

**Timothy J. May Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 03/17/1976**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Timothy J. May  
**Interviewer:** William Hartigan  
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**Biographical Note**

Timothy J. May (1932-2011) was an attorney, a consultant for the Executive Office of the President from 1961 to 1962, and chief counsel for the Subcommittee on Stockpile of the Armed Services Committee in the United States Senate from 1962-1963. This interview focuses on the 1960 presidential campaign, working as a consultant for the Kennedy administration, and working for the Post Office, among other topics.

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Of

Timothy May

To the

John F. Kennedy Library

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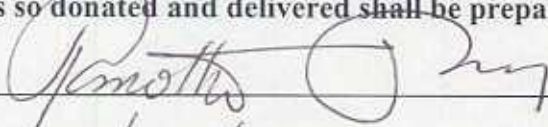
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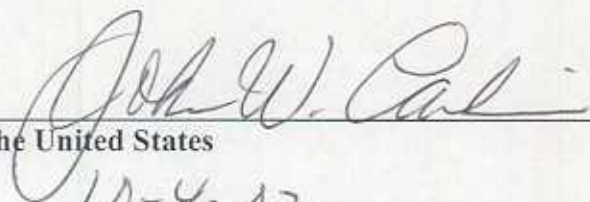
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Oral History Interview

With

TIMOTHY J. MAY

March 17, 1976  
Washington, DC

By William Hartigan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HARTIGAN: Tim May started in Washington as a law clerk for a Judge Danniberg, United States Court of Appeals. He later became a consultant in the White House for the President on the preference to the stockpiling. Later he went to the Hill and became counsel for Senator Symington's [Stuart Symington] investigating committee on stockpiling, then on to the Maritime Commission as managing director, and then finally, as general counsel for the Post Office Department. Tim, when was the first time you met President Kennedy?

MAY: I first met the president around the end of 1956. At that time I was in my third year of law school and I was editor-in-chief of the Georgetown Law Journal. We had received an interest from the senator's office in publishing a law journal article which the senator, with the assistance, of course, of his staff, had written about the regulation of lobbying activities. And so I went up to see the senator and some of his staff people, Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], Lee White [Lee C. White] and Joe Doyle, as a matter of fact. Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan].

We were very interested in the article so I collaborated on the editing of it with Sorensen and Lee White largely, and saw the senator several times during that occasion and we subsequently did publish his article. That would have been in early 1957, when it was published.

HARTIGAN: When was the first time you came in contact with the Kennedy

organization?

MAY: In August of 1960 and largely through John Nolan [John E. Nolan], who was working in the Kennedy advance operation with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and Dick Maguire [Richard Maguire]. John knew of my interest in getting involved in the campaign and he brought me in to meet Dick Maguire and Kenny.

And they did have immediate need for somebody to go down and advance a trip that the president was planning in Houston in the early part of September. The format of the trip was not, hadn't been finally worked out, but at that time they had received an interest from some of the Baptist ministers in Houston in having Senator Kennedy appear before the group of ministers. Basically to allay, or to examine the question of whether a Catholic could be a fit President of the United States, which as you recall was quite an issue at the time. So it was nothing had been agreed and the format had not been agreed to, although when I left there was some discussion that perhaps what they would have the senator do would be to meet in a closed television studio with a panel of the ministers, perhaps three or four, and discuss the issues. Interestingly enough, there were two letters sent inviting Senator Kennedy to appear. One letter was a letter which was the public letter which said that the ministers did not believe that religion was properly an issue in the election, and that the real issues were the major political issues of the day, defense spending, the missile gap, the high unemployment rate, and the run of the bread and butter issues and the problems faced in a cold war atmosphere at the time. A second confidential letter accompanied this letter, which in effect said, "Disregard the first letter, you know what we're really interested in. We want to get into this religious question." As a matter of fact, have copies of both of those letters. Then when I arrived in Houston the first thing that happened was that I discovered a newspaper story reciting the fact that the day before an advance man from Boston had been in--I think it was either Austin or San Antonio--and was issuing commands to the Texans in his Bostonian accent, and they finally invited him to leave town. So, being admonished by that newspaper story when I was greeted by the Texas contingent I was going to work with, I affected at least a southwestern drawl--which wasn't too hard since my mother was from Texas--and they said "Where are you from?" And I said "I'm from Colorado, my mother's from Texas." So, I got along alright with the Texans and basically the format we worked out was that the president would come in, we'd have a large rally at the Houston Coliseum followed by a meeting with the ministers, but that was still tentative. But when I got into discussions with the ministers and it became evident that they were not interested at all in having a meeting in a closed television studio with just a few representatives. They wanted Senator Kennedy to appear before all five hundred members of the Greater Houston Ministerial Alliance. This was a very tricky question. We didn't know really whether we were being set up or whether we were going to be treated fairly and this was a genuine overture on their part. A lot depended upon the chairman of the committee invitation. The Reverend George \_\_\_\_\_ was his name; I believe that was his name. And he was someone that I finally developed a great deal of confidence in and I believed that he really did want to have a fair discussion of the issue and that he really wasn't trying to lay any trap for the senator. Although that didn't mean that there weren't a lot of members of his association who might very well have. But, it was a very chancy and risky venture and there was a lot of discussion back and forth with



Washington as to whether this thing would go on or not. But it was finally tentatively agreed that we would meet with the ministers, all five hundred of them in the Rice Hotel. The logistics were difficult because Senator Kennedy had to go out to the coliseum, and as you know, you always try to draw a very large crowd at your rally so it looks like there's a lot of support and enthusiasm for the candidate. It was widely advertised that the senator was to be on television, meeting with the ministers. And this was going to be on a statewide TV hookup. All the stations in the state. Interestingly enough, the costs of that statewide TV hookup, I understand, were paid for by Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. At least he said that he paid for it out of his own pocket. The format also called for, and this was at Johnson's insistence, that he would accompany Kennedy into the meeting with the ministers and that he was--he wanted to be sitting right up on the podium with the senator. In fact, he wanted to be the one who could introduce him. There had been a lot of talk that Johnson really wasn't supporting Kennedy and that he wasn't really going to do much for him. And Johnson was very concerned to make it clear that he was totally behind Kennedy and was going to do everything he could for him and he wanted this forum to make that clear. The Speaker, Sam Rayburn [Samuel T. Rayburn], was going to be there as well. And the idea was that, you know, they would all troop in together.

Well, the day before we met with the.... The day before the senator was due in.... Jim--who you may remember--who was a campaign aide and who had himself previously been a Protestant minister, had flown in and we had a large meeting with the ministers. And, at this point we were informed by the ministers that a number of their members had become extremely concerned because of the publicity about the meeting, for fear that they were going to be exploited for political purposes. And they insisted that Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn and the Texas politicians could not accompany Kennedy into that meeting. And so this caused considerable consternation back and forth, and again there was a lot of discussion back and forth with Washington. And there was extreme concern on the part of the staff, and I believe a number of his top staff people wanted to scratch the event because they were so concerned about it. And I am informed that, I was, and I have every reason to believe that Kennedy himself made the decision that he would meet with them against the advice of most of his top staff. Perhaps I thought he ought to meet with them because I still was confident that we--that these were honorable people we were dealing with, but I was quite naive myself at the time and pretty green politically. So, my judgment didn't count for much, except that I did have some confidence in these people. We had arranged to have a large TV screen, closed-circuit TV screen, put up in the Houston Coliseum so that we could tell people that they could come to the coliseum, to the rally, and not miss the TV show, which was going to go on right afterwards. And we were, because otherwise we were very concerned that a lot of people just wouldn't show up, preferring to watch this confrontation on television. So, we advertised that fact, that they were going to be able to watch the TV show right at the coliseum on this closed circuit screen. And that did seem--we did have a terrific turnout at the coliseum. In any event, on the day that the president, that senator Kennedy arrived, was to arrive, I got a call from Walter Jenkins [Walter L. Jenkins]. And Walter wanted to make sure what the arrangements were for Lyndon Johnson and at that time I had to inform him that the ministers had laid down the conditions that Johnson and Rayburn could not accompany Kennedy into the coliseum, and if it did happen, they would all get up and walk out. And so Walter Jenkins said, "Well, you're going to have to tell Senator Johnson because

I'm not going to tell him that." So I said well alright--I had never met Lyndon Johnson before--and so we had a.... It was a long, as you may know, a very long ride from the Houston airport into the city. And we had of course, made efforts--as you often do--to try to arrange for crowds at different spots. But, interestingly enough, it's such a long ride and time was so precious that we didn't plan anything on the motorcade route. But spontaneously, and really without any effort on our part, large parts of that route were lined with people with homemade signs 'cause they knew we'd be coming in that way. And it was a rather, you know, interesting and encouraging sign, because there was great doubt as to the acceptance that Kennedy was going to have in Texas.

And so, in any event, the meeting at the coliseum went well and I did get a call right before we left for the coliseum from Lyndon Johnson, actually it was from Lloyd Hand [Lloyd Nelson]. And Lloyd Hand discussed the matter again with me and I told him, you know, that it just couldn't be done. So, at the coliseum during the speeches, interestingly enough the person we selected to introduce, to be the master of ceremonies, the person was Leon Jaworski, who wasn't very much known at that time outside of Texas. And during the festivities Lloyd Hand came over and got me and said that "Senator Johnson wants to talk to you." So, I went over and Johnson put his large hand on my arm and began to squeeze and said, "Now, you know," he said, "I really do have to go with Senator Kennedy to the meeting with the ministers." I told him, I said "Senator, you can't. It's.... In the first place we have to keep you here, so that you can keep the crowd in their places until the television comes on. If you leave these people are all going just be apt to be sitting here and so we had planned that this could be an opportunity for you to speak to them. And more over," I said, "the ministers have just insisted that none should go into that meeting room. No one except the candidate himself, and that none of his staff could go in." And that wasn't true. They had not placed any limitations on Kennedy's own staff going in. But in order to reassure Johnson that this wasn't something particularly pointed at him, which in fact it was, by the ministers, I said that they couldn't have because they were so concerned by the political overtones of the meeting that they insisted that there could not be any of the campaign aides, and other identifiable political figures. So, very reluctantly Johnson accepted that, and there wasn't much else he could do about it. He was extremely annoyed about it. And we then left and went back to the Rice Hotel and after a brief rest we took the senator down and I told the staff that I had assured Senator Johnson that none of the staff were going to go in.

And so Kenny O'Donnell and others did stay up in the suite except for Ted Sorensen. And Ted came down with me as we took the senator down to the meeting room with the ministers and as the senator was going in I told Ted he couldn't go in. And Ted had these great big credentials that we used to wear, the campaign staff aide, and Ted said, "Well, I'm going in. Nobody's going to keep me out." So, I ripped off his campaign credentials, which annoyed him a great deal, but he did go in. He was the only aide to the senator that went, actually went, into the room. I stood outside the door and listened and watched it through a cracked door. But other than the senator--he went in there all alone except for Ted. And I guess Ted had particular interest in that he had a hand in crafting some of the remarks the senator made. And they really were just the right thing to say to that audience. And as you--as is known--it was, the senator acquitted himself perfectly. They asked all the hard religious questions and he handled himself perfectly. So that the tape of that meeting with the minister, which went on for I believe some forty-five minutes, was extremely useful to be

replayed and it was replayed in a number of regions where there was--where it was felt that there was--some anti-Catholic bias and concern on people's parts. And it was a very effective campaign instrument because it did show Jack Kennedy under the most severe circumstances being tested and questioned on these very questions and handling himself beautifully. And the senator was extremely pleased with the whole day's events. And by this time he was ready to leave. Senator Johnson and his party had gotten back to the hotel and we all rode out to the airport together, and the senator, Senator Johnson made much of the fact that he just couldn't understand after he paid ten thousand dollars out his own pocket to pay for a statewide hookup, how they wouldn't even let him in the room. Which amused Senator Kennedy greatly.

And then there was banter about Mike Mansfield [Michael J. Mansfield]. Mansfield was to succeed Johnson as the majority leader. Kennedy was telling Johnson: Well, he's been doing all the work for the last two years, it's only right he has the title. So, it was a very jocular and very, very friendly occasion. And the relationship between the two--even at that early point in the campaign--was splendid. It couldn't have been better. So, that was the end of that first trip.

HARTIGAN: Tim, having been off the other, on the receiving end of communications that were coming back from Texas, with regard to the meeting with the ministers, as I recall it, you were in favor of this meeting in the initial stages, and then as things went on, did you have some questions later on, just prior to the decision as to whether it would be good or wise to have it?

MAY: No, well there were always great reservations about it but, throughout the thing I was persuaded at least that the minister that we were dealing with was somebody you could trust. And interestingly enough he himself had been a fallen away Catholic. He was raised as a Catholic and, you know, had become a Protestant. And he was a Protestant missionary in one of the Latin American countries and had been expelled from there by one--the Catholic authorities that arranged to have him expelled from that country. So that with that background, it raised even greater doubts, but once you spent some time with this fellow and Woodrow Seals [Woodrow B. Seals], who was the chairman of the Harris county Kennedy-Johnson campaign, and who's now a federal judge in Texas, and was a good friend of this fellow. Woodrow had great confidence in him. Woodrow was the leader of the liberal wing of the party in Harris county at that time. Texas politics is really Byzantine or it was then, I guess it still is. It was all divided up into factions. In fact, we couldn't have one headquarters, we had two separate headquarters in Harris county because these people found it very difficult to even speak to each other. The Democratic party ranged all the way from the most arch conservative oil types, to liberals such as a woman very familiar named Frankie Randolph [Francis C. Randolph], who had her own newspaper she put out, which openly advocated socialism, she wanted socialized medicine, take-over of, the nationalization of a number of industries; so that every conceivable part of the Democratic party which represented Texas--it was very difficult to get them all to coalesce under one tent. So we, in fact, had a co-chairman arrangement with Woodrow, representing the liberals and Johnny Crooker [John H. Crooker] who,

subsequently, as you know, worked for Lyndon Johnson in the White House. Johnny, and he was chairman of the CAB [Civil Aeronautics Board].... [Interruption]

HARTIGAN: Tim, sorry for the interruption but we do have to change the tape once in a while. I believe I was, I was asking you the question as to whether or not you had been contacted during your stay in Houston advancing that trip, whether you had been contacted by any of the Catholic clergy with reference to this meeting?

MAY: No, I never had. Never.

HARTIGAN: Tim, you have done or had done other advances in other cities. Would you care to relate to us some of the experience you've had...? [Interruption]

MAY: Well, one of the more interesting stops--although it wasn't--was right here in Washington DC and that was the advance for the second television debate. And we had interest from other local people since they knew the debate was going to take place. That we'd try to schedule some other stops at the same time. And a group of young students from American University--which was just a block away from the TV studio where the debate was going to take place--contacted me on their own and said that they hoped that he could come by after the debate. And I couldn't make any commitment because the senator was very concerned to do as well as he had done in the first debate. And it was very hard to get his attention as to any other campaign activities other than that debate. I did tell the young fellow from American U. that we'd do the best we could. Additionally, Howard University that evening was having a conference. They had civil rights leaders in from all over the United States, and they had invited the senator to appear before them and that had been turned down because, again because, of the focus of concentration on the debate. But, we then also learned that Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] had been invited and he declined. And it seemed like a perfect opportunity, if we could persuade the senator to do it, for him to really contrast his own position and his attitude toward the civil rights movement with that of Nixon, and Nixon was refusing to appear. And so the decision was made that we would do that, make that appearance after the TV debate. What was very interesting though, was at the studio Kennedy, I know he was tense because I picked him up at his house and I met with him earlier in the day and I know he was very tense, and yet he still always had that grace under fire. But the contrast between him and Nixon at the TV studio.... Nixon had gotten there earlier and he was pacing up and down the hall outside the studio. And he looked absolutely ghastly. And the contrast was fantastic. The ability to appear cool and graceful, which Kennedy had, was never more in evidence. And Nixon was at his worst. At his worst, as you know, Nixon's an appalling sight. In any event, the second TV debate, I think the consensus, or at least it seemed in my biased view, was that Kennedy won the second TV debate, too, although the immediate post mortem by the senator and his top aides afterwards was that they thought they had come out ahead, they had put the edge on him but it hadn't been as clear cut superior showing as in the first debate. But, the senator was relaxed and somewhat pleased to have it over and so he was very receptive of my suggestion then that we stop by American University, and we did. And every kid in that school was out on the campus. And they had, it was held outside and it was

at night. But it was just this huge, huge mob of kids. And again, this was something the kids had done on their own, other than contact me, we had no involvement, we didn't really advance that stop or anything else. It was just something that we were able to sandwich into the schedule. But the senator loved it and the kids just couldn't get as close as they wanted, to touch him, to see him. And it was one of the more exhilarating moments of the campaign because of the spontaneity of it and the naturalness of the occasion. The senator really was buoyed by things like that, as I'm sure any candidate would be.

We left there and went to Howard University and an amusing anecdote as Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] knew that Jack was going to go to Howard University afterwards, she had not come to the TV studio. She'd stayed home to watch it on television and as you recall she was pregnant at the time, rather well along, and so it wasn't, she did not do that much campaigning because of that condition at the time. In any event, as we were approaching Howard University in our motorcade suddenly this figure darted out in front of our car, the car with the candidate in it. And the car had to screech to a halt coming within inches of hitting this person who darted in front of the car. And it was Jackie, who had been waiting there and she wanted to join up with the senator. And this was her means of making sure she met the campaign motorcade on schedule before it got to the university. But, we almost lost the candidate's wife that night. And she got in, and it was again a very stirring performance by the senator before this group of civil rights leaders, and he was very pleased with that. After the--after that was over he pulled me aside and he asked me if I could set aside just two cars apart from the motorcade, not tell the press because he wanted to go stop by Joe Alsop's [Joseph W. Alsop Jr.] house. Alsop was having a little social occasion in his home in Georgetown and the senator wanted just a bit of relaxation. And he didn't want all the press and other people tagging along. So, we did. We sent off the motorcade, kind of a false motorcade with the press in pursuit, but with no candidate in the motorcade. And we took the other two cars over to Joe Alsop's Georgetown. This cost a little bit of trouble because the schedule was that he was supposed to leave Howard University and go immediately to the airport to catch a plane because he had still another campaign stop in another city that night. And because of the way this happened no one at the airport, none of the other people at the other end knew that there was this further diversion from the schedule. And, in any event, we went to Georgetown and the senator and Jackie went into Alsop's house and we waited a considerable period of time and I went up twice to try to get the senator. The second time Joe Alsop came to the door and I told him that if he didn't bring him out I was coming in and getting him. And Alsop in his very clipped, British precise speech said that it wasn't at all necessary for me to come in and get him that he would forthwith produce the senator. And senator did come out with Jackie and followed by Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy]. And they got in the car and Bobby had some last minute instructions for the senator. The principle ones being, that I remember, which were amusing, that he was concerned that Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] really wasn't working hard enough out on the west coast and he wanted to make sure, he wanted Jack to give a pep talk to Teddy and make sure he'd work harder out there. And a few other instructions. And his final parting words to the senator were amusing. He said, "Remember Jack, I can't do it all myself." So, we went off in the motorcade and there was an interesting discussion in our hike between Jackie and the senator about oh, an interview she was going to do for one of the magazines, the mass circulation magazines and just what she ought to say and how she ought to say it. And it was

a very earnest, lengthy discussion on the way to the airport about that. So, we arrived at the airport, much to the relief of all those waiting at the airport, who really weren't--who didn't know exactly what had happened to the candidate. A rather baffled press crowd were relieved to find that the candidate finally made the airport.

HARTIGAN: Tim were there any other.... [Interruption.]

MAY: No, the, you know, there were just the routine advance stops, nothing in particular.... [Interruption] ....yes, I worked on some of those committees. I don't remember exactly just what I did other than having a terrible time trying to get to everything in the snow.

HARTIGAN: Did you have anything to do with the planning?

MAY: No, I didn't do the planning. I wasn't involved in the planning. I was on some of the committees and just carrying out assignments.

HARTIGAN: You then joined the administration in various capacities, did you not?

MAY: Yes, about six months after the president took office, Kenny O'Donnell and Dick Maguire asked me to come over as a consultant to the White House and work on some matters. They had, among other things, they had been reviewing previous policies and practices of the strategic and critical material stock pile, which was a program under which there was a stock piling of critical materials that would be needed in a time of war. And so huge procurements had been made, largely during the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] administration, of some ninety-eight different kinds of strategic and critical materials. And there were, there had been several general accounting office reports and investigations that suggested that there may have been some improprieties in the contracting functions and moreover there needed to be the evolution of a new policy as to what the future, the future policy, should be for the stock pile. And I worked on that as a consultant in the White House for several months, reviewed a number of the files, and the conclusion of which, was the president determined that a senate investigation of the whole matter, the policy, the past policies, what the future policies should be, the contracting and procurement procedures that had been pursued. And he asked Senator Symington to chair such an investigation, which was a rather unique thing to do. It's very rare that the executive branch requests the legislative branch to conduct an investigation of that which relates to the executive branch. In fact, I can't remember any other instance that it ever occurred. Senator Symington complied. He was the sub-committee chairman of a defense sub-committee on stock piling the naval petroleum reserves, so he was the appropriate person to conduct the investigation. The senator did ask the White House to supply someone who would be helpful to the senate committee who on the investigation and who was knowledgeable about it. I was asked to go up to the Senate and become counsel, set up the council, for the Senate investigation which I did. And in order to conduct that investigation it was necessary for the president to declassify mass amounts of material. Because heretofore everything connected with the stock piling, the most innocuous materials, were stamped Secret, Top Secret,

confidential, or what have you. Everything, every scrap of paper dealing with it had some kind of label on it and it was not possible to have a public investigation of this matter without a declassification of all these materials. Which is one.... An interesting aside, we did find that during the course of the investigation, even though this was an investigation that the president had asked for, and that largely its focus on past practices involved the policies and practices of a previous administration. And even though all of the new Cabinet officers were not in any way associated with these past practices, and even though these matters had been declassified, we found tremendous resistance from one department to the next to get the information in the files from them. And leading finally to.... In fact, the State Department was the most difficult to get cooperation with because a number of the policies had been developed or altered because of foreign policy considerations. And there was.... And every time we wanted to get a useful document, the State Department would insist that it not be declassified. As a consequence, it was finally necessary to have Kenny O'Donnell call a meeting of representatives from some seven or eight agencies who were one way or another involved in stock piling practices. And the meeting--and no one there was less than an assistant-secretary level--and the meeting lasted five minutes. Kenny came in and he too said listen, he said "The president asked for this investigation. Tim says you people haven't been cooperating, and I don't ever want to hear that again." And he left. And there was, it was literally that brief. And there was a much greater cooperation from everyone, except the State Department, thereafter.

The State Department, in its defense, was concerned not just to cover up just past practices, that were to say the least foolish, but there was a certain continuity of the program and a number of the things they were concerned about that may have had a current impact on relations with governments. And so they did have great concern about that. But, in any event, the investigation did focus a great deal on some highly questionable contracts that had been awarded, for example, George Humphrey [George M. Humphrey] who had been Eisenhower's Secretary of the Treasury. His company, The Hanna Companies [The Hanna Mining Company] of Cleveland got an extremely lucrative procurement contract wherein the government put up all the money to build a thirty million dollar nickel plant, then bought all the nickel from the Hanna Company. At the end the contract gave the nickel company to the, gave all the plant facilities absolutely free, to the Hanna Companies. And there was some, a number of other procurement contracts that were, clearly there was direct involvement by high Republican administration officials in bailing out contractors who.... For example all the copper contracts--these are long term supply contracts in which at the time the contracts were made the price of copper was very low. Well, as soon as the price of copper became high, because of sudden shortage, all these contractors came in and begged to be relieved, and to have suspensions of their obligations to deliver to the stock pile so they could.... A number of them were selling the copper under their contracts at twenty to twenty-five cents and the world price was going a dollar, a dollar and a half. So, they simply diverted all their contract amounts to the market, made enormous profits and through direct intervention at a very high level. This was all covered up, and they were papered over. So, there were a number of incidents such as that that we focused on. The investigation, as well, did and tried to chart a future for the stock pile, where it should go, what true needs of the country might be in an era of limited war, where counter insurgency type of action or economic warfare, the different kinds of warfare the country would be likely to fight,

whereas the policies which was developed and pursued during the Eisenhower administration, all assumed, pretty much, there would be a conventional five-year World War II type war, which is of course, not the kind of war, if we ever got into war, we would have.

So, it did have that aspect to it as well, one of the more amusing things that did happen was that, as you recall the Billie Sol Estes investigation was going on at the same time and Billie Sol was connected with Democratic politics. And the newspapers--largely I always believed because the guy's name was Billie Sol Estes, if his name had been Jack Estes I don't think it would have gotten that much play. But it did annoy the administration to see so much publicity being given to that. And our investigation was going on somewhat simultaneously and the press rarely gave the same kind of coverage to this investigation because it was a much more complicated matter when there was.... When something was done it was done in, you know, very complicated ways, manipulations of contracts, one of false statement goals. For example, in 1954-56 there was a severe slump in the mining industry. And the mining industry arranged to have its own people put in charge at the interior department and at the office of defense mobilization, to set the procurement practices. And all of the procurement requirements for the stock pile for lead and zinc were falsified in order to bail out the severe mining depression. To the extent that at the time we were looking at it we had a twenty-six year supply of lead and zinc. All of which had been largely purchased to keep these mines going and this was part of the Republican administration policy. So, you know, these were more sophisticated types of shenanigans. They were much harder for the press to follow. But, during one series I believe where we were looking into the, you know, some of the juicier contracts scandals that had been conducted, the New York Herald-Tribune, and Bob Donovan [Robert J. Donovan], who was the correspondent for the Tribune, was covering the stock pile hearing and a rather juicy story had broken that day, and the New York Herald-Tribune did not carry one line about this, what the results of our investigation at that hearing had been that day. And the president exploded and that's what led to his cancellation of the New York Herald-Tribune. Which was a celebrated incident at the time.

But that is exactly why he cancelled the New York Herald-Tribune and as you recall, Jack Whitney's [John Hay Whitney] newspaper. And as a matter of fact, we got Jack Whitney's name into this investigation because he had large holdings in some sulfur companies and at the time he was ambassador to the United Kingdom, and while he was ambassador he sent a telegram to the office of Defense Mobilization involving a contract with this company that he was a controlling shareholder of. So, a lot of names came into this investigation. In any event, Donovan called me after the president, after it became public that the president had cancelled his New York Herald-Tribune and he called me about the story. And I asked him, I said "Well, why hadn't--why didn't you run it?" He said "Well," he said "Well, we knew about the story, I was there, I heard it, but I didn't believe it. That's why we didn't write the story." Which I thought was incredible for a reporter.

HARTIGAN: [Interruption]

MAY: ....I don't recall offhand, no I don't. But it was one of the juicier pieces we had and the, evidently the president had followed, you know, the course



of the investigation, because he was keenly aware that the Tribune--which had given great play to the Billie Sol Estes scandals--had not written one line about this part of our investigation. And Donovan himself, as he said, well the reason he hadn't, was he just couldn't believe what was being revealed during the investigation. In any event, the seems all kind of came and went. Then, of course the investigation lasted about a year and a half and they ended up with a report. And at the conclusion of that I left the committee, and at that time the Federal Maritime Commission....

HARTIGAN: [Interruption] ....at the end of the investigation was there any charge of illegality made against anybody? Anybody get indicted, anybody go to jail?

MAY: No one got indicted, but there were a number of people who came close to it. We referred a number of matters to the Justice, the criminal division of the Justice Department for their examination. And a number of these things were beyond the statute of limitations anyway. One of the more interesting incidents that involved the nickel contract; George Humphrey, who had been Eisenhower's secretary of treasury, was involved in. Among other things we had developed that they had defrauded the government of millions of dollars because of their accounting practices during the course of this contract. And the Justice Department did bring a civil suit against the Hanna Mining Companies for the recovery of those monies. And the Hanna Mining Companies had retained the head of one of the biggest accounting firms in the world as a witness to testify that gee everything they had done was perfectly proper. And the federal judge before deciding the case, as a matter of fact, said "Well, in order to find for the government I will have to find that the head of one of the biggest accounting firms in the world has committed perjury." And he then proceeded to find for the government. And the Hanna companies lost that case and they did have to pay back to the government several million dollars, I don't remember the exact amount, but, no one was indicted.

HARTIGAN: [Interruption]

MAY: Well, I mentioned when the investigation was closed I was leaving the Hill and Kenny O'Donnell asked me to go see Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] because they had another assignment that they wanted me to take on. At that time the Maritime Commission had become somewhat of an embarrassment to the administration because Manny Cellers' [Emanuel Celler] Judiciary Committee was very upset. He'd conducted several investigations of the failure of the maritime policies and the failure to police the industry. And Senator Douglas' [Paul H. Douglas] Joint Economic Committee was also complaining about the failures of the Maritime Commission. So, it was becoming somewhat of an embarrassment and they said that they wanted me to go over the direction of the commission, as the managing director. And I quite frankly told them that at that point I had never even heard of the Federal Maritime Commission. And that didn't seem to be one of the things that more uniquely qualified me for that post. In any event I did go over there and the last words they said were, "We will consider your job--you will be doing a very good job if we never hear of the Federal Maritime Commission again." And so, here

was a very interesting two and a half years, the maritime policies are not that well known in this country and people don't have that much concern about them because we don't have that much of a fleet and it isn't that important to this country. It's very important, of course, to those who were employed in that industry, but compared to the major stake that the European countries have in shipping as a form of currency earner and as a major industry, our interest is relatively insignificant. A large part of the job was to regulate the shipping cartels, the international shipping cartels, which they and the European governments deeply resented because they thought it was an invasion of their sovereignty, that we, the United States believed that it could tell all the shipping companies--and ninety-six percent of our commerce is carried on foreign bottoms, not American ships, so largely we were in the business of regulating foreign shipping companies. And that created constant international conflicts that the State Department again.... In my career I kept running into the State Department and their usual clientism, where their concern was much more to keep the foreign governments happy than to--it seemed to be--than to our own interest, but while no one here seemed particularly concerned about it, in Europe and in England the Maritime Commission was page one stuff. Every time we did do something to enforce the law, which is what these congressional committees were demanding we do, we were literally end up on page one. And one headline in one of the London newspapers, at one time, said the "United States declares shipping war on England." And it in fact resulted in three hand written notes from the Prime Minister of England to the President of the United States. Kennedy got one of those and subsequently Lyndon Johnson got two. All complaining about me. Which was kind of embarrassing because the United States even knew we were doing anything then in Europe. It was, there was great consternation, but it was a lot of fun.

HARTIGAN: [Interruption]

MAY: No, this was the Federal Maritime Commission.

HARTIGAN: ...World War II the United States... [Interruption] excuse the delay, there's a change of tapes. Are there any other points or any other incidents in the maritime, your maritime, activities you'd like to comment on? Or do you think you've pretty well covered that?

MAY: No, I think we've covered that, Bill.

HARTIGAN: Tim, you were in the Maritime Commission at the time of the assassination, is that right?

MAY: That's right.

HARTIGAN: Would you like to relate your activities at the time you read about the assassination?

MAY: Yes, I'd been having lunch on the Hill and I was coming back to my office and, the fact is, I was scheduled to go over that afternoon to the White

House to see Ralph Dungan. Ralph had called me and said he wanted to see me and as I was coming into the building, I was greeted by a number of staff people who were all crying and in hysterics, and they told me that the president had been shot in Dallas. And I jumped in the elevator and went to my office, got the radio on and just at the time we turned the radio on Matt Kilduff [Malcolm M. Kilduff] was announcing that the president was dead. And so--unbelievable shock, nobody knew, nobody knew what to do so I just told everybody to go home. I closed the office immediately, told everyone to go home. And I still remember driving home. It was an eerie, eerie town at just about that time, I guess about that time, about two, two-thirty in the afternoon. Driving home there was just this kind of weird eerie sense in the day. Then, you know, just like everybody else, I watched all of it on television. I went down to the.... I went to the funeral, and I visited, walked by the bier, went to the cathedral, but it was grim.

One of the few things I do remember--and vividly--about it, 'cause I couldn't even talk about it at the time. And I couldn't, the fact is, I couldn't talk about it for a long time after that. One point--I think it was either that same day or early the next day--seeing Pat Moynihan [Daniel P. Moynihan] being interviewed on television, and being able to speak so eloquently and articulately about the president and what he meant. And I didn't know whether I really admired Moynihan or whether I hated him for being able to just--being able to talk about it. So I thought either that Moynihan was a really brilliant, eloquent person, or that he was no good. And I've never, to this day, been able to make up my mind.

HARTIGAN: And it keeps getting more confusing all the time.

MAY: Well, I thought I'd finally made up my mind when he went to work for Nixon. I decided, hell, he was no damned good, but lately he seemed a little better.

HARTIGAN: Tim, how long did you stay in the administration after the assassination of President Kennedy?

MAY: Well, I stayed in all through Lyndon Johnson's tenure.

HARTIGAN: I mean you were in the maritime, now?

MAY: Federal Maritime Commission. I stayed there until February, 1966. As you know, Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] a few months before that had been appointed Postmaster General. And... [Interruption] Larry had asked me to come over because the previous General Counsel had passed away before Larry was named Postmaster General. So, there was a vacancy and Larry asked me to come over. I was ready to leave the commission at that time. We had done largely all the things that Congress had directed we do, and we implemented all the new regulations that needed to be implemented. And I felt my job there was done anyway. And it seemed a good time to move.

HARTIGAN: Tim, in the very beginning of the interview, you mentioned an article that

you had collaborated with part of the Kennedy staff with reference to lobbying at the time that you were in Georgetown. Just for the record, do you have that article or is there a copy of that?

MAY: Yes, I don't have it here in the office with me. I don't think.... Wait a minute.

HARTIGAN: My point is that if we don't have it in the library I'd like to get it, I'd like to--because I'll talk to you about the memorabilia afterwards but as long as you raised that particular one it sounds appropriate in as much as the lobbying situation...

MAY: I do have it somewhere and I know it was a rather interesting article because it tracked the history of lobbying and the history of legislation and legislative attempts to deal with it. And it is a rather interesting document. And I think the article grew out of a major statement on the subject that Jack Kennedy had delivered in the Senate. And then it was expanded into a written law article.

HARTIGAN: And also the same thing holds true to the two letters you mentioned about...

MAY: Right, Bill. I will dig those out.

HARTIGAN: And while we're on it, possibly if you have taken the time to review whatever memorabilia you have and if you'd be kind enough to see your way clear to donate them to the library we'll give them an appropriate spot there for posterity to review, go over, and possibly use.

MAY: I will. Anything that I think is appropriate, I'd be happy to....

HARTIGAN: Give me a call and we'll have somebody come down and evaluate it for you. Tim, in the Post Office, you were there at the time that the legislation was drafted and passed, setting up this new quasi-corporate structure of the Post Office. Do you have any thoughts you'd like to express with reference to them now that you've seen it in action? For what, it's two years now, I guess.

MAY: Well, actually it's been--the law was passed in August of 1970 and it began to be implemented in January of 1971. So, we've had about five years of the--under the Postal Reorganization Act. I must say that it's hard for me to be totally objective about it because I was one of the several people that Larry had asked to work on this. He did have the idea himself initially and he didn't know whether it was a crazy idea or whether it was a sensible one. And he asked several of us on the staff to study it and to work up a basic paper on it. And so the broad outlines of what ultimately became the Postal Reorganization Act were contained in a major paper that we did put together on it. And it was our recommendation that it was something that should be tried and it really was the best way to go. But, the, and as you know, a presidential commission was appointed to

really flush it out and do a much deeper study and make recommendations, but there really weren't any really significant differences between the basic recommendations that we had made and the recommendations of the so-called Kapel Commission [President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service, 1968].

But, what happened was that the fundamental error that was made when it was legislated, was that the idea was taken up by the new administration under Nixon. And it seems to me that they primarily saw it as an opportunity and as a vehicle to save money, because the Post Office had become a constant drain on the treasury. And as you know, it had not been self-sustaining, and in fact, since world War II, something like seventeen percent--on the average seventeen percent--of the cost of operating the Post Office had to be paid out of the general treasury, over and above what was collected from postage. And the administration, the Republican administration--it struck me--rather than being concerned with preserving or conserving a basic service to the American people, and doing that in the best and most efficient way it could be done, were much more preoccupied with the opportunity to save some money. And therefore, they put into the Act, and they insisted on it, the absolute sine qua non of their proposal that this new entity be a break even operation. And I can't emphasize strongly enough that that was not part of the proposal that Larry O'Brien advanced. Larry O'Brien believed you should get politics--to the extent you could--out of the Post Office. Politics with a capital P. That you should free up the Post Office to be able to manage itself in a business-like way without the constant day to day interference and interruptions of various political forces, and largely those on the Hill, that you had to put the Post Office in a position to manage and deal with, on a fair basis, their employees and at that time they had in excess of seven hundred thousand employees. These things were part of his proposal, and they ended up as part of the Reorganization Act. But, what people must bear in mind is that postal employees at that time were substantially underpaid. And since the reform, and since there has been collective bargaining with the employees, the employees have at the bargaining table secured major gains. Without making any judgment as to whether they have now gone too far or not, and I just don't have any way of making that judgment, the fact is, though they have obtained substantial pay increases and benefit increases under the Postal Reorganization Act. That's the primary explanation of why the cost of the Postal Office has increased so substantially since the Postal Reorganization Act. But, where the Post Office today is, and it is in any technical sense of the term bankrupt, the Post Office has consumed its beginning equity of one point seven billion dollars, in addition to that, it will in this fiscal year spend another billion and a half dollars in short term operating debt. I don't mean long term debt, I mean short term operating debt. So that, in fact, they have over and above what they, the income that they've received since the organization has started, they will be close to three and a half billion dollars in debt. Now, part of the problem has been this mania that the administration has with breaking even. And it's fair to say that the administration is perfectly prepared to see the basic postal services scuttled rather than have any federal tax monies used to support what is one of the most fundamental of all public services. And there's the problem and that is what is going to increasingly become the problem. You have an administration that won't even consider giving additional money to the Post Office to maintain these basic services. If in fact the Post Office were still costing seventeen percent of the, if seventeen percent of the Post Offices costs, were still, still had to be paid for by the treasury, then the subsidy or whatever

you want to call it, the amount of money the government has to pay to run the Post Office would in this fiscal year be close to three billion dollars and it's not costing the federal government any. It's costing the federal government half that amount to run it. So, in that sense it has, Postal Reorganization has saved a lot of money. In fact, there are now about forty or fifty thousand fewer employees today than there were five years ago. And this is largely the result of tighter management and in substantially increased mechanization in the Post Office. There has been probably some slight deterioration in service. Not anywhere near the deterioration that the newspapers write about. But I--in my own judgment, there has been some slight deterioration in the overall quality of service. Largely attributable, frankly, to mistakes made by machines. In the old postal system, as you know, when a human being was doing all of this work by hand, he made a mistake and another guy down the line was going to catch it. Now, when one of these machines makes a mistake nobody catches that error until a couple weeks later. So, you now have these inordinate delays in a particular piece of mail. On the other hand, delivery of a large amount of mail is probably improved. But, when you average it out you can show that well, statistically delivery standards are probably close to being what they have, what they were five years ago. But, if you're one of the few persons who's been waiting for the letter that was delayed two weeks, the impression you're going to have is that service is worse, and getting worse. But, the postmaster general now finds himself in the situation where the budget bureau in the White House just told them flat-out they aren't going to give them any more money, and they can't raise rates any more than they already have, but they've had a constant cycle of rate increases and if they keep that up they'll lose volume and you'll get into this vicious cycle. And right now in fact, for the first time in modern history, there is a long term trend toward volume loss. That's in large part I think due to the price increases in the cost of postal services that have, that we've had in the fast five years, but also in part due to the change in the means that people have in communicating with each other, but that those trends are going to continue. So, the Post Office is going to be in a continually declining volume position, with an inability to shed cost at the same rate they lose volume. And there is no other course except if you want to maintain a fundamental service such as we, the American people, have become used to. There's no alternative except to continue to subsidize and substantially subsidize this basic government service. I don't see anything wrong with that because the people pay for all government services. And very frankly in terms of what they get from the post office, the ordinary citizen gets a lot more direct service and benefit from his post office than he does from any other branch of government. And the idea that his taxes shouldn't be used at all to support this basic service he's getting that you have, the privilege of having a mail man come to your house six days a week to deliver mail to you or come your office twice a week, the idea that you shouldn't have to pay anything in your tax, in your taxes, to support that is absurd in a system where all government services have to be paid for. And what you do is weigh the value of these services, the people, to see how you're going to allocate these resources, but I'm afraid that, you know, we have an administration now, who'd be perfectly content to see the service dismantled and gutted and a large part of it taken over by private enterprise.

HARTIGAN: Tim, we are very aware of the volume decline in the post office. However, with that in mind and it was an obvious situation, that it was declining, don't

you feel as though one has to question the judgment of the postal authorities in the amount of building facilities that went on in an era when there was a decline in the volume?

MAY: Well, there isn't any question that that was a major mistake made by these new managers. And I suppose we're lucky that it isn't worse than it is. But they've now got.... They built these twenty-one gigantic, huge facilities, and it cost in excess of a billion dollars, as a means of handling bulk mail. And almost everybody agrees that it was a major mistake, and if you could get the current postmaster general to really level with you he'd probably tell you he thinks it's a terrible mistake. But what's he going to do? These twenty-one facilities are out there and so the best thing--and he didn't build them--and it wasn't his judgment to put them up. His predecessors did that. But, it's there, so what are they going to do with it? They can't just scrap these things. But, that was a fundamental mistake that was made and it could have been worse because we came within a whiskers breath of them also going out and building a five billion dollar network of these huge things to handle preferential mail. Now that decision, happily, was killed. But why these people who were from private industry or supposed to know how to run businesses would go out, and without testing the concept by seeing how one of two of these facilities work, go out and build twenty-one of them, and then to find out that the thing doesn't work, is beyond me. But, it was a major and colossal mistake.

HARTIGAN: Alright, with that in mind, your statement of course, that the cost of operation still continues at its same, at its current level, will continue at its current level, and that as the decline in volume goes down the end will probably be the disbandment of the postal service, what happens to all this investment? Is there anything--any way that any of this can be salvaged?

MAY: Well, obviously a lot of these facilities would have some scrap value, but its hard to image they could be used for anything other than a big warehouse and then they may not be properly situated. And the equipment, the machinery that was designed especially for these, can't be really used in anybody else's business so you've got only salvage value out of that. So, you know, given the sunk in investment that you've got in those, probably the wise management course now is to fit them into your system the best way you can, and use them as best you can, although they're going to be inherently inefficient. In fairness to them, I dare say that perhaps five years ago when most of the planning for these things was completed, no one was forecasting a decline in volume this early. I remember some of the prognosticators were looking down the road twenty years ahead and saying that in twenty years you'd have the checkless society and people would be paying bills without ever sending things through the mail, but that was predicted for some time in the future. Nobody was predicting it was going to happen within four or five years.

HARTIGAN: Tim, one last question. What is the attitude of the--and I know you have some contact in dealings with the postal employees--what is their attitude, their moral, etc., at the moment?

MAY: The morale was extremely poor, which baffles me, because in terms of take home pay, they're much better off, much, much better off, than they ever were under the old system. I'd say that the morale is much worse among your middle level managers, supervisors and postmasters than it is among the rank and file. Your craft employees think their morale is not the best, but it's not as severe as the managerial, the middle level, and lower level managerial force. And that's--your talking about seventy or eighty thousand people and their morale couldn't be worse. But, it is baffling in a way because if you compare what's happened to them, to their wages, with comparable fellow employees in another government agencies, they're now making twenty to twenty-five percent more than their comparable level, in any other government agency, was five years ago, their relative position five years ago. So, you have a very curious situation where people are getting, who.... People have, in fact, been treated most handsomely in terms of their pay. But, evidently there's so much insecurity and in many cases confusion about what they should do and what's going to happen to them that its destroyed their morale. Now, of course, an employee isn't sure that he's not going to get transferred to another office and have to uproot his family. Of course, that's what happens in private industry as well. He's not sure anymore that he's going to have a job. Bearing in mind that there were seven hundred and thirty or forty thousand employees and now there's forty or fifty thousand fewer employees. And the, and if you.... When you have to continue to make cuts in your service, since eighty-six percent of the cost of the post office are labor related costs, you're talking about cutting people. That's how you cut service, you reduce your number of employees. So, I think that also has been very unsettling to them. But, it is--and it's probably just a lot of the personal relationships that have existed with the new managers down the line--that despite the handsome economic rewards they've had, they are much more demoralized.

HARTIGAN: Tim, are there any general personal observations you'd like to make with reference to President Kennedy's administration, his organization, before we close the interview?

MAY: Well, the basic observation is one that's often been made. That it, perhaps that we were all naive but it was a time when you really did believe in the capacity of the government to deliver the essential services that people need from their government and to inspire people to do things and that there was real hope of spreading American ideals and methods around the world. And as you know, everything has changed. But, a lot of that derived from style and a capacity for leadership that Kennedy had that we haven't seen since then. And if you just look at the balance sheet, of what was, of what legislation actually was enacted or what deeds were actually done, since it was a short term, it doesn't add up to that much. But in terms of the potential, the capacity to inspire people, the capacity to make people believe that their government really was working for them and not against them, it's what has been seriously missing. You can only speculate as to how different things may have been had Jack Kennedy lived.

HARTIGAN: Thank you very much, Tim May. And I'll be calling you in about a week to talk to you about the memorabilia that you will have a chance to dig out



and possibly donate to us. And this is William Hartigan signing off with Tim May in Washington.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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