

Courtney Evans Oral History Interview –RFK#1, 11/6/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Evans, Assistant Director, Special Investigative Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Liaison to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], discusses RFK's involvement with the McClellan Committee, his role as liaison to RFK as Attorney General, and traveling with RFK, among other issues.

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By Courtney Evans

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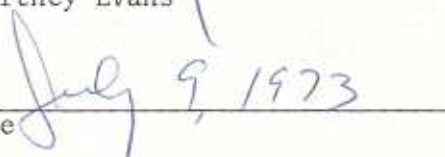
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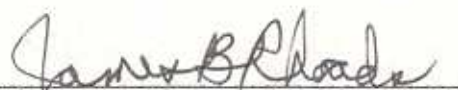
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Courtney Evans



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Courtney Evans – RFK #1

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First Oral History Interview

with

COURTNEY EVANS

November 6, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By James A. Oesterle

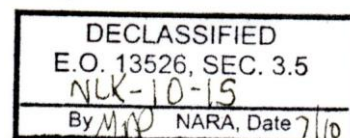
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OESTERLE: Mr. Evans, why don't we start by my asking you when you first came to the Justice Department?

EVANS: Well, I first came to the Justice Department in December of 1940. This was following my graduation from law school the previous June. I'd been admitted to the bar in October. I applied for a position as special agent in the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and was accepted and sworn in the first part of December of 1940.

If you'd like a little more background as to my career within the Department of Justice to give some perspective to this, it might be helpful. The first three years I was a field investigating agent working primarily on national defense type cases, particularly espionage. I was involved with the Duquesne [Frederick J. Duquesne] investigation, for example, in New York when the Nazi saboteurs landed and were apprehended. In 1943 I was transferred to Phoenix, Arizona. There was a prisoner of war camp there where high ranking German naval officers were interned and, because of my background, I was assigned to interview these officers from time to time in connection with German intelligence operations.

At the end of 1945 I was transferred to Bureau headquarters and, with the exception of an eighteen month period when I got some field executive experience, the rest of my career was in Washington. I progressed up the line from being a supervisor to a section chief to an inspector and ultimately an assistant director. My work was both in the criminal field



and in the security field, but at Bureau headquarters it was primarily criminal type work. As an assistant director I had charge of the Special Investigative Division. That

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division was responsible for special inquiry type investigations for the White House, for Cabinet officers, particularly the attorney general. We also had jurisdiction over organized crime in this division.

This was my career in the Department of Justice. I was eligible to retire in November of 1964 and I retired at the end of the year. Actually, when I was eligible, I indicated then to the director that I wanted to retire, and my leave carried me on until the end of the year.

Since that time, of course, I've been practicing law but have continued an interest in criminal justice matters generally through work with states and local units of government. In 1965, toward the end of the year, the then attorney general, Mr. Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach], asked me to come back to the Department of Justice on a part-time basis to help organize the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance, which was a small, temporary grant-in-aid program to help state and local government improve the administration of criminal justice, and to work on more permanent type legislation. It was late 1968 before the legislation was finally enacted. At that time I severed all connection with the Department of Justice.

OESTERLE: Now, you were assistant director to the director of the FBI prior to the Kennedy Administration.

EVANS: No. Let me give you a clearer idea as to the executive level of the Bureau. The director has one individual who is the associate director, Clyde Tolson. The complete line of authority in the Bureau as I left it – this did change over the years, but at the time I retired it included the director, the associate director, and two assistants to the director. The work of the Bureau was divided into two parts and one assistant to the director had one part, the other having the other half. Under the assistants to the director were a number of assistant directors, one for each division. I think when I left there were nine divisions and there were nine assistant directors. I was one of those nine.

As assistant director had an inspector working for him who was kind of a number one man who acted in the absence of the assistant director. The work of the division was broken down into sections and each section had a section chief. Under the section chief were a number of desk supervisors who were responsible for the work in a given category. For example, all theft of government property cases would be handled by one supervisor. He received reports from field offices all over the United States, but his only responsibility was those cases involving theft of government property. A section chief had a number of these individual supervisors under him.

The work of the section concerned related type cases. The Accounting and Fraud Section, which I headed at one time, had jurisdiction over all accounting type cases and all fraud cases. Another section supervised general criminal matters. Another section would deal with some types of internal security cases and so on. The progression at headquarters

then once you got your field experience

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began as a desk supervisor. The next step was section chief. And then you progressed to the rank of inspector, who served as the principal assistant to an assistant director. I was inspector at the time that I knew Robert Kennedy prior to the time that he became attorney general.

OESTERLE: This was when he was counsel for the McClellan [John L. McClellan] Committee?

EVANS: Yes. Actually, I was a section chief when I first met him. I assume that I was given the assignment of maintaining liaison with Robert Kennedy and Senator McClellan because a new Select Committee [on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Fields] had been created by the Senate (of which Robert Kennedy was the chief counsel) to inquire into labor-management relations. My section in the Bureau had jurisdiction over anti-racketeering and other violations of criminal law that pertained to labor unions and labor problems generally insofar as the Bureau was concerned. It was very limited jurisdiction, of course.

I might describe the first contact with Robert Kennedy. I'm unable to give you a specific date at this time, but it was in 1958. Mr. Hoover [J. Edgar Hoover] called me to his office. I was then a section chief. I might add, parenthetically, that this is an unusual situation. The director seldom dealt at the section chief level. He dealt with his associate director and with the assistants to the director and on some limited occasions directly with his assistant directors, but to go down to the section chief level was unusual. So that...

OESTERLE: This was one of the first extended meetings perhaps that you were to have with the director of the FBI?

EVANS: No, I had talked with him before. He had an open-door type policy. Any agent who wanted to see him, when he could work him into his schedule, he'd talk to. So, I had discussed matters with the director before, but the mere fact that he called me directly to come up and see him was unusual. The other way around, if I asked to see him, would not have been unusual. He told me he had just returned from a conference with Senator McClellan and with Robert Kennedy and that he had agreed to cooperate with this new select committee. He said he would like for me to go up to the Senate Office Building at once – it then being about 7 o'clock in the evening – and establish contact with Robert Kennedy and with Senator McClellan. I went to the Senate Office Building and Robert Kennedy's office.

This was the first time that I had ever met the man. I, of course, knew who he was. His brother [John F. Kennedy] was then a senator and a member of the committee, but this was the first time that I'd ever met Robert Kennedy. We talked, I suppose, for thirty or forty-five minutes. He outlined for me their preliminary plans with regard to the operation of the committee, how they proposed to operate and what assistance the FBI might be to them.

Then

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Robert Kennedy and I went around and talked with Senator McClellan, who reiterated what Bob Kennedy had already said in a more abbreviated form.

Thereafter, during the existence of the select committee, I maintained a close liaison with Robert Kennedy, perhaps not on a daily basis, but on the average, two or three times a week. This was over the period from 1958 until he resigned, I think, in connection with his brother's campaign for the presidency.

I became very familiar with what the committee was doing. They had a large staff of investigators. They would develop certain information. When there was some additional data that the FBI could supply which would round out what the committee staff developed, Kennedy would make a request for this information which I accepted and routinely cleared through the ranking officials at the Bureau. The files were reviewed. It was a voluminous operation. I couldn't do it myself, but other supervisors in the Bureau would review the files and gather the data we had. Then a determination would be made as to whether it was responsive, whether it would be helpful to the disclosed. It was a good working relationship giving consideration to the confidential nature of cases that were pending in the investigative process, and which ultimately might be prosecuted. Neither Senator McClellan nor Robert Kennedy expected to receive information relating to cases pending prosecution. This was the kind of thing that had to be screened out.

During the course of Robert Kennedy's career as counsel to the McClellan Committee I got to know him very well. I sat in on many of his staff conferences. I talked with him at length from time to time. He had a good staff, but he himself was not an investigator.

OESTERLE: And had not had experience really in criminal law.

EVANS: No. No, he really hadn't. So I think he valued my advice from time to time and the contribution that I could make in helping him evaluate situations.

It was in that period of time that I met his wife and family. He was very good about meeting socially with his staff. There was never an occasion that he had any kind of social affair for his staff that I wasn't invited. Most of these were at his house, his home. There were other occasions when he would be entertaining other people and he would ask me to join with them. So I think I got to know the man and his family very well in this period of time. I was certainly not an intimate, but, as a professional person who was working with him, our friendship developed. I was perhaps in a little bit different position in that I was not a subordinate, but I don't think that really made any difference to Bob Kennedy. If a person was making a contribution in a cause which Bob Kennedy felt was important, then that person was important. And I sometimes think, with the exception of old boyhood friends, old family connections, this was pretty much his standard. He wanted to associate with people who believed in what he believed and who were contributing in a cause which Bob Kennedy felt was important, then that person was

worthwhile for the country.

OESTERLE: Do you recall in any detail the first meeting that you described a little earlier, kinds of things you talked about, the hopes of the McClellan Committee, the select committee, that had been established?

EVANS: Well, a little bit. The first and only time that Bob Kennedy ever called me Mr. Evans was the first meeting when I walked in. By the time I left, which was an hour or so later, we were already on a first name basis – and recognize that he was my junior by several years, not a full generation but certainly half a generation's age separation.

I think at this meeting he just generally outlined some of the information that had been brought to the attention of the committee. Initially it was the Permanent Investigating Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Government Operations that began to develop this information. When it became apparent that it was going to be a very extensive investigation, the Senate reached the conclusion – certainly I would think on the recommendation of Senator McClellan, but also his fellow committee members – that this special select committee should be set up and devote itself solely to improper relations. As I recall, the primary investigations were to deal with the situation involving President Beck [David S. Beck] of the Teamsters Union [International Brotherhood of Teamsters Union] and the situation at Portland, Oregon, involving labor union activities there. This had been the subject of a good deal of investigation, I think, primarily by the newspapers in Seattle and in Portland. Really it was spearheaded by Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman] who later became the press secretary for Bob Kennedy.

OESTERLE: Press secretary, yes.

EVANS: Now, that's about all the detail I recall as to what transpired at this first meeting.

OESTERLE: Could you describe the course of the interests and your involvement with the committee in the course of the next year and perhaps how the intensity changed from time to time and the demands of your role?

EVANS: Well, I think that they were far more intense in the beginning when Kennedy was acquiring a staff of investigators who lacked extensive knowledge and expertise in this labor-management area so that in the beginning

there were many, many requests for information. As the ability of the committee

investigators increased with expertise, as they developed their own sources of information – their files grew, their library expanded – in later months they had available themselves much detailed information which cut down on the requests that they made of me and of the FBI for information. I don't recall volume specifically, but it seemed in the beginning there were, oh, scores of requests every two weeks or so.

OESTERLE: For information about particular individuals?

EVANS: Individuals and situations. Whereas toward the end and after the committee had developed extensive amounts of information through investigation and public hearings, the number of requests declined materially.

OESTERLE: Was information shared with the FBI or did the FBI continue to have more information and little need to request information of the committee, especially as the hearings take place and there are probes?

EVANS: I don't think there was too great a need for the FBI to seek information from the McClellan Committee, although we did from time to time and it was a two-way street. They were just as cooperative as we were, but the responsibility of the FBI is to develop evidence of a specific criminal violation. Either the person did violate the law or he did not as the facts would show. The Senate select committee was concerned much more with situations and relationships and a course of dealings within management or within labor circles. The goals were two distinct areas. It wasn't too often that the committee developed the hard kind of evidence in a specific situation involving a specific person and a specific act at a specific time that the FBI needed for court cases.

OESTERLE: Beyond going into their files did the FBI on behalf of the committee ever conduct a new investigation?

EVANS: No, I don't think so. I think that was outside the scope of the agreement. And really the jurisdiction that the Bureau had was restricted to investigation of allegations of criminal violations. I don't know that there was ever a request of that kind in any event.

OESTERLE: One of the recommendations, I believe, that came out of the McClellan Committee, was that a kind of clearinghouse be established which would cooperate and share information and resources with police departments, the FBI, and other investigative agencies around the country.

EVANS: Yes, that was one of the recommendations. I don't know that it was ever implemented.

OESTERLE: No, it was not.

EVANS: And there's a basic reason why it wasn't implemented. This is not a situation that's confined to improper activities in labor-management; it's much broader. But law enforcement is compartmentalized. There is great pride within many law enforcement organizations. There's a feeling that they can do the job and they can do it themselves. And while they're perfectly willing to cooperate with fellow agencies in some areas, there are other areas where they feel that they cannot cooperate. A law enforcement organization, a police department, even an individual officer develops an informant in the criminal underworld who will furnish him certain information only because of a personal relationship with the officer. The criminal may well be putting his own life in danger if it were disclosed to other criminals that he had cooperated. When that kind of a situation arises, a police officer is very reluctant to share that information with anybody because he doesn't want to jeopardize the life of his informant. This often extends within his own department, much less supplying it to some other department. So there has been a reluctance by law enforcement to do this very kind of thing. The police deal almost on a personal basis and they will orally tell another officer something that they would never reduce to writing. This is one of the difficulties in trying to have a meaningful central clearinghouse of information. There is another problem here involving right for privacy and the dissemination of unsubstantiated allegations. In a sense, as far as that person is concerned, this is slanderous, and if it's not proved and if it's circulated, it can well be detrimental to the lives of these people.

OESTERLE: Even though the source is questionable.

EVANS: Certainly. As a matter of fact, it's an allegation and it can be labeled as an allegation, but as it is circulated it gets more and more substance in the minds of the recipient because of the origin of the information. It's no longer a detective saying that a criminal informant alleged so and so. Suddenly this is a report of the New York City Police Department or of the FBI that says so-and-so. As a consequence, it's exceedingly difficult to have a clearinghouse of essentially unsubstantiated information. Now, what is substantiated information is a question of evaluation and unless a fact has been reviewed by a court and accepted as a fact, there's a degree of authenticity or the truthfulness because of who says it. There are all of these problems involved in clearinghouses in the law enforcement area.

OESTERLE: I understand the problem, yet...Or let me put it this way: Was it part of the maturing of the role that the McClellan Committee wanted to play, the realization that a clearinghouse which was an early recommendation that they made...I mean was it part of their maturing when they realized that this was not feasible and that it did not serve the investigative agencies' best purposes?

EVANS: I think this is a good conclusion. As the committee became more aware of how the underworld operated, how law enforcement operated, and in reality how society operated, I think they came to the conclusion that there were certain conditions that might make this clearinghouse idea impractical. I don't know that they ever withdrew the recommendation, but certainly it was never pushed. In the review of the inquiries into police activity, law enforcement generally, this comes up from time to time. It's currently being advocated in connection with organized crime. It's not going to operate there any better than it would in the labor-management area.

OESTERLE: Then, of course, in specific cases the FBI or other police agencies can cooperate and can even operate through an organization, I guess, like INTERPOL [International Organization of Criminal Police] as it's necessary.

EVANS: INTERPOL is an international organization. It does serve as a clearinghouse. If a police organization in France wants to get some information in Canada, INTERPOL knows where to write, to whom to refer this request. But it's rather simple in its operation; it doesn't go much beyond that. Basically if you get down to a need on the part of a law enforcement agency for specific information in relation to a specific event, then the degree of cooperation is good. If the police department in Chicago is trying to locate a fugitive who is believed to be in St. Louis who has been charged with an offense and a warrant is outstanding, they will get the best cooperation that it's possible for the St. Louis Police Department to give. This is uniformly true in specific situations. But for the police department in Chicago to say, "We have a developing criminal conspiracy in fencing of stolen property, so please send us any information you have about fencing in St. Louis that you think would be helpful to us," little will be forthcoming. The police don't operate that way.

OESTERLE: Was it part of your role, your obligation as liaison, to educate the committee or to at least put forward the ideas of the FBI in this regard?

EVANS: This is a very difficult question. The FBI has always taken the position that they gather facts and that they make no recommendations. The facts are submitted to an agency that has jurisdiction to evaluate them and to determine whether or not prosecutive or other action should be taken. Its agents operate within the confines of this policy determination. As an FBI representative I didn't have this kind of mandate or perhaps much influence. On the other hand, it's very difficult at times to separate a personal role from an official role, and I don't think it would be immodest to say that I had some influence in guiding the thinking of some people associated with the committee, members of the committee and the staff.

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OESTERLE: Did Mr. Hoover inquire of you about matters being considered by the committee?

EVANS: Oh, I just routinely kept him advised; it's kind of an understood thing within the Bureau if you're assigned liaison with a particular agency. There are many of them; it's one of the strong programs in the Bureau, their liaison relationship with not only law enforcement but any agency that had possible common interest with the Bureau in any field. So it's just understood that if you're assigned a liaison function, one of the things you have to do is to keep Mr. Hoover and other officials in the Bureau advised of any situation that is of interest as far as the Bureau operation is concerned. This doesn't extend to personalities, but it does involve....

OESTERLE: I wondered if there had developed over the course of the early years of the McClellan Committee a particular interest in the work of the committee, because of the kind of thing they were doing, on the part of the FBI, the FBI Director?

EVANS: Well, the Bureau had long had jurisdiction over the anti-racketeering statute. Federal law in those days was much more restricted than it is today, and as a result of the work of the McClellan Committee, of course, major legislation was introduced and became law that expanded the jurisdiction of the Bureau. Their primary function really was to develop this kind of legislation. You didn't have to be much of a seer to look ahead and to see that this was going to happen. And so there was, I think, a quickening of interest within the Bureau, mainly because jurisdiction was going to be expanded and responsibilities of a heavier nature were going to be placed on the Bureau. They did look ahead so that they could be prepared to meet these responsibilities when they finally enacted into law. In this sense, there was a continuing and a quickening interest.

OESTERLE: You said earlier, that as time went on there was a lessening of the initial intensity on the part of the committee, especially after the staffing had been pretty much completed and as the investigators on the committee gained experience.

EVANS: Yes, this is true. But that's a lessening of intensity on the part of requests coming from the committee to the FBI for information.

OESTERLE: Do you remember any particular or special interests of the committee in the early days? You mentioned that at that point they were investigating the Teamsters and, of course, they were developing the case against Beck as it turned out. Do you recall any of the details of that particular case?

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EVANS: No, I really can't. I wasn't involved to the extent that I would have a rather vivid recollection of a situation as a person who was actually investigating or as an individual who was involved in interrogation of

a person before a hearing would have where there was great preparation, great emphasis on one specific situation. I wasn't involved to that extent at all, so therefore I don't have vivid memories of specific investigations that were conducted. The major cases are obviously documented in committee hearings and the record developed.

The only case that I had direct involvement with was the so-called Cheasty [John C. Cheasty] case. John Cye Cheasty was a committee investigator who was allegedly approached by the Teamsters and offered a bribe to report back to the Teamsters what was going on within the committee. I got involved with this case because bribery is a federal violation. This case was investigated by the FBI as a specific allegation of a criminal violation of federal law. Hoffa [Jimmy Hoffa] was arrested and brought to trial and acquitted. That is the only case in which I had any kind of detailed involvement, and the record of the trial contains all the details.

OESTERLE: How would you describe the relationship between the director of the FBI and the attorney general? At this point they may not even have met. Well, they've had that one meeting with McClellan and the attorney general that you described or the...

EVANS: Oh, I think they must have had other meetings that I don't know about. Mr. Hoover did tell me on many occasions of a rather long acquaintanceship and friendship that he had with the attorney general's father, Joseph Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]. I have just assumed that during the course of that relationship Robert Kennedy, who was really little more than a youth at the time, a young boy, must have been involved in some way, but I don't have any knowledge of this and really know only what Mr. Hoover told me as to his relationship with the senior Mr. Kennedy.

OESTERLE: Is there anything else that we should perhaps talk about during this early period involved the committee and/or Robert Kennedy as chief counsel?

EVANS: Oh, I might give you an impression. This was the first major responsibility in national life that Robert Kennedy had. He was certainly inexperienced. He was mature for a man of his age, but this may not be maturity to a person who is forty years of age. I was impressed with the rapidity with which he learned; how experiences broadened him more than they would the average person; how he developed an ability to deal with older people, recognizing that Senator McClellan, the committee chairman, was a contemporary of Robert Kennedy's father; his ability to deal with antagonistic forces, hostile witnesses; his general maturing at a rapid rate in this period of time. But this doesn't compare with the rapidity at which he matured and the extending grasp of his interests and his knowledge that occurred when Bob Kennedy was

attorney general. It was dramatic in those years. In the McClellan Committee years it was

certainly far above average, but not the rapid type of development that occurred when he became attorney general. And again I think it's a reflection of the times and responsibilities. The position on the McClellan Committee, important as it was nationally, didn't compare with his position as attorney general. His committee interest was confined in a narrow field. As attorney general he was broadly interested in many things that affected the nation.

OESTERLE: Do you have any insight into the relationship that the chief counsel shared with Senator McClellan? Was it a very close relationship?

EVANS: I have the impression that it was very close. Senator McClellan thought very highly of Bob Kennedy and his ability as chief counsel and the work that he was doing as chief counsel. I don't think they shared any type of philosophical base. There was a great contrast between the self-made farm boy from Arkansas and the son of a wealthy New England family who had had the benefit of good prep schools and college. There was no sharing of philosophy, but when it came to the work of the committee and what Bob Kennedy was doing, Senator McClellan, I'm sure, had a very high regard for him.

OESTERLE: Was it your impression that Robert Kennedy was fastidious with detail and grasping sometimes rather technical aspects of union organization and/or complicated financial matters, for instance, of Beck and, of course, later Hoffa?

EVANS: I think he grasped this very rapidly. "Fastidious" may not be the word. Certainly there wasn't anything fastidious about his work habits, but he was a driver. He drove himself harder than he drove anybody else. There were no distractions when it came to doing the work and getting the job done. Hours meant nothing. I sometimes used to ask him if he shouldn't be paying a little more attention to his family. Not having had the privilege of having dinner with my family during the week for years, I could see that there were some bad effects to this, fortunately not serious. But I could see that perhaps I would have had a better relationship if I had devoted more time with my family, and so I used to talk with him about this, that he had a responsibility to his family, too. I don't know that I had much effect, although later on when he was attorney general he would seldom if ever let anything interfere with his having Sunday with his family.

He grasped things very rapidly. He had a brilliant mind. I don't think he was a scholar, but certainly he was very alert and was quick to grasp what was important and what wasn't important. He had excellent accountants to help him with these financial matters on the committee staff as investigators. I'm sure accounting was a completely foreign field to him, and yet when the accountants would

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bring in the results of their work, he was able to grasp the significance and to raise pertinent points about it.

OESTERLE: When does he first meet John Seigenthaler in this period? Do you recall when Seigenthaler comes on the scene? Seigenthaler was working in Nashville, the Nashville Tennessean.

EVANS: Yes. I can't recall specifically when John became involved there. He was in and out.

OESTERLE: He'd approached the McClellan Committee.

EVANS: John Seigenthaler was a principal aide to Robert Kennedy and Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] was also a principal aide. If I recall well, Seigenthaler came first and Kenny came later.

OESTERLE: Seigenthaler, I believe, was quite interested in having the McClellan Committee look into some matters in Tennessee, first met Senator McClellan, and then was referred to the chief counsel. Sometimes within the period of the next six months or a year at that, he begins to work with the chief counsel and/or indirectly with the committee.

EVANS: I first met Seigenthaler during the course of his work with the McClellan Committee. Again, I think he was a newspaper reporter who had delved into the labor-management situation in his area and who had a great deal to offer to the committee in the way of a general description as to what the situation was, who the people were that were involved, background concerning these people. He did in Tennessee what Ed Guthman did in the Pacific Northwest. And there were others. The investigating reporter was a good source for the McClellan Committee.

OESTERLE: Martin [John Bartlow Martin] fits in here too, doesn't he, at some point with his series that he did on the Teamsters union, John Bartlow Martin?

EVANS: I think so, although...

OESTERLE: You don't recall.

EVANS: His activity is not prominent in my recollection.

OESTERLE: Can you make any observations about Seigenthaler, O'Donnell, Guthman, and their relationship with the chief counsel at that point? How this relationship developed over time?

EVANS: Yes, because I think – well, certainly not with O'Donnell but with Seigenthaler who, to my knowledge, had not been associated with Robert Kennedy previously. His relationship, I think, kind of paralleled mine in that it was gradually a development of mutual respect and reliance upon efforts. With Kenny O'Donnell it was different; he was an old friend of Bob Kennedy's. It went back to college days. They had this long relationship. But beginning with the period of the McClellan Committee, the special select committee, Robert Kennedy developed a new group of close associates. You certainly have to put in this category Seigenthaler and Walter Sheridan and Carmine Bellino. It was there that Angie Novello [Angela M. Novello] was Robert Kennedy's secretary, and she held that position, no matter what he did, till he was killed. Ed Guthman obviously falls in this category. There were a number of people that played a significant part in Robert Kennedy's career, and this began at the time of the McClellan Committee.

OESTERLE: Working together as a team.

EVANS: Yes.

OESTERLE: Your relationship with Robert Kennedy continues through this period. At what point do you leave this role as liaison with the committee and go back to other duties prior to going to the Justice Department?

EVANS: Well, let's see. I think I maintained the liaison with the Senate select committee as long as it was in existence. In late '59, early '60 Bob Kennedy resigned to manage his brother's campaign.

OESTERLE: You stay on at this point?

EVANS: I stay on. The work of the committee slacks off. There's not really...

OESTERLE: Is it a function of the fact that Robert Kennedy leaves at this point, not really that the work of the Committee is slacking off? No connection?

EVANS: Oh, I think it's coincidental. If he hadn't gone to do this, he would have gone on to do something else. The work of the committee was essentially completed. They were carrying on and I maintained liaison, but as I say, it was an insignificant responsibility.

I had little contact with Robert Kennedy during this political period. I was a career government employee. I just never got involved in political things. It was against the law and outside of my field of interest. So as a consequence, from the time that Bob Kennedy left his position as chief counsel for the McClellan Committee

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until after the election, I had very, very limited contact with him. I may have talked with him

on the telephone two or three times. I may have run into him casually on the street two or three times, but in that period of a year or so I just had little contact with him.

OESTERLE: In the course of your tenure with the McClellan Committee did you also get to know John Kennedy at all?

EVANS: Oh, yes, but nothing like I knew Robert Kennedy. Senator Kennedy at that time played a major role during committee hearings. I knew him, but I didn't have the personal relationship that I had with Robert Kennedy.

OESTERLE: Was it your impression that the brothers worked very closely together and very well together at this point?

EVANS: Yes, they did, very closely and very effectively. Again, in contrast to their relationship after John Kennedy was elected president or even after he started to campaign for the presidency, there wasn't that complete working together. John Kennedy had many interests, as he had to have as a senator, that didn't concern Robert directly. And Robert Kennedy was so involved in the work of the committee that he didn't concern himself with many other things that John Kennedy became involved in. But there's no questions that as far as the committee aspect of John Kennedy's life is concerned, to my knowledge, they worked very closely together. It's entirely possible that behind the scenes, unknown to me, Robert Kennedy worked closely with John Kennedy in other areas. I just don't have any knowledge of that.

OESTERLE: During this period did you visit Hickory Hill as a guest?

EVANS: Yes. As I said, I was there when he'd have his staff or parts of his staff.

OESTERLE: Can you recall any particular occasions?

EVANS: He was a great man to have conferences out there, so sometimes it was semi-business. He did a lot of things with his family and in the summertime we'd swim in his pool. I was never a tennis player, so I couldn't play tennis with him.

OESTERLE: These were enjoyable occasions though, children and animals?

EVANS: Oh, yes. The usual...

OESTERLE: Chaos.

EVANS: ...Kennedy type of life, but no situation that I remember specifically. I used to get kidded about Mary Courtney [Mary Courtney Kennedy]...

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[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

EVANS: It wasn't at the period of time when Mary Courtney was born, but after that, when she was still an infant, that the family of Robert Kennedy began to be publicized and the identities of the children were known. I used to get a lot of credit all over the country that I was so close to Robert Kennedy that he named this daughter after me, that, of course, he had to have a feminine name so he called her Mary Courtney. It wasn't true at all. I asked Ethel Kennedy one time where she got the name and was kidding with her about I was getting credit for it. She told me that this was a childhood...[Interruption] Ethel Kennedy told me that actually the child was named for an old and very dear friend of hers whose name was Courtney. It's unusual because it's a name that's given both to boys and girls. In the minds of a lot of the public, particularly at the time when Robert Kennedy was attorney general and my relationship with him was publicized a good deal more, I got all of this credit for being so close to the family that this had occurred, when it wasn't true at all.

OESTERLE: Did Ethel Kennedy know that you had informally advised Robert Kennedy to spend a little bit more time with his family from time to time and not work so hard? Were you kidded at all about this or did she make anything of this? Or was this the kind of thing that perhaps the...

EVANS: Oh, I never even discussed that with her. Robert Kennedy had enough problems. I would guess, judging from my relationship with my family and having been away so much, that he must be having the same kind of problems. I wasn't about to complicate them by taking it up with his wife, even on a joking basis.

OESTERLE: All right. You're still with the McClellan Committee, and Robert Kennedy has left and is working on the campaign for John Kennedy, Senator Kennedy, in his campaign for presidency. When do you next pick up your relationship?

EVANS: I would assume that during the campaign I may have gotten three, four, at the most five telephone calls from Robert Kennedy. Generally he'd want to know if I was acquainted with a certain person or a certain situation. He was seeking information. If I had it, I gave it to him.

The next time I had any extended contact with Robert Kennedy was following the election. The FBI normally investigates anybody or anything that the president may ask. This is established procedure. Among other investigations that in the past had been routinely

requested by the president were investigations for high level government appointments. Following the election you may recall that the first announcement that John Kennedy made, as far as appointments to his administration were concerned, were J. Edgar Hoover and Allen Dulles,

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Mr. Dulles being the director of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. Shortly before that was announced – several days – I received a telephone call from Robert Kennedy. He said that he would like to come down and talk with the director and could I arrange this for him. I made arrangements for Robert Kennedy to come in and talk with the director.

Mr. Hoover never told me what they discussed. Robert Kennedy did tell me that he talked with Mr. Hoover about the possibility of his becoming attorney general, and asked whether cooperation would be received from the FBI in connection with investigations for the White House. Actually, Robert Kennedy told me about this after he had been named as attorney general. It was about that time that the FBI had to perfect some arrangements with the incoming administration as to what investigations were to be conducted, and, as I recall, Robert Kennedy and I talked about it. It was at that time that he told me of his conversation with the director.

Initially Robert Kennedy said, “You can deal with Larry O’Brien [Lawrence F. O’Brien],” and I did for a period of a week or two. Then the new administration began to get a little better organized and I dealt with Ralph Dungan, who later became the ambassador to Chile, I guess – someplace in South America – and ultimately with Kenny O’Donnell. As a result, I contacted Robert Kennedy in this period – it being the last part of November, December and early January – once in a while. I would see him in the office, but I didn’t have any close contact with him. I was dealing with the three assistants.

We began, in response to requests that I received from O’Brien or Dungan, or ultimately O’Donnell, to conduct investigations on people that were being considered for or who had actually been named as Cabinet officers. It’s very difficult for a president to have an investigation conducted of a Cabinet officer in a new administration before he makes some kind of public announcement. Even though the president knows it would be desirable to get all of this information before he ultimately decides, the mere fact that the FBI goes out and starts making inquiries about prominent people gets back to the press awfully fast and then you have a series of stories, speculation as to who’s going to be named. You’ve got it anyhow, but you don’t need to increase the period in which speculation can occur and the intensity in the speculation, by having FBI agents out making inquiries that are obviously of an applicant type nature. So we conducted all of these investigations usually about the time or immediately after the president had announced his intention to appoint so-and-so to a Cabinet office.

OESTERLE: Was there any way for the FBI to participate in the kind of informal inquiries that would go on prior to an all-out FBI security investigation?

EVANS: No, not really. This is a period of time in which the president is making a judgment as to appointment to high level office, and he's pretty much dependent upon individuals whose judgment he respects for confidential advice. The FBI's inquiry is an open inquiry, and while high level people are interviewed, it's to get specific information, not to get recommendations or judgments as to a man's overall ability.

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OESTERLE: No, I just meant checking the files to see if there was anything that had already been developed on some of these people that might be red-tagged, so that a president might be warned or that one of his assistants or aides who is concerned about this kind of thing might be warned that, "Better go slowly on this person, and, indeed, we'd better have a full investigation before we do appoint him."

EVANS: When you get down below the Cabinet level this is done. This is done regularly. The president isn't faced with the same problems...

OESTERLE: Or pressures.

EVANS: ...when he gets down to a lower level. There's not the intense public interest in sub-Cabinet officers as there is in a person who is to be head of a department.

I guess, essentially, this takes us up to about the inauguration. Immediately after the election, about the middle of November, Robert Kennedy was operating out of an office at 1001 Connecticut Avenue. I think it was an office that had been used by the Committee [Democratic National Committee] during the course of the campaign and he just moved in and took office space there. Early in December, after his appointment as attorney general for the new administration had been announced, arrangements were made with the then attorney general – not by me, but by somebody – for Robert Kennedy to take over office space in the Department of Justice building itself. After he moved into the building, it seemed that I saw him with a great deal more frequency that I did before. On a new attorney general being named, it was a practice that the Bureau had followed before – it wasn't designed specifically for Robert Kennedy – that the FBI immediately began to prepare a series of memoranda for him to advise him with regard to work that the Bureau was doing, programs that were underway, so that he would be better informed when he actually took office as to what some of the immediate problems were going to be and so that he would be generally knowledgeable as to what was going on.

In addition, there was some information that Mr. Hoover thought should be brought to the attention of the president-elect. I did this initially entirely through Robert Kennedy. After the inauguration, we established a formal relationship through Kenny O'Donnell to get the information to the president. This was with Bob Kennedy's concurrence, on the basis that time was often of the essence, and if information should go to the president, it needed to go there fast, so get it there fast. This was the way to do it, so we did that. Thereafter I had charge or responsibility for not only liaison with Robert Kennedy which I'd had before, but

now I had it with the president.

OESTERLE: Did you receive both titles at the same time or did one follow the other even though...

EVANS: This is not a question of title. This was just...

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OESTERLE: The duty implied.

EVANS: ...my responsibility. It was, however, early in 1961 that I was actually named an assistant director. As I pointed out in the beginning, it was very unusual for a lower ranking official to have personal contact with the director. I had been having it then for a period of over a year, so I think that this probably logically followed. There wasn't a vacancy; the director had to create one, so he just created a new division. That's why our responsibility was relatively limited within the division; it was something new that he'd created taking some responsibilities from other division.

Liaison, I say, is not a formal title. At least on a high level in the Bureau it's not a formal title. The Bureau had liaison agents who, at a low level, maintained contact with other agencies. This is an assigned title, but it's strictly a low level operation. The liaison agents did not deal at the Cabinet level, even at the sub-Cabinet level, just the ordinary routine handling of business back and forth to expedite it. We had had one such liaison agent at the White House, and after a period of time when I felt a little more at ease with the situation, I recommended to Kenny O'Donnell that we bring back the same liaison agent who had been serving the White House for years. He and the president were agreeable to this. The liaison agent for the White House all through the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] years thereafter proceeded to handle the day-to-day operations, dealing with the Secret Service and with the various secretaries, subofficials and administrative assistants in the White House on routine matters.

My activity was confined primarily to dealing with Kenny O'Donnell himself and a little with Larry O'Brien who was congressional liaison man for the president. Principally I made this recommendation because it was taking so much of my time just working with Robert Kennedy.

This brings us up to the time when Robert Kennedy had been designated as attorney general, the inauguration, and the beginning of the Kennedy administration. I suppose there are some areas here that you will want to go into in a little more detail.

OESTERLE: You start traveling with the attorney general very early during the first year, don't you?

EVANS: Yes. One of the first things that Robert Kennedy became interested in, expressed a desire to take action in, was in the field of organized crime. He wanted to go throughout the country to find out for himself what the situation was. He wanted to, I think, do two things: he wanted to meet the local

people that were doing the work, the state officials that were involved; he had a new U.S. attorney in every district. So these trips served a dual purpose of his conferring with the United States attorney to discuss the policy of the Department of Justice under the new administration, and also to meet with state and local people and find out for himself about organized crime. Both of

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these were my area of responsibility. Investigation of the U.S. attorneys had been under the division I headed and I also had jurisdiction as to organized crime.

This had never been before and Bob Kennedy, I think probably because of our personal relationship, asked me to go along and to help in these conferences. So I started to go with him, and for a period of over two years I suppose I made every trip that Robert Kennedy made which concerned Department of Justice business. He made lots of trips by himself or with others when it was strictly personal. He made trips for the State Department. I wasn't involved in any of that kind of travel.

OESTERLE: Who else traveled with you when you were on the department's business though in the field, when the attorney general was visiting either the local court or gathering the local United States attorneys together and usually on these trips also visiting the local FBI field office?

EVANS: Well, my counterpart as far as U.S. attorneys was concerned was John Reilly. He headed the Office for United States Attorneys. He was the coordinating official in Washington for activities on the part of U.S. attorney relationship. I went because of the relationship with the local authorities, and was involved in the conferences set up for Robert Kennedy to inform him about organized crime matters. These conferences were attended by state and local police, state and local prosecutors, and by representatives from federal agencies, Internal Revenue [Service], Secret Service, and obviously the FBI.

As a matter of practice, Robert Kennedy would visit these offices whenever he had the opportunity, separate and apart from the conferences with the officials. He wanted to go in and meet the people that worked for the Department of Justice, and so he would tour the office of the United States marshal, the office of the United States attorney, and the office of the FBI. This was unheard of. Most of these employees – in general, the secretaries and clerks – were amazed. Some of them had been working for the Department of Justice for twenty-five or thirty years and they had never seen an attorney general before. He came in and he was, well, a celebrity in his own right by that time. The older employees, I think, appreciated the opportunity of meeting him, and he was a tremendous hero to the young clerks and stenographers we had in the FBI field offices then. It was just a good personnel practice that he instituted. There wasn't anything significant about it; it was just a nice, good, human thing to do. He'd talk with the clerical employees and tell them how important their work was and how much he appreciated their work as career people, that the attorneys, U.S. attorneys and assistant attorneys general and everybody else in the department couldn't do their work without them. It was very human, and effective.

OESTERLE: Can you describe what some of the briefings specifically arranged for the attorney general were like?

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EVANS: Oh, they would vary. Ordinarily when we reached a city I had previously made arrangements for the FBI local office to have an agent pick us up. If there were four of us sometimes we'd have two cars. One got a little crowded if we had luggage, although many is the time the four of us traveled in one car with one agent driving. When it was publicized ahead of time he was coming to town, the press, some prominent local officials, the U.S. attorney and the U.S. marshal would be out to greet him when he arrived. He'd go through this formality at the airport and sometimes talk with the press briefly, although generally he scheduled a press conference later.

At the office of the United States attorney, Robert Kennedy would confer with the U.S. attorney privately. Then the U.S. attorney would bring in his assistants who would brief the attorney general on the important things that they were doing. This ordinarily concerned cases that were then in the prosecution stage. Following this ordinarily he would schedule his press conference. Ten or 11 o'clock in the morning is an opportune time for this. Ordinarily he'd talk to the press in the office of the United States attorney. Sometimes there was something special arranged for the lunch hour. If not, we ordinarily ate a sandwich someplace or in the office as he continued to talk with people. The conferences with the local police and prosecutors, the federal agencies that were concerned with organized crime, were generally a question and answer proposition. The attorney general would start out by asking some questions and he just built a discussion in this way without any formal presentation. He was there to gain knowledge as to what was being done about organized crime, and this was his method of developing that kind of information.

OESTERLE: Could you ever brief him so that he could ask specific questions or had any particular knowledge about any of their cases that were very important locally?

EVANS: Almost without exception on the plane on the way out I would brief him on the situation in the city to which we were going, alerting him to major developments, the situation as to local government, the extent of organized crime in the area if it existed, some personalities that he ought to know, that kind of thing. Oh, sure, he was briefed ahead of time. I generally had it in written form, but he much preferred to be told about it than to read.

OESTERLE: And John Reilly would do the same thing?

EVANS: As far as U.S. attorneys were concerned. Reilly had been very active in the campaign. He was close to Robert Kennedy then, and I left it

strictly to Reilly to brief him on the political implications of anything that might be involved in the area. Once in a while I would alert John to a particular situation, make certain he knew about it and that he was going to take care of it, but he handled that part of it.

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On these trips, Robert Kennedy would never take a trip to do one thing. He always had to have a lot of things to do, so the trips were scheduled around other responsibilities that he had, generally involving a public appearance of one kind or another. He might be making a speech before some large local group. He might just be talking with students in a law school. He didn't go out specifically to hold conferences. There was something else that took him there, and since he was going there, he was going to make the most of the day and work all of these other things in.

OESTERLE: These were long days?

EVANS: These were long days. Robert Kennedy operated on the thesis that you never traveled during the business day and many is the hour that we were moving with wheels up at 6:15 in the morning. If we closed out the day before 10:30 or 11 o'clock at night, it was unusual. They were long days, even to the point that – well, he traveled commercial airlines almost exclusively – if it were a question of having to waste time because of airline schedules, once in a while we'd charter a plane, or one or two times when I was along he used a White House plane, but very, very rarely. I recall one time when we did to Cincinnati, and one time someplace else. But only as a very last resort would he call on the White House to furnish a plane.

OESTERLE: Was the average trip one or two, three days?

EVANS: Yes. Ordinarily we would visit two places, at the most three, and then back – and it was one long day in each place. That's why I have the joke about wheels up at 6:15. We might have to be three hundred miles away, but we're to be there and start business at 8:30 or 9 o'clock in the morning.

OESTERLE: Did he always try to – especially during his tenure as attorney general increasingly he would attempt to – get home weekends or at least for Sundays?

EVANS: Yes. Oh, there were times when he would work in the office on Sunday. I know during some of the civil rights problem days he was there twenty-four hours a day, Sundays included. But the work on Sunday was ordinarily two, three, four, or five people might go out to the house and he would talk with them about something that had to be done, and immediate decisions had to be made. But as general rule he was not out of town, to my knowledge, on this type of thing, at any rate, on a Sunday.

Really, to operate, it's very difficult for a Cabinet officer to be away for more than two or three days. You can handle a certain amount on the telephone, but the work of the department is going on and you have scores of assistants that have to confer with you about certain things. So, as a consequence, you just have to be

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available in your office. He can't be gone too long a period of time. I'm sure that's the reason trips were two and three days in duration, and only when he would go to Africa or to Japan or a trip like that would he be gone for any extended period of time.

OESTERLE: Would you spend the entire day with him when you were somewhere out in the field, or would you have some other business with the local FBI officer, perhaps, that had to be accomplished even as the attorney general was making a second or third stop down the line?

EVANS: In the beginning I was involved in conferences with the U.S. attorneys. These were new people. I didn't know many of them so I used this as an opportunity to become acquainted with and to understand the operation of the U.S. attorney. I needed to be educated too. But later on, after this first go around, if he'd visit the place for the second time, then I no longer had the urgent need to be involved with the U.S. attorneys and with conferences with judges and this kind of thing, so I would drift off and take care of other things.

OESTERLE: What stands out in your mind about the first year of the new administration in terms of the attorney general's special interests or involvement?

EVANS: This is a rather involved question and it's going to take a good deal of time to go over what was done and what was important. I think that this might well be the subject of more extensive discussion that we could have perhaps the next time we meet.

OESTERLE: Yes. I've listed what I think are the major cases that you would have knowledge of and some of the other events. Of course, we can discuss the March on Washington and your involvement in that. This might be a good point to...

EVANS: I really think this might be a logical place to stop for now and then take this up in some detail later.

OESTERLE: Fine.

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