

William J. Royan Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 07/09/74
Administrative Information

Creator: William J. Royan
Interviewer: Joan-Ellen Marci
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Biographical Note

Member, U.S. Air Force, Detachment 1, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada (1962-1965) during Robert Kennedy's climb of Mt. Kennedy (1965). In this interview, Royan discusses Robert F. Kennedy's climb of Mt. Kennedy.

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William J. Royan, Jr.
William J. Royan, Jr.

23 March 1975
Date

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Date

William J. Royan – RFK#1

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Oral History Interview

with

William J. Royan, Jr.

July 9, 1974
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Joan-Ellen Marci

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project
of the Kennedy Library

MARCI: How did you happen to be stationed in the
Yukon at that time?

ROYAN: Well, at the time I was assigned as NCOIC of
USAF [United States Air Force] Detachment #1.
It was an assignment out of Anchorage, and I
was assigned here in '62 right up to '65. So I had the
opportunity to be there when Senator Robert Kennedy came up
to make the climb.

MARCI: When you were there, had you advance knowledge
of Senator Kennedy coming? Were you assigned to
a detail to pick him up?

ROYAN: No. We had something like four or five hours notice that he was coming up, but we weren't assigned to any detail, actually, to pick him up. But we did meet him at the aircraft.

MARCI: It was mainly Canadian Air Force that was taking care of his transportation?

ROYAN: Right. It's a Canadian Air Force station. And there were only two of us [Americans] assigned there at the time.

MARCI: When did he arrive in Whitehorse, and how did you happen to meet him when he arrived?

ROYAN: Well, the month was March, '65. Time of day, I can't quite remember just when it was. But, like I say we had four or five hours advance notice that he was coming so we were there to meet the aircraft. I think he was very surprised to see two American air force people meet him when he did step off the aircraft. In fact, I said, "Welcome to Northern Massachusetts," and that really surprised him.

MARCI: Was your family there in the beginning of the trip when you first met him coming off the plane, or was this later?

ROYAN: No, my family met him later, after he had made the climb.

MARCI: There was a delay when he got to Whitehorse. Did you stay with him during the delay and help him spend the time?

ROYAN: Yes. He had approximately an hour, an hour and a half, delay because of weather. And I did get to spend some time with him in the Yukon flying office where he changed from his suit to cold-weather clothing. And I had the opportunity to challenge him to a game of darts. He said, "What stakes?" and I said, "Fifty cents." And he said, "No, let's change it to a nickel." So we played a game of darts for ten points.

MARCI: Did he challenge the Canadians while you were there? Was it a game between just you and the senator or the Americans against the Canadians?

ROYAN: No, at the time, it was just a game between Senator Kennedy and myself.

MARCI: How did the people in Whitehorse follow the trip? Were you getting bulletins back as they climbed up Mt. Kennedy?

ROYAN: Yes, they did. They sent a staff reporter and photographer with Senator Kennedy, and they did relay back. They also had a T-33 aircraft that had taken pictures while they were making the climb. And these were also sent back.

MARCI: Here you've got the Whitehorse, Yukon Star.
Was there a staff photographer around all the
time that he was around?

ROYAN: Yes, there was. In fact, I think the staff
photographer was there when Senator Kennedy
arrived and he stayed with him and made the
climb and also up until the time that he did leave.

MARCI: How did you hear that they would be coming back
down? Had you advance notice when they were coming
down, and were you there to greet him?

ROYAN: Yes. We had word from the control tower that he
was on the way back. We met him at the helicopter
when he did get back.

MARCI: Did you notice any visable changes in him, the
difference between going up and coming down?
Did he seem much more tired or like he had
accomplished something?

ROYAN: Yes, he did. He did seem quite tired on the
return trip.

MARCI: How long did he stay in Whitehorse on the return?

ROYAN: I would say it was in the proximity of three or
four hours--enough to clean up a little bit, get
something to eat, and then they left.

MARCI: And then the Canadian Air Force took him back to
Juneau?

ROYAN: I'm not sure. I think he went south to Edmonton, and then from Edmonton I believe he went out on either U.S. civilian or U.S. military aircraft.

MARCI: I think that covers his trip, unless you have some other recollections.

ROYAN: Well, I do have one thing I would like to say. In the article that he was asked if he would make the climb again, he said, "No, I think I'd leave it up to Ted to make the next climb." I don't know if Senator Edward Kennedy would ever make the climb, but I know if he did I sure somehow would like to be a part of it, a part of returning to the Yukon.

MARCI: Thank you very much.