

**Angier Biddle Duke, Oral History Interview—JFK#1, 4/7/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Angier Biddle Duke  
**Interviewer:** Frank Sieverts  
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**Biographical Note**

Duke, Chief of Protocol for the White House and State Department (1961-1965), discusses informal and state visits to the White House during John F. Kennedy's (JFK) presidency, including those of John G. Diefenbaker, Mohammad Zahir Shah, Kwame Nkrumah, and other dignitaries, and changes that Duke and JFK made to state visit policy and format, among other issues.

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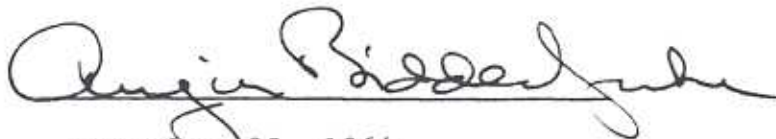
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## Angier Biddle Duke—JFK#1

### Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Kennedy family's associations with Duke's family
2	European refugee issues in the late 1950s
4	Circumstances of Duke's appointment as Chief of Protocol
5, 10	Developing policy and protocol for state visits
6	Canadian Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker's 1961 informal visit
7	NATO Secretary General Paul-Henri Spaak's 1961 informal visit
8	Afghan King Mohammad Zahir Shah's 1963 state visit
12	John F. Kennedy's (JFK) preference for in-depth information rather than "briefs"
14	U.S. relations with Pakistan
16	Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah's 1961 state visit
17	Dignitaries that JFK did not get along with

First of Four Oral History Interviews

with

Angier Biddle Duke

April 7, 1964

By Frank Sieverts

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SIEVERTS: Today is April 7th, 1964. The interviewer is Frank Sieverts of the Bureau of Public Affairs of the Department of State. I will be interviewing Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke, the Chief of Protocol of the Department of State in the Administration of President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy].

DUKE: Good morning, Mr. Sieverts.

SIEVERTS: Well, I'm very glad that we're able to be together today. I think we might just begin by having in your own words: when did you first meet President Kennedy? Was it before he was president?

DUKE: Well, yes, I knew John F. Kennedy; I've known him for a long time—so long that it's hard for me to pinpoint exactly what time we met. But I never knew him really well before he became president. I first became particularly conscious of him through my uncle, who was A.J. Drexel Biddle [Anthony Joseph Drexel Biddle, Jr.], during the time when he was Ambassador in Poland. John F. Kennedy's father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] was Ambassador to the Court of St. James' at that same time, and the two diplomatic colleagues and friends would correspond. During a summer at vacation at Harvard, John F. Kennedy and his brother, Joseph Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.], visited my uncle in Warsaw. That was in the summer of 1939, if you remember the book, *While England Slept*. It came out of that period. There's one curious anecdote, I think is quite

interesting, about the connection of John Kennedy with Ambassador Biddle. That concerns the time, when during the summer of 1960, Tony Biddle was called by Senator Kennedy, who was in the middle of the campaign. He asked Tony if he would consider becoming Ambassador to Spain, if he won the election. Actually Tony Biddle was intrigued, puzzled, surprised, by the call. Piecing it together, he laid it to the fact that this young man, this Harvard student, who had visited him in the summer of 1939, had observed how he, Tony Biddle, being the representative of Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt], to what really essentially was a dictatorship in Poland at the time, and yet had maintained successful relationships with Congress and with the State Department, had helped to create a not unpopular image of Poland here in the United States. Poland was, of course, a vital factor in the international policy in Europe at that time. I think that one could make a case for comparing totalitarian Spain, with all its importance, to the West, to American foreign policy, to our defense structure in

[-1-]

Western Europe; one could make a case that there is a comparison between the two countries at two different periods of history. Uncle Tony did think that that boyhood memory, or that youthful impression of his service in Poland, was the thing that recalled him to duty in Madrid, some 25 years later.

Now, I can't claim that there was any useful recollections of any association with me that called me to service with the President, because my association with the President was rather slight through the years. I knew the future President well enough to call him by his first name and that's about all. However, I do recall an interesting and somewhat amusing conversation with him. I had returned from an overseas assignment in 1958. It was a European Refugee Committee which was preparing a report on the European refugee situation, called the Zellerbach Commission of the International Rescue Committee. We had conducted a survey of refugee problems in Yugoslavia, Austria, Germany, Belgium and France; and roughly speaking, our conclusions were that the refugee situation in Western Europe was, if anything, somewhat exaggerated in the professionals' minds. The figure, if I remember it now, of somewhat less than 50,000 refugees left over from the war, was a negotiable number and one that could be handled and assimilated very much in the same manner that we had assimilated the Hungarian refugees after the crisis in 1956. So, we had a wealth of statistics, a body of information on this, with which we had returned from Europe, and I went to see Senator Kennedy in his office, to go over the situation and enlist his support for appropriate legislation. Our hope was that his support would help pool immigration on an equitable basis among the Western countries, which could, in effect, solve the refugee situation in Europe within a year or two. I went over this with Senator Kennedy at some length and with a good deal of passion, with a certain amount of, well, personal involvement, and in great detail. I suppose I took about 10 minutes to go over this with him, and he listened patiently, calmly, and politely. Then he looked at me with a quizzical smile and he said, "You take all this pretty seriously, don't you, Angie?" which was the most deflating remark which he possibly could have made. Not that he didn't take it seriously, because he did, and he did lend his support to refugee and appropriate immigration legislation, but it



amused me—this attempt, this obvious ability to create a personal relationship in the middle of an impersonal subject at that time.

SIEVERTS: Why did you go to see him in particular or had you seen many...

DUKE: I'd seen many. I saw Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], I particularly remember; we'd gotten to Senator Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff]—he was then a congressman; I'd seen Congressman Walter [Francis Eugene Walter]; but Senator Kennedy was very much of a rising figure in the field of international affairs in the Senate and one who would understand and be sympathetic, I think, with this subject.

[-2-]

SIEVERTS: He wrote a speech which became a pamphlet called *A Nation of Immigrants*, which may have responded in part to...

DUKE: Very much to this. He knew what I was talking about. What we were trying to do, was get off the emotional plane about refugees and onto a practical basis, to scale down this seemingly permanent operation and reverse the attitude of hopelessness which some of the professional agencies had about refugees. They're inclined to build it up into such large numbers. Actually a lot of it is true. You can talk about 10,000,000 refugees in the world and be correct. You can probably double that number and be correct, but if you do, your mind boggles at any approach to a practical solution of the problem. What we were trying to do was to take a segment of the world refugee problem, reduce it to manageable proportions and do something about it. And this is what I was trying to tell Senator Kennedy about; and he pricked my balloon of intensity quite effectively, but at the same time he got the message. While we didn't get the specifics that we wanted, necessarily, the mood became a successful mood, and I think that the refugee situation in Europe today has in effect diminished to the point of disappearance. Now, I'm telling this story purely as a background to future conversations with him. This was the most substantive conversation I had had with him up to that time.

SIEVERTS: But he did inject the personal element?

DUKE: Yes. He did, in official conversations. I ran into him many times before he was president—once or twice or three times a year—socially perhaps; sometimes at large political dinners; always pleasant and affable. But during the election year, I sent him a telegram from Spain, after the Wisconsin primary, in which I pledged my total, complete commitment to his campaign, and he sent me a telegram back thanking me very much and so forth.

During the campaign, I was Chairman of the Nationalities Division of the Democratic State Committee in New York. I was more in contact with Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] that I was with the candidate. I oriented myself to my own past experience in Latin America, both during the campaign and afterwards, and I tell you this because of what subsequently happened. After the election I was sent down to Latin America as the chairman

of a special New York World's Fair Committee, and our group visited every one of the presidents of Central America and extended them an official invitation to participate in the Fair. I brought back my own private report to Bob Kennedy on the political situation in those countries, plus my personal evaluation of the American embassy personnel in each of those countries. I looked forward to services in Latin America, frankly. Therefore, I had hopes along those lines when on December 27, 1961, I got a call from the President-elect.

[ -3- ]

My heart was in my mouth with anticipation, and with some dismay I heard him ask me to become Chief of Protocol. With scarcely concealed disappointment, I replied, "Well now, Senator, I don't quite understand this appointment. I don't understand your reasons for it, but naturally you're asking me to serve, and I certainly will take it seriously." He said, "Well, don't answer me. Don't give me an answer. Think it over and let's talk about it again when you've had a chance to think about it." And he said, "I don't think you know much about the job, do you?" And I said, "No, I don't know much about it at all, but what I have heard about it, I don't like." And he said, "Well, look, don't let's talk about it anymore—let's have another talk in a week or so." So I met him on New Year's Eve, and that was at Ambassador and Mrs. Earl Smith's [Earl E.T. Smith; Florence Pritchett Smith] apartment in New York, and during the course of the evening we sought each other out, and he asked me if I had given it more consideration. I said, "Yes, I have." I still was rather reserved about it, but if there wasn't anything else for me, I'd naturally do what he asked me to do. He said that he didn't want me to approach it from that point of view. He felt that the post of Chief of Protocol had been miscast, mistyped in the past, and that something could be made of it that would be helpful to him and in foreign policy; and before I discussed it any further with him, he'd like me to go down to Washington and talk with Dean Rusk—talk with him and see what the future Secretary of State had to say about it what his concept of the post was. Well, the point of the story is that I did go down to Washington. I did have lunch with Dean Rusk and, yes, Dean Rusk had some very definite ideas of how this post could be used with some real influence in foreign policy. I became more enthusiastic and shortly thereafter I called the President-elect and said I would be delighted to take on the job. And he said, "Well, do you have any reservations, still?" I said, "The only reservation I have is about the name." And he said, "Well, for heaven's sake, change it, if that's all you're worried about." I said, "Well, fine. I certainly will if I possibly can. I hereby accept the job. Now I'm going to see if we can't change the name." He said, "Fine, go to it." The postscript of the story is, that the Secretary and I tried quite hard to find some other name for it, but we just couldn't find a suitable alternative.

SIEVERTS: As a substitute for the name, Chief of Protocol?

DUKE: Chief of Protocol. So the compromise, the solution that Loy Henderson [Loy W. Henderson] came up with, was "Chief of Protocol of the White House with the personal rank of Ambassador." This is what is inscribed on my presidential commission today. To the best of my knowledge, that exact wording hasn't been on any of my predecessors' commissions; and I have since become quite reconciled to the

whole thing. And so, with that, without any further conversations, I was sworn in on January 24, 1961.

[-4-]

SIEVERTS: Did the President swear you in or...?

DUKE: No, none of the State Department presidential appointees at my level were sworn in at the White House. The Cabinet was sworn in there, and I did attend that swearing-in ceremony. I think the first conversation of any substance that I had with the President after that took place on February 6—and in his way, whatever he did was always a surprise. It certainly was to me, and I'll never forget it. It was a new experience to be back in government again. I hadn't been in government service for nearly 8 years, so some of the practices and customs were strange to me. Whenever the President called, and he did call many times, I was always shocked, surprised, galvanized into action, and each time it was a most refreshing experience, but also a disturbing one. It was therefore quite a shock when on February 6, after I had been on the job for just about 2 weeks, he telephoned and asked me to formulate policy for visits of world leaders and their meetings with the President. Not having been indoctrinated in that subject for very long, and having to come up at once with recommendations for a profound change of policy, it did not make for, I can assure you, a very—well, let's say—easy moment. But that's just what he did call me about. I do have a memorandum of that conversation, and perhaps the best thing is just to let me run over it with you.

SIEVERTS: Sure.

DUKE: The President mentioned that there were six visits proposed for that year. As I recall it, that was based upon the Secretary of State's recommendation, that we have a visit every two months. This plan subsequently went out the window. You couldn't possible withstand the pressure from world leaders who wanted to come here and touch base with him.

SIEVERTS: There were many more than six.

DUKE: Many more! But in the beginning, when we were pushing about these theoretical blueprints, we just thought that this would be an ideal way of spacing things. Well, the President evidently looked over the schedule for these six visits and he looked over the past pattern of these visits and was rather shocked to find that they were 3-day affairs. He also spotted from the past that there were three dinners for each head of state. Briefly—to run over it with you—and this is what he was doing with me—there was a White House dinner for the visitors the first night. If it was a state visit, it would be a white tie affair, which made it worse. The second night, the Secretary of State gave the dinner, and the third night the visitor gave a dinner for the President and his wife at the embassy concerned. The President said, "Gee, that's not only tough on me to have to go

to two dinners, it's particularly difficult for the Secretary of State, because he would have to go to all three of them." And he felt it rather pointless for the visitor himself. He thought there should be some other way to cut down the empty formalities and devise some other form which

[ -5- ]

would be consonant with the traditions of the past. Yet he stressed that we must preserve and strengthen the human and personal communications between the visitor and the President. He suggested that I prepare some more effective formula that would be less shattering to the visitor and to himself. He wondered out loud if perhaps he should give a dinner, cancel the Secretary's dinner, and conclude with a return embassy luncheon. And oddly enough, this idea really became the form that we got around to in about six months. He also objected to having so many of the same people at each event. He felt that this would begin to be nonproductive. I did have to explain to him that it would be very hard not to have top people, the same top people at each time, because—well, it's difficult not to. He was grumbling about that one, I must say. He did want to insist that if we did make any changes, we'd better put out an announcement before any of them took place, so nobody would feel that they were discriminated against that we were not downgrading the visitor in respect to the past or changing our policy or warmth of feeling about his country. He, of course, wondered what degree of precedent was involved and how much of a shock it would be to change. In reply, I'm afraid I floundered around because I'd never been through a state visit myself, so I really couldn't discuss it with him from a practical point of view. All I could do was to talk it over from a theoretical standpoint. But his ideas set the tone—they set the tone and he made it clear to me that he wanted an effective, human, personal relationship, unaffected by, uninterrupted by ceremonial events which might be boring, tedious, or in any way cut the mood of communication between the visitor and himself. He was at that time asking me to devise ways and means of carrying this out. I will say, that's precisely what we subsequently were able to accomplish. That was my first conversation with him of any substance when he took over.

SIEVERTS: Is that a conversation on the telephone?

DUKE: On the telephone. It took perhaps ten minutes, because we talked back and forth. Well, subsequent to that I can remember the first visitor. Not of this particular type, but the first visitor that came to see him was the Prime Minister of Canada, Prime Minister Diefenbaker [John G. Diefenbaker]. We discussed that one in advance, and it was to be very simple, because the Prime Minister was going to come down and stay at the Canadian embassy, and it was scheduled to be purely an office call. The President asked me if we ought to give him some hospitality. I said, "Well, I think that it's important to set a precedent for handling uninvited guests. I think that if anybody comes at his own invitation, he should get what he asked for." Meaning, if he asked for an appointment with the President, that's what he ought to get—nothing more. If the President were to be subjected to people who invite themselves, and then they get hospitality, this would, in geometric progression, multiply the number of such visitors and their demands

upon his time. He seemed to think that mine was the right way of approaching it, and we handled Mr. Diefenbaker on the office-call basis.

[ -6 - ]

SIEVERTS: Did the President right away understand the extent to which he was going to be a magnet for world visitors—there would be a flow of people wanting to see him—or is this something that dawned upon him gradually?

DUKE: Well, to tell the truth, I don't think he could possibly have understood the effect that he was to have on the world leaders, because it was not something that any of us realized, at the time. I'm going back to Diefenbaker and tell you something that is a very hard story to tell. That is, I never saw such a man so nervous. Think of it—a prime minister of a great neighboring power. I picked up the Prime Minister at the Canadian embassy and I rode down with him in the White House car. All the way down in the car, Mr. Diefenbaker plied me with questions as to what kind of a man John F. Kennedy was, and he was literally perspiring on that winter day as he talked. It's easy, after four years now—or nearly four years—to remember vividly as I do how nervous and upset and querulously questioning he was. Naturally, the President would never be aware of this particular type of thing. He felt it was my job to reassure the Prime Minister that everything would be all right, and I did so repeatedly. We got into the President's office, and immediately the President was terribly courteous and terribly deferential to his senior statesman colleague and couldn't have been more polite. Again I use the word deferential. This reassured the nervous Prime Minister a great deal, and they hit it off as well as possible under the circumstances. I think that brooding in the back of Diefenbaker's mind was the fact of his very successful relationship with President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], and, therefore, he was quite apprehensive about his ability to strike up a relationship with the new President. And I don't think he ever really got over the fact that the administration had changed. He didn't think he could ever work it out as well again. He was obviously upset about it and, frankly, I think that no matter how the President tried to get along with him, I think that Diefenbaker was so nervous and so guilty-feeling that he never really got over his own initial fears. But that's purely a subjective judgment of my own. Diefenbaker was the first of the official visits.

I can remember another odd one—an amusing visit. This was the second—at least the second so-called informal visit an office call by Paul-Henri Spaak, Secretary General of NATO. We'd arranged to give him the Medal of Freedom, and the President, of course, had not awarded a decoration before. He was impatient about any briefing on ceremonial matters ahead of time, and he didn't appear to have the time nor the inclination to go over the ceremony in advance. The medal itself was made up by the Defense Department, but the citation was drawn up in cooperation between State and Defense. I frankly don't remember the details on that, but the point of my story is that after lining up the NATO

[ -7 - ]

ambassadors in the President's office, he walked into the room, shook hands with each of them (I introduced them to him), he came to Mr. Spaak and handed him the citation and read it. He pinned the medal on. He said words which perhaps he'd prepared in his mind before, but were most appropriate to the occasion. The President then went around the room, said goodbye to each of the ambassadors, and because nothing could have been planned, he went out into the hall and stayed in the bathroom until we all got out of his office, before he could come back.

SIEVERTS: Was this generally the case that he would...

DUKE: He liked things well planned, but he didn't want to be told about it. He hated wasting time on rehearsals—going over things in advance. In that connection I can recall how even on things like our arrival in Mexico City on his state visit, it was very hard for me to get his attention to what was going to transpire when the door of the aircraft opened. He and Mrs. Kennedy would come down the steps and they would go through a very important, a very interesting and fascinating ceremony—exchange of remarks and everything else. It was difficult for me to get his attention and to get him to concentrate, if I might use the word, on what was going to happen to him when he got down the steps. I shared those responsibilities with General Clifton [Chester V. "Ted" Clifton, Jr.], who I think will bear me out, that it was hard to pin the President down to go over these things with him. But I perhaps should add that he moved through those occasions effortlessly and without awkwardness even if unplanned.

SIEVERTS: Did he make any bloopers as a result of his informal approach to

DUKE: Bloopers is too strong a word—I think that improvisations is probably another way to put it. Always there were plenty of improvisations, but his manner and his charm would bridge whatever ceremonial gaps might appear. I don't think that anybody was ever conscious of any particular mistakes. I mean, yes, I've become in the last three years—I've become somewhat of a technician, and I'm probably more conscious of mistakes in this field than anyone else. I remember a mistake of a kind last fall—in September—with the King of Afghanistan [Mohammad Zahir Shah], just before he came to Washington. We were down in Williamsburg with the Afghan party and there was a great deal of doubt about the weather. Now the weather factor was quite important, because the President was very anxious to eliminate going out to the airport—and he wanted to create and to make part of tradition the official arrival at the White House, which could only be done on a good day. He liked very much the helicopter arrival there and all the glorious ceremonies on the South Lawn. That is something that he and I had been talking about for a long, long time, and I have my point of view about it, and he had his point of view. He thought it was easy. I knew the difficulties, so there was a continuing dialogue between the President and myself. I'm using the Afghan story to make my point. For instance, the

military experts, the Defense people, were very wary, and they are today, about landing a helicopter in the presence of troops. The space is limited and the safety factor marginal—they wanted always to use the Ellipse. The military wanted the helicopter to arrive at the Ellipse. The visitor would then alight from the helicopter, get in a car, and drive through the White House gate where the President would be waiting at the diplomatic entrance and there go through the ceremony. Well, none of the ambassadors with whom I had to arrange things liked this. They felt that at the point of arrival in Washington, their Chief of State should be greeted by the President of the United States. Now this is a point that I tried repeatedly to get over to the President. He understood it, of course, but he didn't like it. He thought it was rude of the visitor to quibble about this particular detail. I said, "Well, now if we can get one or two of them to land at the Ellipse, one or two with great prestige, then the others will follow." The point is that the arrival of the King of Afghanistan would be quite an important precedent, and might settle the matter permanently. I had always been pressing and fighting, in effect, the Defense Department because I felt that you could land a helicopter inside the White House grounds, where the visitor would step out and be greeted by the President. They agreed you could do it, but they didn't like to. Well anyway, the point is that this day, we were down at Williamsburg which we use as a staging area. When the visiting Chief of State comes in, his party arrives either at Philadelphia or Williamsburg—then we fly them to the White House lawn or the Ellipse in about 45 minutes or so. Well, it so happened that it was a terrible day, and raining hard. To my surprise, the President called me at Williamsburg, asking me what I planned to do—"Are we going to land inside the White House grounds or outside?" "Well," I said, "On this I must bow out. This is not a protocol problem, Mr. President, this is a technical problem. If the Defense people say because of weather conditions we have to land outside, I can explain that to His Majesty and we will have no ceremonial problems. We'll put him in a car and bring him through the gate. But if the weather is clear, I won't be able to justify this." We agreed that there was going to be a weather problem and that we would land outside—at the Ellipse. I was to tell the King in flight—that this was what was going to happen. Well, that's just about what did happen. We did land outside; we landed on the Ellipse; we got into waiting cars. The King didn't care at all—he was quite undisturbed. The trouble with the ceremony, and I'm speaking in the role of a critic now, is that the President had that marvelous mania for health and youth, so we stood in the rain. The President didn't wear a raincoat, a coat, or a hat. The President's sister, Eunice Shriver [Eunice Kennedy Shriver], was dressed perfectly beautifully. She had a hat—no coat. And we stood in a fairly heavy drizzle for about 20 minutes. The King is completely bald. Driving up in the car, when he saw that the President wasn't wearing a coat or a hat, he took his raincoat off, and the Queen [Homaira Shah], although I think she had a coat on, was hatless. The whole official party stood there in a steady downpour. I can still picture the King with the water dripping down his face and going into his collar. Of course, the President, vigorous, youthful, magnificent, standing in the rain, was a marvelous figure. But again, from

[ -9 - ]

my own point of view, I wished that we could have stood under umbrellas. A canopy! There was a lot of talk after that—about having a canopy

SIEVERTS: As sort of a fallback?

DUKE: Yes. And it could be against the sun on other occasions. General Clifton and I did talk about it, but since then, for inclement weather we've moved on to the north portico of the White House, which is sort of a weatherproof operation. So the situation hasn't arisen, in a sense, since then. But that's my story of a possible ceremonial gap.

SIEVERTS: You can blame it on the weather in this case. What was the follow-up on your telephone conversation on the organization of the visit? Did you then have a meeting with the President?

DUKE: We never had a meeting. He was very impatient with meetings of that kind. If I had a point to clear up with up him, and it would usually have to be a point, I would ask for an appointment—I'd call Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], and Kenny would say, "I can fit you in at 10:30 or 11:15." I'd go in and I'd have one specific thing to discuss with the President. Hardly ever did we discuss anything at any particular length. I would say, "This is what I propose to do—I propose to streamline visits along these lines."

For example, "I propose that we have various categories of visits, that for a state visit we have a White House dinner with a white tie the first night and you would go to the embassy for luncheon on the second day. That would be the extent of your participation ceremonially. The visitor would leave on the morning of the third day. He would have two meetings with you in the morning or afternoon of the first day—and during the afternoon of the second day he would have a final meeting and issue the final communiqué." Well, naturally he was enthusiastic. He thought this was fine. There were certain variations, which I won't bother you with. But on a state visit there would be a parade and then the President would escort his guest to Blair House where the key of the city was given. That would differentiate it from the so-called presidential guest visit which included luncheon at the White House, dinner by the Secretary of State, and again the President would go to a return luncheon at the visitor's embassy. This became the standard form which we followed quite successfully all the way through.

SIEVERTS: Did the President discuss the food to be served at the lunches or dinners?

DUKE: You see, Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] and Tish Baldrige [Letitia Baldrige] would run the White House end of things regarding food and entertainment. My concern came in when I was asked by the embassies involved in a visit what did the President like when he came to their luncheon? Well, there are two things that the President told me. First of all, he told me that he never ate when he went out. So, for heavens' sake, it didn't much matter what they served—because he would have his meal, one way or the other, before going out. And secondly,



I asked him something which I think is worth noting. He would, of course, have to sit at the luncheons and dinners next to the world leader who was visiting him and I asked, "Did you ever get anything accomplished sitting there next to him?" He said, "Practically never." He said to me that it was a waste of time in terms of substance. I just think that's quite a little footnote.

SIEVERTS: This would be the luncheon and the dinner as opposed to the meetings?

DUKE: Yes, in contrast to the meetings. Meetings were the guts of things. I mean, after all, seeing him sit next to—let's say Prime Minister Nehru [Jawaharlal Nehru] all through luncheon or dinner, and then the next day go to the Indian Embassy and see them sit next to each other all through luncheon, I asked him on the way home, "Did you and the Prime Minister get anything settled? Did you accomplish anything?" He said, "Well, I think the best way to answer that one, is no. We just don't get much done under those conditions."

SIEVERTS: Well, then some of the visits and the conferences in the office...

DUKE: Well, of course, the meetings in the President's office. I wanted from the very beginning to establish my right to sit in on those meetings, because the visitor would not look to me for leadership or guidance in the program, or accept my advice, unless I was associated very closely in his mind with the President. So rather than, let's say, escorting the visitor to the White House and departing, I would bring him in and take my place somewhere in the room with the Secretary of State and the other members of the meeting. So I am in a position and I have been in a position to evaluate in my own subjective way just how successful these meetings were. The Secretary of State will have his point of view; the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau, and of the area, will have his, but I, too, will have my own personal attitude as to how these conferences went. My experience is limited to these meetings and it was conditioned by my own previous experience in the Foreign Service. Again, from my own point of view, there was a hallmark, a signature of the successful style that the President was able to carry out in these meetings. In other words, these personal confrontations with world leaders were one of the most distinguishing examples of success of the Kennedy Administration. He had an amazing effect on people, and I've tried to analyze it time after time—and part of it was his deep, personal interest in the visitor. This overwhelms them. This is fascinating.

A man like Sékou Touré, for example. For the President to know as much about the President of Guinea as he did, and to ask him personal questions about his life. He knew that he was descended from an Emperor in that part of West Africa; he knew his labor union background; he was able to joke with him about Soviet aid in the country in a way that showed a very profound knowledge of Guinea and its politics and the visiting President's leadership. This had an extraordinary effect on this visitor personally. I'm not only pinpointing this on Sekou Toure, but I'm talking

about every such individual he met. That they were overwhelmed is perhaps the right word to use—terribly surprised at his depth of interest and understanding of each person and their mission. This had remarkably successful results. It hasn't anything to do with politeness or manner or even style. This was a deep involvement with the visitor.

SIEVERTS: You say he knew the details—did he study up in advance?

DUKE: You'd have to get Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] or Ted Sorenson [Theodore C. Sorensen] to tell you about this. I naturally would come over, sometimes early for meetings, to take him to other meetings. I'd call for him to take him to the embassy for the return luncheon or dinner, and on the way over he would have with him, let's say, a briefing book. I never had occasion to refer to it—all I know is he had it and sometimes he wouldn't talk to me. For part of the trip, sometimes all the trip, he would just absorb information. I presume it was about the particular subject at hand. I can recall, and this is a little bit off the subject, but in this connection, one day President Makarios [Makarios, III] of Cyprus was giving a luncheon—the return luncheon for the President—at the Blair House because Cyprus didn't have an embassy residence at the time. I called for the President and, as a matter of fact, I went up to his bedroom in the White House as he was a bit late getting dressed. Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] was there and I believe Mac Bundy, and they were briefing him. He was going to have a press conference at 3:30, I think it was, that afternoon, and they were going over possible questions and answers with him. The President turned to me and said, "You've got to guarantee that you are going to get me out of there at least by 3 o'clock—in plenty of time for this press conference." I said, "Yes, Sir, I certainly will." At that point there was a question that either came up in his mind or in Bundy's mind about the situation in Nepal, regarding military aid. Red China was planning aid. I recall there was some problem of that kind, and the President turned to me as we were going out the door and he said, "By golly, I haven't got all the dope on Nepal. I want you to get me the answer to this possible question about the implications of Chinese military aid to Nepal." I said, "Fine." And when we got to Blair House, I had the secret service look for the Nepalese desk officer, and funny enough, they located him having lunch at some restaurant nearby on Connecticut Avenue. I got him over to Blair House in the middle of our luncheon and had him type up very short answers to all possible questions. When we left the luncheon (I got the President out at about 5 minutes of 3), I had the Nepalese desk officer, just to be on the safe side, come along and ride with us in the car, and I asked him to stand by if the President had any further questions on the subject. We rode to the White House in silence while the President looked over the possible questions and answers. He made no comment. It turned out there wasn't a question that afternoon on the Nepalese situation.

SIEVERTS: That often happens.

[-12-]

DUKE: Right. But if you asked me, is he briefed and was he briefed, I would say "briefed" is a bad word. I would say that he usually went to source materials.

He was terribly interested in background, and I think he went in depth into things rather than skim over them. So I'm not too sure I like the word brief, because he wasn't a person who liked things condensed. We all know what a tremendously rapid reader he was. That leads me to another little point.

When the ambassadors would present their credentials, some of them would arrive almost trembling with anticipation and sometimes with apprehension. I can recall one ambassador who never spoke during the whole interview. He was so tongue-tied and so struck with the importance of the moment. When an ambassador comes in, there is a point in the conversation at which documents are exchanged. In addition to their credentials they present him with a written message about their mission to this country, to which the President replies in a similar printed letter. Ambassadors take a great deal of trouble about their formal statements to the President, although they are never read out loud, as was the practice in the past. They are for the record and are often published in the press of their own countries. The President would take the papers out, glance at them, put them back in the envelope and hand the whole batch over to me. Well, now, the point is he would just glance at them. The President was able to look at these remarks and, truly in a very few seconds, get the whole substance of what was said. The ambassadors didn't know that. They were rather nonplussed, almost insulted because here these carefully prepared, carefully written documentations of their points of view and their country's policies were flipped through in a matter of seconds and handed over to me. Later I would have to explain, "Now look, the President is a rapid reader—he got what you said." But there were many times when the President indicated that he had absorbed what he had skimmed through when he might say, "Well, now, you've said on page 2, this, than and the other," which absolutely flabbergasted the new ambassador. I just bring that up to show that this is proof of the legend of his rapid reading.

SIEVERTS: He received all the ambassadors when they arrived to present their credentials?

DUKE: Oh, yes! He was very interested and very keen about that. But the one thing that the President didn't have was foreign languages. He was impatient of translations. When he couldn't communicate directly, with an individual, he had a less successful relationship. With anybody who could speak English, whether it was a Thai, a Lebanese, a Ceylonese, a South American or naturally a Commonwealth ambassador, there was always a successful relationship of one kind or another. On the other hand, if he had to get through the laborious translating system, he did get impatient. It was such a waste of time. But, as you know—we all know—the presentation of credentials is an important moment. I think he made it more important, because rather than just receiving the credentials, and asking about wives and children, he would invariably get into substantive matter and improve

[-13-]

upon the occasion by getting to matters of concern. Sometimes he might not know much about the country and wanted to learn more. Let's take Somalia, which I particularly remember. On that occasion he asked the Ambassador to tell him everything he could about

his country. “We’ve got 15 minutes,” said the President, “now you tell me, Mr. Ambassador, what you want me to know about your country, and I’m frank to tell you, I don’t know too much about it—I know where it is—I know what your population is—I know what you produce—but you tell me everything you think I should know.” Well, the Ambassador, who by the way spoke perfect English and had a very attractive personality, was, of course, delighted, pleased, and got off on quite a fascinating account. On several other occasions when there wasn’t much to talk about, the President would ask the Ambassador to tell him everything that was on his mind. This was an amusing technique and it worked.

SIEVERTS: Were there any ambassadors that the President didn’t get along with?

DUKE: I remember one, yes. I remember one in particular. It was a Pakistani—the present Pakistani [Ghulam Ahmed]. I don’t know what kind of a classified record we’re talking for here. Well, he’s the brother of the former Ambassador, Aziz Ahmed, who was well liked here. I think the President liked him, but he was looking forward rather, to meeting the brother and starting off with a clean slate. After all a lot of effort had been invested in Ayub Khan [Mohammad Ayub Khan]. We did a great job, I believe, on the President of Pakistan while he was here. I think that without going into our Pakistani policy, the President was disappointed at the change in attitude in Pakistan and considered it unreasonable. I don’t want to go into too much of the substance of this conversation between him and the Pakistani Ambassador. Just let me tell it to you this way. The Ambassador took the occasion of presenting his credentials to disagree with the President and disagree profoundly, and disagree in very effective, rather legalistic language. The President started by saying that it was our policy to create strong, independent, viable states in South Asia, and that we wanted a strong, independent Pakistan; a strong, independent India, Ceylon, Burma, and so forth. That seemed simple enough. Why couldn’t the people in the area understand it? The Pakistani Ambassador came back with a rather devastating argument that demolished this, to me, rather plain, effective statement that the President made. And with a very passionate and rather emotional business about the United States helping and sending aid and assistance to the bitterest, deepest, most historic enemy, bent on destroying Pakistan, and if America was so unsophisticated and so I not to understand their feelings, well, then obviously communication was not very easy between them. So, the atmosphere between the Ambassador and the President came to be very, very strained—to the point where I wondered how we were going to get out of the room. I think the President got up and asked if he wanted to see the Rose Garden, and I think we sort of had a look out the window and a polite look at the Rose Garden. My opinion was, at the time, that the

[-14-]

Ambassador had destroyed his effectiveness with the President and served as an example of just how not to present your credentials.

SIEVERTS: The visitor, Ayub Khan, was one of the showpieces of that first year, wasn’t it? Do you remember preparations for that? Discussions with the President?

DUKE: That's right. Well, not many discussions with the President, because don't forget, most of the White House preparations, Mrs. Kennedy particularly interested herself in, and Tish Baldrige—a most creative and imaginative person in that field. They took the idea of a White House, white tie dinner, and transposed it to the banks of the Potomac at Mt. Vernon. This fulfilled all the criteria that the President agreed to, but they were the ones who were responsible for transposing it and enriching it and enlivening it. Naturally there is always a reluctance among us here at the State Department to do anything different, because it symbolizes different nuances in policy. So therefore, speaking for myself, I would always be the reluctant dragon about these events. I couldn't be terribly enthusiastic about events of this kind, because I could foresee the difficulties I would be having when the inevitable day came when we had to entertain or receive or negotiate with either the Prime Minister or the President of India. So I was never the most enthusiastic supporter of these ideas. This is not said in criticism. It's probably said in self-criticism, because I was always unenthusiastic about any deviation from the norm. After all, those deviations made the flare, the style, the touch that enriched the policy.

SIEVERTS: How about the meetings actually with Khan? Did you sit in on that? Was there a good relationship developed?

DUKE: Oh, yes. Simply wonderful. You see, Ayub Khan, as I think you'll hear from Philip Talbot [Phillips Talbot] or anybody that's an expert in the field, is an outgoing, attractive, charming, completely sympathetic and understanding personality. He and the President got along fine—just plain fine, all the way through. Don't forget, that was early in the Administration—spring of 1961—and I don't frankly know too much of the background as to why the relationship soured after that. I haven't had the occasion to follow it. The personal relationships—they were magnificent. The President was charmed by him. Subsequently things cooled, but as to that particular moment, things were fine. Khan was a most refreshing character. The contrast between him and the President was great, but they got along terribly well.

SIEVERTS: Do you remember any private scenes between them that show how they got along—any conversations?

[-15-]

DUKE: I can remember conversations but I don't remember the words. In the cabinet room, sitting across the table, I just remember that every subject that was brought up, they either agreed on or understood each other's position. That was the tone of their relationship and, of course, President Ayub Khan was so courtly and so magnificent with Mrs. Kennedy that that also made an impression.

SIEVERTS: Did the President respond to...

DUKE: Yes, he enjoyed that.

SIEVERTS: To attentions paid to his wife?

DUKE: Yes, he did—very much so. I might add that in the presentation of credentials, he used Mrs. Kennedy and the children [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy; John F. Kennedy, Jr.] a great deal to relieve tensions, to introduce a human note or to give a tone to a meeting which could be rather stereotyped and cut and dry.

When President Nkrumah [Kwame Nkrumah] of Ghana was here, he appeared to be surprisingly emotional and unreserved. He gave the atmosphere of enthusiasm, completely deceptive, as far as I'm concerned. I was completely taken in by him, as I thought that he caught the fire of the President's youth. He talked in terms of understanding the appeal of the President, not only to the youth of America but to the youth of the world. I thought he understood the symbolism of it. They talked about the future of Africa, the future of the world, civil rights. It was most fascinating—it looked to me like a fusion of minds. Really, to me it was an excitingly successful meeting. The President asked if he wanted to go up and meet Mrs. Kennedy and the children, and I thought Nkrumah really looked terribly touched as he bounded out of there. The two of them went out into the Rose Garden and up into the mansion. I waited for them to come back. When they came back, the President of Ghana was leading Caroline by the hand, almost with tears in his eyes at this family confidence. Afterwards I accompanied him from National Airport to New York. On the plane, he said he wanted to send a personal message to the President. I got him a yellow pad, and he wrote out some rather passionate, emotional words about brotherhood, the call of youth, the depth of understanding. I mean, very emotional, passionate words! He wrote them out in his own hand and he gave them to me. As I say, I imagined or thought perhaps that there were tears in his eyes. It's quite ironic, because that was in the Spring of 1961, and it was only a few months later that I read of a statement of Nkrumah to Mao Tse-tung in Peking and you could compare the two messages. He'd practically written the same message to Mao that he'd written to President Kennedy, using the same phrases, the same feeling. I had felt he was an emotional human being, who responded to the human qualities in the President. It's really amazing that I could have been so taken in. As a matter of fact, it made me a little more cynical—or at least more realistic about other meetings which seemed to be equally successful.

SIEVERTS: Did you get that message to the President?

[-16-]

DUKE: Oh, yes.

SIEVERTS: On the yellow...

DUKE: On the yellow pad—I folded it up and put it in my pocket.

SIEVERTS: And it would be in the President's file?

DUKE: I'm sure it would be—somewhere—I'm sure Mac Bundy would know where it is.

SIEVERTS: Right. That's most interesting. Were there people that the President didn't get along well with? I mean foreign visitors, not ambassadors.

DUKE: Well, I think there's another type that the President didn't get along with—European types who confine themselves to formalities and were unwilling to commit themselves personally, to personal opinions or personal point of view or to talk frankly. I can recall a very icy conversation between the President and the Ambassador of Portugal. If you will remember, the Ambassador of Portugal was the Deputy Premier under Salazar [António de Oliveira Salazar]. This was a time when the Angola question was boiling toward a crisis. His name is Pedro Pereira [Pedro Theotonio Pereira], and he is a perfect reflection of European formality in many ways. He came here with an inflexible mission evidently, to convince the President and our Government of the absolute, unchangeability of Portuguese policy in Africa. Well, the President, I feel sure, felt that such a stand should be justified and such a position should be explained. As the Ambassador spoke very good English, I imagine the President rather looked forward to talking things over with him. And instead of that, the Ambassador came in and he told the President, in detail and at length, the Portuguese position. I won't use the word lectured, because he was too polite, but he did it in such a way as to make it impossible to have a discussion. I can remember the President's impatience and annoyance and, I would say, almost anger at the way things were going. When he caught the way things were being presented, he seized the first possible moment to terminate the interview. He had his own ideas about the Angola situation and about Portugal, and felt that the Portuguese position was not as inflexible as the Ambassador made it out to be. Therefore, he felt that the Ambassador should have talked to him more frankly about it. But that illustrates the point.

SIEVERTS: Yes. It was remarked in the press, during that period, that another person that had this problem was Grewe [Wilhelm Grewe] from Germany.

DUKE: Yes, I was aware of the fact that there was a personality problem with Grewe, but I never saw it in action. I detected a certain annoyance when I saw the President with the German Ambassador—let's say at luncheons and dinners—a certain lack of rapport. But I never saw it in action, if you follow me.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

Angier Biddle Duke Oral History Transcript—JFK #1  
Name Index

**A**

Ahmed, Aziz, 14  
Ayub Khan, Mohammad, 14, 15, 16

**B**

Baldrige, Letitia “Tish”, 10, 15  
Biddle, Anthony Joseph Drexel, Jr., 1, 2  
Bundy, McGeorge, 12, 17

**C**

Clifton, Chester V. “Ted”, Jr., 8, 10

**D**

Diefenbaker, John G., 6, 7

**E**

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 7

**G**

Grewe, Wilhelm, 17

**H**

Henderson, Loy W., 4  
Humphrey, Hubert H., 2

**K**

Kennedy, Caroline Bouvier, 16  
Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 10, 15, 16  
Kennedy, John F., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,  
12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17  
Kennedy, John F., Jr., 16  
Kennedy, Joseph P., Jr., 1  
Kennedy, Joseph P., Sr., 1  
Kennedy, Robert F., 3

**M**

Makarios, III, 12

**N**

Nehru, Jawaharlal, 11  
Nkrumah, Kwame, 16

**O**

O'Donnell, Kenneth P., 10

**P**

Pereira, Pedro Theotonio, 17

**R**

Ribicoff, Abraham A., 2  
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 1  
Rusk, Dean, 4, 5, 11

**S**

Salazar, António de Oliveira, 17  
Salinger, Pierre E.G., 12  
Shah, Homaira, 9  
Shah, Mohammad Zahir, 8, 9  
Shriver, Eunice Kennedy, 9  
Smith, Earl E.T., 4  
Smith, Florence Pritchett, 4  
Sorensen, Theodore C., 12  
Spaak, Paul-Henri, 7, 8

**T**

Talbot, Phillips, 15  
Touré, Sékou, 11  
Tse-tung Mao, 16

**W**

Walter, Francis Eugene, 2