Security Advisor. I had worked with Brent Scowcroft when I ran the CIA and he was the deputy to Henry Kissinger in the Nixon White House and the Ford White House. I had worked with Jim Baker all my life in various incarnations and certainly Dick Cheney, when he was in the Congress. And then I watched him do a fantastic job in Congress. I knew him well, I respected him. So the experience that I had in dealing with these people I think made it easier for me to select them and I knew that they could work together.

Q: [Did] Mr. Baker do a good job?

A: He did a first class job. He will be one of the great... History will show that he was one of the great secretaries of state. Not just because we managed to handle some difficult international crises well, the unification of Germany, the end of the Cold War, certainly Desert Storm, the liberation of Eastern Europe. We handled the US side of those things well. But he’ll be seen as a great secretary. He was a tough negotiator. That’s another thing. He was a very strong negotiator. And yet, in the process, he could keep the
respect of those with whom we were negotiating. And so I think they’ll -- history will show that he was one of the very, very best.

Q: We have a terrific story about how one of the folks -- I think -- was it Dennis Ross, Andy, or Mr. Zoellick that was saying how he did negotiations but then it was... Bob Zoellick.

M1: Bob Zoellick.

Q: Negotiations within negotiations, only thinking of your position when he got to that level. And --

M1: Thinking four to five steps ahead, positioning you with Prime Minister Thatcher, for example. Where Mr. Baker was in line with Geoffrey Howe up to a point where you were able to go to Prime Minister Thatcher and say now... Jim was with Secretary Howe lock, stock and barrel. Now we got to take this position.

Q: We found that really interesting and we want to just ask you... On your communications level, working with an old friend, how did that help? How -- what was it like for you to...?

A: Well, I would have good communications with Jim Baker. He would call over on a secure line. He didn’t have to go through any filters to call me. He could come up to the residence where Barbara and I lived and the White House, second floor, and say, “I’ve got to talk to you about something.” And there were very few cabinet members that really had that access. Brent Scowcroft obviously did and Dick Cheney would. But a lot of them, you know, would do the business in the daytime. Baker could come night or day. The communication was terribly important. We compared notes on the various world leaders we were dealing with. We usually agreed in our assessment of those leaders. But he would bring along discussions. He would work with the foreign
secretaries knowing that when push came to shove the president and his foreign counterpart, the head of state or head of government, would have to make the final decision. But I never felt that Jim Baker was on a different wavelength and part of that was because of communication, staying in touch, and often the staying in touch would be with General Scowcroft, the national security advisor, because the president had a huge domestic portfolio, had to worry about a lot of domestic issues. Probably spent more time on domestic affairs than on foreign affairs. And that meant that to keep everything moving the secretary of state should be comfortable with, compatible with, have trust in the national security advisor. So some of the communications came that way. But often it was direct and then I would immediately fill in the national security advisor so he wouldn’t be blindsided.

Q: Just a last couple of questions. One was Mr. Genscher, Mr. Shevardnadze told us about how when they would come to Washington, for example, or meet with you at summits, there was a clear projection of strength in your relationships with your cabinet members, Mr. Baker in particular. You seem to be... You know, it was so obvious that the two of you were on that same wavelength. They appreciated that and were able, as they said, to trust the situation. They had much more confidence when... Were there other personal relationships that you developed with this part of your technique in negotiations?

A: Strong personal relationships are important and it was essential that the foreign secretaries, as well as the heads of state and government, knew that when Jim Baker said something, he was speaking for the Administration. He would not be countermanded later on by a back channel from me or from our national security advisor in the White House. And so, again, the word trust comes up. But the trust wasn’t just between us.
The trust had to be projected so that the people that Jimmy Baker was dealing with in these seemingly endless negotiations around the entire world would know that they were dealing with somebody that had the total trust of the president. Now, of course, there were other relationships where I had that same feeling of trust in cabinet officers. I had a very close relationship with Nick Brady, a very close personal one. He was our secretary of the treasury. Had a very close relationship with some of the domestic cabinet officers. But none closer than Jim Baker because our relationship had gone back many years and long before I thought I’d be president and long before he would probably even dream of being secretary of state, we were dealing with trust on matters -- perhaps less global importance but in matters that were very important in formulating a relationship that I think stood the country in good stead.

Q: Just a last question on this relationship with Mr. Baker. Do you have a Baker story, something you could share with us that would exemplify the situation, with all these events you just brought up in history really?

A: Well, here’s a man with a terribly weak serve in tennis and it hasn’t set him back in life. I mean, if I’d have been burdened with a serve like that I might have decided to teach over there at the University of Houston or something and not aspired to be in political life. But he had overcome adversity. It was difficult for me as a net man to overcome that adversity because with that powder-puff serve I’d get drilled when I was playing at the net. But it said something about the guy. He kept his chin up and decided that he would -- we’d go forth. I remember playing... And, you know, when he was secretary of state and I was president we played against the president of Ecuador and the president of Argentina and Baker showed them no mercy on the court. He kept drop shotting the
president of Ecuador so much that the guy broke his ankle or twisted his ankle and had to retire after we did the (inaudible) six love. He never thought that it’d be nice to let him win a game or two. And Carlos Menem, the president of Argentina, never forgot that. So the next time I played with him, it was at Camp David, and Menem showed up with his own tennis pro to show that he wasn’t going to be beaten again. So Jim had that very competitive side which, as I say, he... It showed the best in him and showed that he could rise above a powder-puff serve to be Secretary of State of the United States of America.

Q: What would you say to young people about becoming involved in public service? I mean, with all the hardship and sacrifice?

A: Well, one thing that concerns me is that given the ugliness of the press these days, the national press, with its intrusiveness, its unaccountability, and given the climate in Washington, where everybody is considered guilty until proved innocent, guilty of something, transgressions in private life, financial transgressions, whatever... With that ugly climate, a lot of young people are turned off. And yet I’d say take a look at some that have served. Take a look at a Jim Baker or a Dick Cheney or a Brent Scowcroft. There are men of total integrity and honor and emulate them. Don’t give up. Stay involved. And if you don’t like things, try to change them. There is nothing worse than the arrogant young people standing on the sidelines griping about things, unwilling to support candidates, unwilling to take a position on anything, simply sitting there criticizing. And we have the best political system in the world. There’s some problems with it. There’s some honorable -- many, many honorable people in it and a few bad eggs that -- men and women that send out the wrong signal. But to young people who are disillusioned, I’d say, “Look at history. Compare this system, this process, this
engagement, with any other system. And then if you believe in your country, try to serve. Get into a campaign. Write something. Try to get into the political arena in one way or another. You don’t have to run for sheriff but do something. Not just sit there and complain.” And I must say that it’s not very pleasant. And when after... I think 1992 was about the ugliest year I’ve ever been through in 30 years in and out of public service. I never saw the press as up in arms as they were in their quest for change. But I would simply add to that that I was very pleased when two of our own sons, who were at their mother and dad’s side during that ugliness, decided that they wanted to get into what Teddy Roosevelt called the arena. And in it they went. And one almost was elected governor of Florida and the other is the governor of Texas. And they were doing instead of just griping. They were in there fighting for what they believed. And so I’d say to young people that are disillusioned, “Hey, yeah, there’s some problems. But if you don’t like the way things are, get in and try to fix them.”

Q: Is there more opportunity? I mean, you ended the Cold War?
A: Oh, sure.

Q: (inaudible) Middle East, a lot of people think...
A: Yeah. These pessimists out there. Well, let them look back when we had superpower confrontation, nuclear power, staring across a great abyss at each other. OK. Let them... If they think things are tough today ask them how they’d like to have been a citizen in Czechoslovakia or Hungary when the tanks rolled in. They didn’t like things today, how about back in the Vietnam War or back when I served in World War II? We have a world that’s essentially at peace, certainly as far as the United States go. We’ve got many blessings to count and I am not sympathetic to those who just want to point out the
things that are bad. As far as I’m concerned, the glass is far more than half full and it ain’t half empty.

Q: Doesn’t the world need their leadership to help guide to the next (inaudible)?

A: Yeah, they need it. They need to sit around, stop wringing their hands, and feeling sorry for themselves. That’s my view.

Q: Oh, we agree, actually, and that’s part of the purpose of this tape.

A: Good.

Q: And thank you very, very much.

A: All right. Well, I’m out of here.

Q: A real honor.

A: Good to see you guys.

END OF AUDIO FILE