

**Godfrey McHugh, Oral History Interview – 5/19/1978**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Godfrey McHugh  
**Interviewer:** Sheldon Stern  
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**Biographical Note**

McHugh, a General in the United States Air Force and Air Force Aid to the President from 1961 – 1964 discusses his role in the White House, the presidential use, planning and protocol of *Air Force One*, advanced planning for presidential travel, the transport of foreign dignitaries, and the aftermath of President Kennedy's assassination as well as McHugh's role in transporting the late President's body, among other issues.

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# Godfrey McHugh

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Oral History Interview

with

Godfrey T. McHugh

May 19, 1978  
Washington, D.C.,

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: Why don't we begin with an account of your background and the Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt]-Truman [Harry S. Truman] era and how you came to be appointed Air Force Aid to the President?

McHUGH: Well, obviously the President [John F. Kennedy] knew my background. I had known him as a congressman and as a senator. I had had dinner with him at his house. I had been invited to his wedding.

STERN: You had known his wife, too?

McHUGH: I knew his wife, too. I had had dinner with the Auchinclosses, with Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] and her sister [Lee Bouvier Radziwill] and her mother and father several times. Therefore the President was well acquainted and very familiar with the facts that I also had been in the White House quite often. I had had dinner with President Roosevelt. Very small dinners when he only had Churchill [Winston Churchill] there and two people, who I can't think.... The king and a couple of people.

STERN: You had flown on presidential aircraft.

McHUGH: I had flown on presidential aircraft before. President Truman took me to Key West [Florida]. He had me on his yacht, the *Williamsburg*, quite often. I was a White House aide and he would ask me to come quite often in the evening when he had to receive one or two people.

One day he had to.... He was very tired, he had come back from a political trip and he asked me, "Major, do I have somebody else to see tonight?" And I said, "Yes, sir. There's a delegation of Polish people." He said, "We must do it. Bring them in." I brought in those Polish people. He did not know about it and yet he was able to make the most extraordinary warm speech to them, saying that Paderewski [Ignace Jan Paderewski] had taught him how to play the piano; that the statue of a Pole was right in front of the White House in the park; that the Poles had made a name throughout the United States. And they started crying. He received a painting from them, thanked them very much, and it was over. This shows you the warmth of the man, the kindness of the man. I had the amusing....

STERN: That's why he's such a successful politician.

McHUGH: Very successful. I felt that I had been so often his guest that I should invite him to dinner and to have a party. So I went to him and I said, "Mr. President, can I give a party for you?" He said, "You ask the boss. I'm willing." The boss of course was

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Bess Truman [Bess Wallace Truman]. I went to Bess Truman. She said, "Absolutely, Margaret [Mary Margaret Truman Daniel] and I and the President will be there. Check the calendar of the President and we'll do it. I checked the calendar. I had a small house in Georgetown. I decided to give the part. I invited two or three other White House aides to help me with it. It was in my house.

The President came. I invited the Cabinet; they came. I invited the Supreme Court justices; they came. I invited the Joint Chiefs of Staff; they came, and a few society people in town. It was a fabulous party. The one amusing incident was the captain of the *Williamsburg* called me and said, "You know the President would not like your house." And I said, "Why, captain?" He said, "He likes to play the piano. I will send you the *Williamsburg* piano." And they sent the piano of the *Williamsburg* to my house so he could play. When the President came in he said, "I think I am outranking you, am I not, lieutenant colonel? – or whatever – major?" "I am taking this house' I like the piano." It was amusing. It was a warm thing. The Secret Service descended upon me and said, "You can not do that again. This house is too small." I said, "Look the President..." They said, "Please, we ask you. The President might do it, but please don't do it again."

STERN: For security reasons.

McHUGH: For security reasons. I had five parties in a row – four parties in a row, I

think it was – and I said, all right. I went to

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Anderson House [Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.] and asked them if I could use the Anderson House. And I said, “The White House aid wanted to know.” They said, “If you are not a member of the Order of Cincinnati, then you cannot do it.” I said, “I realize that, but it’s for the President.” They said, “The President is not giving the party and it cannot be done.” So I said, “If the President asks you?” He said, “That’s different.”

So I went back to the White House, had a letter typewritten on White House stationery with the President’s name on it, brought it to the President and I said, “Mr. President, would you sign this letter to the Order of Cincinnati asking them to let us use the house because you want to give a party there? It’s not quite what you’re doing, but we want to give you a party in a beautiful setting. We want the Marine Band to be there and we need some space.” He said, “I’ll be delighted.” He signed the letter and from then on we had the Anderson House.

STERN: How nice. Did you have any similar experience with President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] after Truman left?

McHUGH: No, with President Eisenhower I was stationed in Europe. I was the head of the joint exercise planning staff. Army, Navy, Air for NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], and I was roaming around all NATO, constantly in a different country organizing these exercises. But I knew Eisenhower well because I had flown him to his NATO job because Mr. Truman asked me to do so. He asked me to pick General Eisenhower up at Columbia University in New

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York, fly him back to Washington, then fly him to Paris, which I did. I sat with him and talked with him. As a matter of fact, he said to me when we were landing at Orly [Orly Airport], “Colonel, are there many people out there?” And I looked out and couldn’t see anybody. I said, “Well, not too many.” And he said, “I just don’t know why I ever took this job.” [Laughter]

When we were in the White House – Eisenhower was leaving – he turned to President Kennedy – we were the three of us in this room...

STERN: On inauguration night.

McHUGH: ... on inauguration night. He turned to the President and he says, “That linguist has worked for me for many years. I know him well.” We laughed and he went away. He knew I knew him well.

STERN: So you came then to work for President Kennedy after many years with White House experience.

McHUGH: With many years of White House experience and many years on the high level staff of the Air Force. I'd like to give you – to confirm the fact that I worked for General Arnold [Henry Hartley Arnold] and he gave me the Legion of Merit actually for my work with the scientific advisory board [NATO Advisory Group for Aeronautical Research and Development] – I'd like to give you three documents to show to various parties, one for every ten years that I've worked in the Air Force. That is one of the reasons plus the fact that he knew this background, why I believe the President must have selected me.

STERN: Of course you did know him personally as well.

McHUGH: I knew him personally. I had dinner with him and Hugo Black [Hugo L. Black]

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who was the head of the World Bank [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development] at his house in Georgetown. The only people there were Jackie and the President and Hugo Black and myself.

STERN: I think it was Eugene Black [Eugene R. Black].

McHUGH: Eugene Black, yes, the other one on the Supreme Court. He had asked me because he saw me in Paris, and on the Riviera at the Eden Rock, [Restaurant, Cap D'Antibes] a few months before when I was still in Europe and he said, "When you come back to the States I want to talk to you about what you were just telling me." I had told him that on the yacht that I had on the Riviera I could only get the weather from the Russian stations. All the others were always backed out or messed up. But the Russians could.... In addition, they would put up a real good propaganda. I said, "It's a shame that we can't do better." When I came to that night he said, "Let's talk about your experience with radios in Europe and how badly the Voice of America handles it." That was his statement.

STERN: That's fascinating. Can we discuss in some detail your, let's call it a typical day, if that's possible, exactly what you would expect to do on a typical day at the White House.

McHUGH: A typical day at the White House would be, get there before the President got up to be sure that we could read all the newspapers and be ready for any of his questions, because he would never give us a warning. A little buzzer would sound in the office and we'd

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run down. I would run down.

STERN: When you say we, do you mean the other...

McHUGH: If they were asked.

STERN: ...military aides?

McHUGH: No, we were not asked together. He would ask one person at a time whatever he wanted. He would say, "Why did this thing happen?" One day I was seated with Admiral Anderson [George W. Anderson, Jr.], who was the head of the Navy at the time yet, and the President in the cabinet room. Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] came in and threw a piece of paper in front of the President and walked away. I had been seated behind the President – not at the table, of course – against the wall, because he had asked me to be there to get some papers from him, so I was there waiting for him to give me instructions. I could see he was turning pale, he was turning furious, he was getting absolutely mad, and I could tell it. I said, "My God, what on earth has happened now?" And he said, "McHugh!" And he rarely called me McHugh. He said, "I want to find out about this and I want the answer within the hour. How the hell can you have your service stab me in the back?" Anderson was shaken up, too. Anderson remembers that very well because he just told me that at dinner a week ago. He said, "Do you remember when the President got so mad at you?" I said, "Yes, but he was not really mad at me. He was mad at something." I took the paper and read it. It said, "The Air Force has spent eleven million dollars at..." Not Hyannis Port – a base there.

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STERN: Otis Air Force Base?

McHUGH: Otis Air Force Base. "... to build a hospital for Mrs. Kennedy to have a baby, with a wing lavishly furnished. Money has been spent absolutely stupidly." And it was released to the press that way, and the press was putting it out. I knew it was not true, but I quickly got on the phone and I called the commander of Otis and I said, "Now what is this story about the...." He said, "It is not true but you have to call the material people. You have to call the building people." I called each one of them, one at a time. I had about six phone calls. They all denied it, and I finally got the.... They said Doctor Travell [Janet G. Travell] had inspected the wing several times, had ordered changes made, and things which were not true. They told me no. Five years before the President got elected, the Congress appropriated eleven million dollars to Otis as one hospital in case of dire emergency in the United States, atomic attack on the United States, they wanted several.... The hospital was rebuilt and reorganized for the purpose.

STERN: I see. Wasn't there some incident though, connected with that, concerning some baby furniture?

McHUGH: No, there was no baby furniture there. There was no baby furniture, but there was a room that had been assigned to her in that wing, in a wing. Doctor Travell has stated she felt that they said, "You can bring anything you want." But we didn't have baby furniture, no.

STERN: I think the incident I'm thinking of was in August of '63 when she was pregnant with the baby that died.

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McHUGH: Oh, not yet. Not that time.

STERN: This was later.

McHUGH: This was earlier.

STERN: It was something about buying some baby furniture and the President was very angry about it?

McHUGH: I never heard of that one. I heard about the eleven million dollars that we were spending. I came back and I got everything ready within the hour. I think it was, and he was still in the cabinet room, still with Admiral Anderson and cabinet people. I walked in and I gave him my report which was a very short paragraph. This was done: Congress approved; this was done because it was designated as a hospital for emergency. I said, "The wing was built, but they did reserve one room in that wing, and there is nothing wrong about that." He said, "Thank God. Now I want you to.... Whew! Salinger.... Forever not checking, and I want everything checked with the services when it has something to do with the services, because you fellows know, and they don't know enough by themselves." That's the way that incident ended.

STERN: So this is an example of the sort of thing that you would....

McHUGH: This is an example of the sort of thing that would suddenly come. Another example was, I'd be sitting in my office answering letters, checking on letters. We had a big staffing the Pentagon writing letters for the President. We had to check every one of them to know that it was reasonable, it was correct and that the President would sign such a thing, or I would sign it for the President quite often.

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STERN: These were letters from the public about....

McHUGH: From the public about their sons dying somewhere in the Pacific. Their sons are missing, or they were ill in a hospital and they didn't know anything

about it. That we were spending too much money on the base. That we were closing a base and not opening another one.

STERN: All sorts of public relations.

McHUGH: All sorts of public relation things, and they had to be answered. Every one was answered either by me signing it for the President – “The President has asked me to let you know that...” And we did all these things. I was doing that when – we had an agreement with the President that any time he wanted to fly anywhere, *Air Force One* only needed thirty minutes at any time of night or day to fly him out of Washington anywhere, any time. So suddenly I see a helicopter land on the lawn. It’s very rare that I didn’t know about it, because I was not handling helicopters – the Navy was – Taz Shepard [Tazewell T. Shepard, Jr.], a very wonderful fellow. I called quickly Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln], Evelyn Lincoln, and she said, “The President is in. He wants to talk to you.” So bang went the phone and the President said, “I want to leave immediately. We are leaving for Hyannis Port.” No. For Boston. I said, “Yes, Mr. President.” I called Andrews [Andrews Air Force Base] and for the first time in years, as far as I knew, *Air Force One* was shooting landings thirty miles away because they had had problems with some of their instruments and they were checking them out. The backup

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was there, but had been taken by the Vice President [Lyndon B. Johnson] who was flying somewhere and had taken off. We did not have a 707 on the field.

I realized that I was going to take off within two minutes maybe, and I said, “Get the Jetstars, four of them. Refuel them right now, crew them right now and have them standby one at a time all of them, one behind the other. We’ll be there in fifteen minutes. It has to be done in fifteen minutes.” But they can do that. It’s an extraordinary thing. Beautifully organized. Very competent. So they said, “Yes, general, it will be done.”

The phone rang again. The President said, “We’re leaving.” We get into this helicopter. He was very, very upset. His son [Patrick Bouvier Kennedy] was very, very ill in Boston. Oh, before that – excuse me – he said to me, “There is only one doctor that could save my son. His name is...” Such-and-such. “He is in New York, I think. Can we get him to Boston?” And that is all he said before we took off – you see, we were still in my office.

STERN: Is this in the summer of ’63?

McHUGH: Whenever his son died. His son died within five, six days.

STERN: August of ’63, right.

McHUGH: So I called for the airport again and I said, “Send an airplane. It doesn’t matter which one.” One airline and one of our executive airplanes to New

York, LaGuardia [LaGuardia Airport]. Have it stay there on standby.” Then I called the New York office of the doctor. He was no there; he was on call. “Do you know where?” “No, he has five or six places he’s going to go. Here are the phone numbers

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of these places.” I called each phone number, two or three. I realized it was hopeless. I called back the office. I said, “Will you call the police and tell them there is an emergency, that they have to pick up the doctor and bring him to LaGuardia.” They said, “What kind of emergency?” I said, “The White House needs a doctor in Boston, and they need this doctor. Will you please get hold of him.” And I said, “You can ask the White House to call but it is easier for you to do so and you can use our name. The White House needs a doctor.” The police found the doctor, brought him to LaGuardia. The plane was at LaGuardia. He was flown into Boston. While I was flying to Boston I called the airport in Boston to have helicopters stand by. I cleared the parking lot around the hospital for one helicopter to land, and the man was there within the hour. I got a personal note from the President thanking me for “the excellent, amazing, good work you did helping us get this done.”

STERN: Of course that sort of incident, as impressive as it is, is obviously an unusual one. Not the sort of thing that happened every day.

McHUGH: It is, not the sort of thing that happened every day.

STERN: That’s just exactly what I mean. What sort of things happened on a more daily basis, more routine kinds of things?

McHUGH: On the more daily basis, there would be a call that the President had decided that he was going to Caracas. There was going to be a meeting there. So immediately we had to figure out, did the State Department know? Yes, it’s been organized.

STERN: What kind of notice were you given on a thing like that?

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McHUGH: Oh, sometimes two, three weeks. It was a plan that they were going to do it. So then we would call the State Department and said, “What about this?” They said, “Well we’re trying to get a meeting set up between the President of Venezuela and the President of America. This is the way we’re going to do it. We want to land there at such a time.” And now we have to find out whether or not we can do that. So we’d have an advance trip. I’d call Swindal [James B. Swindal] and I’d say, “There’s a plan to go to Caracas. We have to land near the water. We’ll take a car up to the capital. Would you find out how long it’s going to take, what the weather is going to be on that day?” You have to do it that way. He said yes. Then we would send...

The preparations for a trip are an amazing thing. But I'll tell you that on this particular trip. I will digress a little bit.

STERN: Okay, fine.

McHUGH: We are flying down to Caracas after having an advance trip. I will explain the advance trip.

STERN: Yes, I'd like to know that.

McHUGH: When the President said to me, "Is it right what I hear that we are having a fighter escort?" I said, "Yes, Mr. President, you're not supposed to see this fighter escort, but it's up there with a squadron. There is also a command ship, communication in addition to ours. We had to do it because the joint chiefs were absolutely adamant that you could not fly that close to Cuba without having a fighter escort. They will not take the responsibility. They told me not to tell

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you that because otherwise you would get mad and refuse it." He said, "They didn't want that refused. They had to have it. What else is there?" I said, "Well, sir, you have a weather ship that flew before you landed there. We sent people, weather personnel and equipment, in order to check the weather constantly and report to us every two hours what the weather was. We have armed guards that are there now to protect the base and the airplane when it is there. We have Secret Service there examining everything around." And he said, "What else?" And I said, "Sir, of course you have aircraft carriers. You have an aircraft carrier in the water. It is there somewhere on the left and that is in case we drop in the water or something, they can come and get you. They have helicopters aboard the thing." He said, "That's ridiculous." I said, "Well, sir, that is the way it's done. And not only that, you have an aircraft carrier off the coast of Venezuela." "What for?" I said, "Sir, a whole marine squadron is aboard to come and rescue you in case.... You remember when Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] went, he was attacked, and there was that thing? Nothing like that is going to happen, sir. In case of trouble, those men are ready to fly off the aircraft carrier, drop around your car, protect you, pick you and take you right back to the aircraft carrier." And he said, "Continue." And I said, "Yes, sir, I can continue for a long time, but I don't want you to think that we are doing this foolishly. This has to be done for the protection of the President of the United States." And he said, "What else?" I said, "Sir, there is

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a whole squadron of army men at Fort Bragg, paratroopers, waiting to go into two huge air force airplanes, waiting to fly in case of trouble and to protect you again. They are not going to do anything in case of actual trouble. But they are ready. They are in their barracks. The planes are fueled, the pilots are replaced every two or three hours, and that is the way." And

he said, "Well, I do accept that." [Laughter] That's the type of thing. And I go back now to the advance trip. The advance trip we went there, we took a car, we landed.

STERN: When you say we, who would go along?

McHUGH: Swindal, the Secret Service, the doctor. Everybody connected with the President, who was going to go there anyhow, went there first. We would calculate how long it would take us to walk from the airplane to the car. How long it would take the car to go from that place to the hotel where he was going to be, or to the palace where he was going to be, or to the conference room. The Secret Service examined the conference room on all sides. Checking what could go wrong, what could not go wrong. The elevators, whether or not they wanted him in the elevators or preferred him to walk, because in case the current in that country was not always on, we don't want him in the elevator. Then we would go to the kitchens and specialized men would see what kind of furnace they had, cooking surfaces and things. We would take our own food for him so it would be.... We would use an excuse that he was on a diet or something so he would eat the proper food. That is the type of thing.

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STERN: Was this a safety concern, too?

McHUGH: Safety concern always. We would buy fuel and put it into refueling trucks way before the airplane would come and examine it every three hours. There would be samples taken out to see if they had put something in the fuel that would spoil the fuel later on. The fuel was examined, completely chemically examined, all the time, daily, daily, daily until it was put in the aircraft, because the fuel we put in the aircraft we completely checked constantly at Andrews. We wanted the same type of consideration given to him when he was landing any place.

STERN: That's fascinating. I wonder for example, two other cases I remember finding a lot of material in the papers, did you go through such rigid and detailed preparations, for example, if he were going to, let's say, Los Angeles or some place within the United States? Was it pretty much the same?

McHUGH: Exactly the same. Nothing was left to chance. *Air Force One* prided itself on being able to take off at a certain time and land at exactly the minute stated wherever it was in the world. We were always able to do that. We never were late and we never were early. One day the President... It's a story I said before, but I'd like to repeat it. One day the President said, "I want to go to Palm Beach. How long will it take us?" I said, "Two hours and ten minutes, sir." He said, "That's too damn long. My friends have private jets and they can get there faster." I said, "Yes, sir, but they are not the

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President of the United States. We want to land you at exactly the minute you stated you want to land. We ask you and we land you there, and we cannot do it unless we have a small cushion of time because you are rarely on time leaving.” That’s right. He has all these very important things to do at the last minutes. “Therefore the cushion is already lost by the time you board the airplane. So we’ll take off later than we thought we were going to. But we still have a cushion then because we can make the plane go a little faster, so we catch up; or we can go a little slower, so we land you and the door opens on the minute.” He said, “You’re right. It has always been on the minute. You continue doing that.”

STERN:           What about, for example, the trip to Vienna when he met with Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev]? Did that create special problems because he was going to....

McHUGH:        No, it did not. The same type of security was used. He was very excited about seeing Khrushchev and he spent quite a long time. We had dinner with him in a gorgeous palace. It’s a beautiful setting. Khrushchev, as you well know, was a peasant, a strange man. Very, very shrewd and the President enjoyed talking to him. He felt, I think, that he had won his point with him because he seemed very satisfied at the end on the flight back. He seemed very happy with his trip.

STERN:           Wasn’t there something about, he asked you sometime later to buy the chairs for a museum in the United States that had been used at the conference?

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McHUGH:        He had said that several times and we did several of those things. He would say, “I would like to have,” and we would buy it for him and see to it. But I would turn that over to the State Department and say, “The President would like to have such a thing,” and they would go ahead and get it. I had to turn over a lot of these things that he wanted done.

For example, his own chair that Dr. Travell said was required, had to be a little higher on the left side because his spine was a little hurt or something. We fixed up the chair only for him. Nobody ever sat in the President’s chair on *Air Force One*. When we used *Air Force One* for somebody else, we would put something over it, so they would never know that it was a little bit higher on one side than the other.

STERN:           Let’s talk a bit about *Air Force One* itself. I think that’s a fascinating subject in terms of the communications and the way the plane had been planned. Very interesting.

McHUGH:        The plane, the aircraft, was planned a long time before President Kennedy was elected because we knew we would have to replace *Air Force One* from time to time. But it was not designated yet. We had all plans and suggestions from Boeing [Boeing Airplane Company] before the President was elected. I was brought

in...I was in long-range objectives at the time, and they knew that I had been on *Air Force One* several times, and they asked me to come and give them suggestions. With Eisenhower's pilot, we looked at the plans and decided that we should try to give the President privacy

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for the first time. They had never had privacy. Always entering from the front of the airplane, having to pass through the crew members, the front of the galley, in front of the guards, in front of all their friends and staff and finally get up to the back where there was a suite for the President. We decided that maybe we could make him enter the back of the plane, by the back door. Have the back for the Secret Service, a few Secret Service, one or two. A galley especially for him. Then a corridor on the left side and an apartment or a room, a bedroom with the powder room and clothes closet for his particular use and his wife, two beds and a little table. Then the suite for the President. This business, for a table for him to sit and four seats on the other side in case he wanted to talk to people. That was designed that way, accepted. The press got a hold of it and got very worried because they said the wing when it landed would be in the way of the press and the cameras, but nevertheless this was done that way and the President was delighted with *Air Force One*. Mrs. Kennedy told me one day, "There are two things the President adores. One is "Hail to the Chief," he adores that song, and he adores *Air Force One*." She was very sweet and very kind. She knew that he had a great, great liking for *Air Force One*.

STERN: One of his aides said, and I can quote it to you right here that, "*Air Force One* was like a flying hotel in which nothing could go wrong." Do you think that essentially that was true?

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McHUGH: This is essentially true. It was more than a hotel. It was a communications center in which nothing could go through.

STERN: There was a lot of secret communications equipment, too.

McHUGH: It was fantastic secret communications. It had everything duplicated and duplicated again. Because if there was a war suddenly, some atomic bomb dropped on the United States, we could communicate with every command in the world directly from this airplane. Immediately and quickly, we could communicate on many wavebands on many kinds of radios. The communication people aboard were trained so that if you asked them to get any number anywhere, they could get you that number, even privately.

There was an amusing story, not about the airplane but about communications. The President said, "We're going to get hotlines direct to Khrushchev and direct to de Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle]. When they are on, I would like you to come here and call. You speak French and I'd like to see how you...." And jokingly a few weeks later when it was all in, he

said, "Godfrey, now that this thing is in, call de Gaulle for me and see how long.... You keep on bragging about your communications. Call him. I want to time you." I picked up the phone in the White House and I asked for the Elysée [Elysée Palace] in Paris and I got a few quick, quick, quick, quick. And I heard some people, communicating, saying, "Do you want the Elysée Palace?" Then suddenly a voice came on, "Elysée Palace Hotel." We had the Elysée Palace Hotel, the small little hotel on the Rive Gauche. I couldn't believe it. I said, "What? I want to speak to

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President de Gaulle." "Who?" And the President said, "Now, now, now, it's already four minutes. How are you doing?" I said, "Mr. President, you won't believe it. It's not the Elysée, I've got the Elysée Palace Hotel." He said, "I knew it. It's no damn good." [Laughter] But we did get cut off again and I said, "No don't give me that again. Give me the Elysée, where the President is." Then we did get it within two or three more minutes.

STERN: He was always willing to make a joke out of something like that.

McHUGH: He was very, very willing to make a joke and to tease.

STERN: Did you have special problems in terms of planning travel when his wife was coming along? Did that create any complication?

McHUGH: The only communication was that he was very attentive to Mrs. Kennedy. He wanted her to be happy. Therefore he wanted to know the weather all the time. What the weather was going to be when we landed. What the weather was going to be the next day when we got up and had to do something like lay a wreath or something.

STERN: Which is not something you can always know.

McHUGH: Which is not something you cannot.... I would get the weather bureau to give me what they thought it was going to be. I would give it to him in writing and Mrs. Kennedy would sometimes pack her bag on what this thing said it was going to be in Venezuela, for example. Now we also had weather people stationed where we were going to land. But it was late, because as the weather changed as we were flying to it, we knew what the weather was going to be, but Mrs. Kennedy couldn't repack her bags. The President sometimes would get a little

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annoyed saying, "You're always wrong with your weather. It is not the weather you promised."

STERN: Were there special precautions taken for her safety?

McHUGH: No, because of the President, nobody had to worry. The security was extraordinary. Of course, you cannot prevent someone from being killed. That's an impossibility. As you know Moro [Aldo Moro] was killed with five military guards ahead; they killed five of them and took him away. It can be done in the United States; it can be done anywhere.

STERN: This is absolutely fascinating. I can across something that might interest you. There was a note in January '61 from Congressman Gerald Ford [Gerald R. Ford] of Michigan which I found in the papers, in which he questioned the amount of money that had been spent on *Air Force One*; he said it was too much. He was especially concerned about \$190,000 for classified communications equipment. Do you have any recollection of that or how it was handled?

McHUGH: Yes, the classified equipment because these are top, top secret-type radios that can communicate with the satellites, can communicate, for example.... There is no place in the world that we cannot reach from *Air Force One* immediately. It can be done from other airplanes, too, but we do it directly. For example, when we went to Boston with those four airplanes. We were talking about that on...

STERN: Yes.

McHUGH: We had the four Jetstars ready. He went into one with me and

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Salinger, I think, and a couple.... I'm not sure that Salinger was there. We flew and landed there. Then all the papers said, "For the first time the President of the United States was out of communication, and he is the commander in chief. How could they have done that, to put him in a twin-engine airplane?" First of all, it was not a twin-engine airplane. It is a four-engine airplane. Second, it had extraordinary communications on all of these airplanes, but not direct to the rest of the world. What we do is call Andrews, or whatever station is closest, and they connect us to anywhere around the world. They have the possibility of doing that. So the President while he was flying a Jetstar could call all his commanders, give orders to the Pentagon, do anything the same way as if he were in *Air Force One*. Now somebody is going to say, "Why did you spend that much money on *Air Force One* to do it directly?" The reason is, we are not flying over the United States all the time. We fly across the Pacific, we fly across the Atlantic, we go to South America. Wherever he is, we can't depend on the communications on the ground but we can depend on our own communications. In case that was not enough, once in a while we had a command ship that would fly above us if it was very important, like going to Venezuela. So that in case something happened to the communications, we had them all.

STERN: Did you make special precautions for, kind of – how do I put it? – mundane sort of emergencies like health emergencies, clothing, things of that sort?

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McHUGH: We had with us a man, a warrant officer, who gave him massages all the time he was aboard. Any time he wanted a massage, any time he wanted to be rubbed he could do that. We had Dr. Burkley [George G. Burkley] who was the most devoted human being you have ever heard of. He would stay night and day. He would remain and do anything for anyone. It was an amazing man. He was there in case something happened. We all regretted that sweet Dr. Travell got the title of doctor to the President for a while, because she was not really his doctor.

STERN: Burkley was really....

McHUGH: Burkley was the doctor, and he felt relegated as second, and he did resent it a great deal, I remember that. But of course he never said anything about it. He was just hurt. Dr. Travel realized that and did not try to impose on him, and little by little it was settled by the President himself who did say, "Dr. Burkley.... And Dr. Travell is taking care of special handling and Mrs. Kennedy."

STERN: Did you ever have any kind of emergency where the President needed something which you didn't have, and you'd have to get it? You pretty much planned for everything?

McHUGH: No, that was completely panned. He was never sick with us on any trip.

STERN: You have, from the papers.... It's obvious, with such an immense amount of responsibility and detail, you must have had a fairly large staff of people working under you.

McHUGH: The staff was very small. I had a remarkable major that I had

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assigned to me to help me. That was after a year, or more than that. I had a secretary who was excellent. She had been a secretary of the aid before. She was well acquainted with all the business part of it. I had two sergeants, Craig [Craig Chance] and Poole [Henry G. Poole], who were devoted men, who would work night and day to do their job. That is all we had in the Air Force Aide's office, which was fixed up and redecorated by the Air Force in a very nice two offices, two rooms.

STERN: You were in the White House?

McHUGH: In the White House, in the east wing. A beautiful office with TV and records and things, because when the President went and gave a conference, for

example, a press conference at the State Department, he would be asked questions about the military once in a while. He did not know the answer, but he was so extraordinarily clever and agile that he would bypass the question and answer it in a certain way. But we knew he wanted to know the answer by the time.... So we immediately.... We'd watch the conference on TV – that's what I did. I don't know what the others did, but I'm sure they did.

STERN: Trying to anticipate what he'd ask you?

McHUGH: I'd take notes. He's asked about this, he's asked, Why did we spend that amount of money? Did we really lose that many airplanes? I'd call the Secretary of the Air Force immediately who'd tell me, "Don't call me. Call so-and-so." I'd call that.... But I had called the secretary, which I felt was very important, to put him

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in the chain of command type thing. He, after all, was appointed by the President. Then I'd get the answers, have them typed real quick, and as the President drove back, I'd hand him a piece of paper.

STERN: He must have enjoyed that.

McHUGH: He enjoyed it very much.

STERN: I can imagine that. He liked that sort of efficiency.

McHUGH: One day he told me, he said, "You like physical fitness." And he said, "Now Salinger is having a fifty-mile hike. I think that you are the only one that is capable of doing this." "Why is that?" He said, "Because you just finished paratrooper training." I'd gone through paratrooper training when I was in the White House, and made many jumps, you see. He said, "I want you to go and tell Salinger that you'll be on that team." So I went to Salinger and he said, "Oh. Well, sure. I'm going to do it and so-and-so is going to do it." And of course he got out of it because the doctors and everybody else told him he couldn't possibly walk fifty miles – he was in terrible shape.

STERN: He was somewhat overweight.

McHUGH: I said, "But I'll do it," because I was through paratrooper training a month before and I really was in very good shape. I had to do twenty-seven pushups and all, over and over and over again. And he said, "All right. " And little by little, and then the President called me and said, "Look, Salinger is going to get out of it, I know, and let him handle it, and don't push and don't say to anybody

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you're going to do it, because it's going to be embarrassing to him. When he gets out of it gracefully, you don't say anything any more." Finally he called a press conference saying Salinger's heart is not better....

STERN: Did you have any special problems in transporting foreign dignitaries? I know that you picked people up abroad, brought them to the United States.

McHUGH: I was sent to pick up the king of Afghanistan and had many interesting.... Of course, I speak French. I speak way better French than I do English, because I was brought up in Europe and went to school in France, and my French is excellent. They love to speak French, most of these foreigners. These kings were either educated in that language, or brought up there. I was sent to pick up the king of Morocco. Shall I tell this story?

STERN: Yes, that's a marvelous story.

McHUGH: The President called me and he said, "I want you to go to New York and talk to the king who is arriving by boat, because he won't fly. I want him to fly out of here because we want him to be out of Washington by the next day. And convince him that *Air Force One* is a safe airplane and fly him out. So I went with Angier Biddle Duke and we got on a tug in the middle of the harbor. We went to sea. We got on the boat at sea, on the ship, I met the king, who I knew, and had met several times before. I said, "Your majesty, the President wants you.... He's worried about your safety.

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That's the first thing, He wants you to have the best plane in the world to go back, because he feels it's safer than anything that you can go on, including boats. He's willing to let you have his own airplane and his own crew, and has ordered me to accompany you in case you are willing to accept." And the king said, "I cannot refuse such a generous offer. Tell the President I will accept." Then when I flew him back, I was on the airplane and he said to me, "I'd like to talk to my military aid. He lives in a village near Rabat." I said, "Well, we'll try to do that, sir, and what else?" Then I got up and I quickly said to the communication man, "Sergeant, we must call Rabat immediately. We must get hold of this captain who lives nearby." He said, "Sir, you do it. You speak French, and I'll put you in communication immediately to Rabat." Which was immediate. Then I asked Rabat, where does the captain live? I got the captain on the phone. I said, "Hold him there." I went back to the king and said, "Sir, where does that captain live?" He said, "In the village so-and-so. His number, I think, is something like six-four-two." I said, "Sir, just pick up the phone and ask for it and he'll be on the phone." And he was. He said, "Your communications are fantastic."

STERN: Well, they were.

McHUGH: And they were. You know, the telephone communications of the White

House are the best in the world. They are extraordinary. Shall I tell you the story about making *Air Force One*... [Interruption]

STERN: You had to pick him up at Addis Ababa?

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McHUGH: Back at Addis Ababa. That, too?

STERN: Yes, the whole thing. That's a marvelous story.

McHUGH: I was sent to pick up the emperor.

STERN: He was – what? – coming to visit the President?

McHUGH: He was coming to visit President Kennedy and we took *Air Force One*. Dr. Burkley and a marvelous crew – Swindal and Hanson [Lewis B. Hanson]. Hanson had worked for me as a lieutenant when I was Vandenberg's [Hoyt S. Vandenberg] Air Force aide. I was the Air Force aid to the chief of staff of the Air Force at that time, and picked up Hanson and when we had *Air Force One* I made him.... I asked for him there, because I wanted Swindal to be the boss of the flying. "Do you accept Hanson as your copilot?" "Oh, I know him well. He's a fantastic man, I'd love to have him." So he became our second in command.

STERN: I see. Just one question. When you are, for example, taking *Air Force One* to Ethiopia to pick up the emperor, in case of an emergency in which the President might need, there is a backup plane...

McHUGH: A back up plane and a backup to the backup.

STERN: ...with the same equipment and everything?

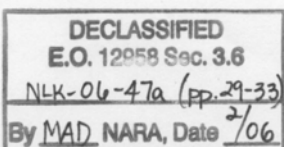
McHUGH: With the same equipment, duplication. This is an amazing story. When the President was killed and we were going to fly him back, President Johnson refused to fly in *Air Force Two* because he said the communications were not the same as *Air Force One*, which of course was not the case. He just wanted to be

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on *Air Force One*. But they were identical.

STERN: So then you went to pick up Haile Selassie.

McHUGH: So I went to pick up Haile Selassie. His imperial majesty told me that he would be delighted to come, but he'd like to go to the Sudan first. I felt I



could not give him an answer right away. I called the White House. Went through *Air Force One*.

[BEGIN TAPE TWO]

McHUGH: "He wants to go to the Sudan?" "How long will it take?" "It's only an hour from here, sir." And he said, "All right, you can do that." So I came back to Haile Selassie and said, "Your Imperial Majesty, everything is all right. You can go." But he says, "Did you tell him that I want to also go to Switzerland?" I said, "No, you didn't tell me that." And I said, "I'll go back." So I went back to *Air Force One*, got back on the thing and got hold of somebody in the White House. I said, "Ask the President if we can also go to Switzerland." The answer came back, "Yes, you can go to Switzerland for only one or two days and no longer, and be right back from there direct." I said to Haile Selasse, "Your Imperial Majesty, we can go to Switzerland." Now we take off and we land in the Sudan and he said, "I'm going to get off the airplane." I said, "How long are you going to be here?" He said, "Not too long." I couldn't figure out what was going to happen, when suddenly the door had been opened to let the emperor leave. His own ambassador came in and crawled on the floor of *Air Force One*.

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Nothing ever happened before like that. Completely crawling, never lifting his head, his nose on the ground all the way from the entrance to the chair where the emperor was seated and he stayed that way until the emperor addressed him. They were talking in Ethiopian. I felt I should leave and I said, "Your Imperial Majesty..." He said, "No, you don't talk Ethiopian. That's all right. It will only take two minutes." They kept on talking back and forth. Then the ambassador crawled backwards, feet backwards all the way back out of the airplane.

Now I asked some people later on in the State Department what on earth could have caused that, and they said, "It is rather natural, because when a man is in disgrace he has to lie down for forgiveness and can't get up until he is totally forgiven. Apparently he was not forgiven because he walked back feet first all the way out of the airplane. So that was one...."

STERN: Even you had to walk backwards when you addressed the....

McHUGH: That was another thing. I had been told that the emperor felt very pleased if people did not turn their back on him. It was to him paying him homage and honor. So I decided to do the same thing. As I was in his throne room, I finished talking to him telling him about the flight and when we were going to leave, I walked backwards a hundred feet in the huge throne room. As I was walking back I deviated a little bit more to one side than the other, and suddenly I felt my hand taken by something, and it was a cheetah that put his teeth into my hand.

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STERN: He had two of them, right.

McHUGH: Two of them on the side. Big cheetah, tremendous circus cheetahs, and they came quickly and opened up his jaws and got my hand out of there, and I kept on walking backwards and holding my hand in the handkerchief. Dr. Burkley came running to me at the hotel and said, "I've been told you've been bitten." He gave me a tetanus shot, and all. It was not bad, and it was just a nasty little thing, and banged up my hand a little bit. On the airplane flying to Saudi Arabia, I sat in front of him at the table and he said, "I want to give you a gift. I have a gift for you." He gave me a bronze medal, gold-plated, that was, he said, struck when he was made emperor forty-two years ago when he was inaugurated, and he said it was a present. I said, "You Imperial Majesty, thank you very, very much." "Oh, no," he said, "Don't thank me, thank the cheetah. She is sending this with her apology."

STERN: Then you took him to Switzerland as well.

McHUGH: Then I took him to Switzerland, and when we got to Switzerland for the first time we had a mix-up with the luggage which I did not understand. It's an interesting one. We put the emperor and the top staff in one hotel, and we put the remaining portion in another hotel. I got a call from the minister of finance saying, "There's a suitcase missing." I knew that nothing could be missing. It may be in the wrong room. So I went around with a sergeant looking at every room, checking the luggage. Here was the leather suitcase he was talking about, had described. I said to the sergeant, "Let's

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pick it up and we'll bring it to the hotel." The sergeant said, "I can't lift the thing." I said, "Come on." I tried it myself, and it was so heavy – we could lift it all right – but, I mean, it was unusually heavy. I said, "Let's open it. We can't put this on *Air Force One* and carry this without knowing what it is because it might be a bomb and for security reasons." He was very, very good at opening things. In about two minutes he had the suitcase opened and it was solid gold bars. The whole thing was only gold bars. So we closed it up very quickly and brought it back to the finance minister and gave it to him. He said, "Thank you. You saved my life."

STERN: Which I'm sure he meant quite literally.

McHUGH: I think he did.

STERN: Were there any other incidents? You flew the premier of Japan, I believe.

McHUGH: We flew so many people that it was once every two or three months we'd be flying somebody else. Nearly every time there'd be a slight amusing incident, anecdote, but we can't go into it all.

STERN: No, of course not. Can you tell me anything about the relationship between

you and the other two military aides? About General Clifton [Chester V. Clifton] and Taz Shepard?

McHUGH: The three of us were called in on the first day in the President's office, in the Oval Office.

STERN: Had you known them before?

McHUGH: I knew Clifton a little bit. I had never seen Taz Shepard.

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Taz Shepard, as a matter of fact, had never seen the President until the inauguration.

STERN: Yes, I know the story. He was Senator Sparkman's [John J. Sparkman] son-in-law and was flown in, and the whole thing.

McHUGH: He looked at the three of us. Clifton was a general in the Army, Taz was a captain in the Navy, and I was a colonel. He looked at us straight in the eye and very seriously he said, "There's one thing I want you three to understand. I don't want any kind of trying to give orders to each other. Nobody outranks anybody here. That's number one. Number two, you do not work for your service any more. You work for me, reporting what I want from your service. You obtain the information and give it to me. I do not want you to think that you are here to propagandize and give me stories about your service. I want the honest truth and nothing else. Three, the first one that disobeys these orders its out." It was so clear, there was no question about what he meant. All three of us shook hands and said, "Let's work together. You don't command me, I don't command you. We'll do the best we can with our service, and we work only for the President, we report for the...."

Then a few days later he said, "You know what I should have added? No one in the White House commands you. You work for me." He meant Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] who had the habit of calling and giving orders here and there. He said, "I give you the orders." I was delighted. He must have done it to the other two, too.

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STERN: Did you ever have any problems with them?

McHUGH: We did. But it was arranged in a very amusing way. One day because the President was always trying to be kind, for political reasons he knew exactly when he should do certain things. After Cuba, this ghastly thing in Cuba, he called us in...

STERN: You mean the Bay of Pigs or the missile crisis?

McHUGH: The Bay of Pigs.

STERN: The Bay of Pigs, yes.

McHUGH: No. The missile crisis.

STERN: Missile crisis, okay.

McHUGH: He said to us, "Many, many people of the Army, Navy, and Air have had their families disturbed. They are all standing guard, they are all being moved from one base to another, waiting to invade Cuba," in case we had to. "I want to thank the families and I want to thank the officers and the soldiers and the airman and the Navy, everyone. I want to go to each one of your services and thank them. I want to give four hours or three hours to each one of your services. Arrange it." So all three went out. Clifton did an extraordinary job, because he got for the first time a whole division to stand at attention on one base. It had never been done before. The whole damned division. The Air Force had all of the pilots of the U-2s and the fighter pilots that flew over that took all of the pictures showing that there were missiles in Cuba. The Navy, of course, had its own thing.

We arrived first at the army base. We were supposed to spend

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three hours, let's say. Four hours later we were still there. With jeeps running up and down, this huge division going there into a building, going out of a building. Suddenly Clifton came to Taz and I said, "The Secretary of Defense (who was with us) and the President have decided you're going to have to cut down the time spent at the Air Force and Navy because of the length of time we were here." Instinctively I knew the President would never, never do that. I said, "I don't believe that." He said, "Well, that's what it is." He walked away. I said, "Taz, let's ask the Secretary of Defense." Taz said, "Oh, come on." I said, "I'm going to ask the Secretary of Defense." He said, "I'll go with you." So we walked to the Secretary of Defense and McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], very short tempered, said, "I don't know anything about that. It's ridiculous." That was the end of that. I said, "Let's go and ask the President." So we walked up to the President and I said, "Mr. President, did you order us to cut down on the length of time you are going to spend at Homestead [Homestead Air Force Base, Florida] and at the Navy?" He said, "No, who said that?" "Well, because you spent so much time here, we got a little worried, that you might have to cut down the whole...." "No," he said, "I told you I wanted to see everyone, and that's what I want to do." That thing taught us a lesson that we could not perhaps trust Clifton as much as we thought we could. We were very careful from then on. But never mad at him. We never... We were all friends. We tried to openly be as nice and helpful to each other. He did, too. This

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is the only occasion I had to say, “I’d better be careful,” because if it depends on his service, he is going to do it.

STERN: I did come across some very.... Again, it’s not a very major thing, but some brief evidence that Clifton at one point told someone that he felt that because you had, of course, all the planes at your disposal, and Shepard had the Navy mess, that sort of thing, that he had no physical means of influencing the President. Therefore, the two of you had an advantage. He felt a little kind of disadvantaged.

McHUGH: The Army had helicopters. That’s a very interesting story. We were flying back from somewhere in bad weather. When we landed at Andrews, there were cars sitting next to the airplane. The President turned to me and said, “Why isn’t my helicopter here?” I knew why because I had already told him on the airplane – the weather was too bad to fly a helicopter from Andrews to the White House. We didn’t want to take the chance. First of all, they were single-engine airplane, they were reciprocating engine, they were not jet engine. Those helicopters, although very beautifully kept and all, were not of the latest type. They did not have the communication equipment, the navigation equipments necessary to fly inclement weather. He turned to me and said, “I like to live dangerously” – and I remember the word so well – “and I want for the next time for you to have helicopters here.” We had helicopters there. The weather was getting a little bit better, so I said, “Mr. President, let me ask the pilot. Taz will ask perhaps.” And Taz came back

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and said, “Yes, we can fly now the weather has lifted.”

He came to me the next day and he said, “Do something about that.” So I called the Secretary of the Air Force and told him, “We have to get better helicopters for the White House.” He said, “We don’t have any in the White House.” I said, “I realize, but maybe we can the next time. Why don’t we put some effort....” He said, “I’m not interested in doing that. We have enough problems.” So I called Taz and I said, “You call up the head of your service and see if you can get jet engine, twin engine and good communication, navigation equipment.” Then I went to Clifton and I said, “Why don’t you ask your service? The army has good helicopters. It is a specialty of theirs, and get two.” And the Marines, the Army and the Navy provided twin-engine helicopters, jet-powered with all the instruments, and the President could fly back and forth all the time from then on.

STERN: That changed his method....

McHUGH: That changed the entire.... Because we didn’t have to worry anymore. Before that we could not take it upon ourselves to fly something that we knew was not safe.

STERN: Of course not. Right. I also came across in your papers the fact that you constantly had requests from people – I guess the only word to use is

hitchhike – to try and hitchhike with the President. Private citizens would write to you and say, “I want to go home. Can you take me.” Did you ever make an exception to that sort of thing, or was it impossible?

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McHUGH: No, I don’t recall ever making an exception. But we would provide them with transportation otherwise on the press plane, on the backup plane.

STERN: I see. But they wouldn’t travel with the President.

McHUGH: If there was a reason, and we would always let the President know who it was and why we were doing it before we answered. He okayed anybody personally. “Sir, we have Mrs. So-and-so who says her son is on the base where we were going to land, and he’s very, very ill, and he has to fly back. I don’t know if it’s true or not, but that’s this letter. What do you want?” He said, “I don’t want anything done,” or I want something done.” But never in *Air Force One*.

STERN: You simply couldn’t take a chance on a thing like that?

McHUGH: No, not on a stranger.

STERN: Did you ever fly – well, I seem to remember at one point Ambassador Duke asked for a trip to Italy, and you were not able to take him, as I recall.

McHUGH: That is correct. One of the amusing things with Ambassador Duke was the President told me he was going to make a political tour of the West and I could have ten days off. He didn’t want me there, and I didn’t have anything to do. I had worked, you know – every day we worked very late, very early. He said, “Take ten days off during my trip.” So I took off to Greece and chartered a yacht, a very gorgeous yacht. Beautiful yacht, a seventy-foot yacht. It had a beautiful crew, and took off in the Med [Mediterranean Sea]

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with a friend of mine. As we were in the Med having fun aboard this beautiful yacht, an airplane flew over us, and it looked like a Navy plane, and I couldn’t figure out why. Then it took off away and then the police came. We were near a harbor in a little island and the police boat came up and said, “You are wanted on the phone. The White House wants to talk to you.” And I said, “This has gone too far.”

STERN: There goes your vacation, right?

McHUGH: I went to the phone, got hold of the White House who said, “The President wants you to pick up Haile Selassie in two days.” I said, “Am I supposed

to?” “Yes,” they said, “You’re supposed to fly right back to Washington. Ambassador Duke will go with you.” And I said, “Look, I’m making a decision right now. Is it the President that said I have to fly back personally, or is it you telling me that? Because if you are telling me that, I’m not going to do it. I am going to stay in Rome. I’m going to fly from here to Rome, which is closer. They can land in Rome, pick me up, and then we will go to Africa.” He said, “Well no, I thought it was best for you to fly.” I said, “Send *Air Force One* with Angier Biddle Duke to Rome. I will pick him up at the airport there in two days. Is that what you say it is?” “Yes, two days.” “In two days I will be there.” That’s the way I went to pick Haile Selassie.

STERN: Is this the one that led to all these other complications?

McHUGH: Yeah.

STERN: I noticed also that you had to arrange trips for other people

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which did not involve either the President or foreign dignitaries – for example, when Glen Seaborg [Glenn T. Seaborg] went to Moscow.

McHUGH: That was a most interesting trip. The President came to me and said, “I have okayed for the Atomic Commission [Atomic Energy Commission] to go to Moscow.” I said, “Sir, you would do me a fantastic favor if you would allow me to take *Air Force One* to fly them to Moscow.” He said, “That’s ridiculous.” I said, “Sir, are you going to use the airplane? It’s going to happen in one week. I’m told you’re going to be here and you don’t need *Air Force One*, and it will be very impressive for the Russians to have *Air Force One* there. It would give them prestige.” He said, “I’ll give you an answer in a few days.” A couple of days later he called me back. He said, “It’s a good idea. You can fly them. Tell Seaborg that *Air Force One* will take them to Russia.”

We told Dobrynin [Anatoly F. Dobrynin], and in a few more hours or days I got a call from Dobrynin saying we had to land in Copenhagen to pick up a Russian pilot and navigator, and we could not fly direct, nonstop from Washington to Moscow. They would not permit it. So I went back to see the President who did not want me to go to Copenhagen. I said, “Mr. President, I need your

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support because I have Ambassador Dobrynin telling me that we have to go to Copenhagen to pick up a Russian pilot and a Russian navigator. I know you don’t want us to land there. Can I say that *Air Force One* cannot go then? I don’t want to say that without your permission.” He says, “I want you to fly to Moscow, and I don’t want you to land in Copenhagen. That is correct. But you can use whatever you want. Do it on your own.”

I went back to Dobrynin and I said, “Ambassador, will you tell your government that we cannot use *Air Force One* and land in Copenhagen. We have to go direct nonstop from

here and maybe the atomic commission will not be able to go.” Very quickly came back an answer: It cannot be done; you have to land in Copenhagen. Back to the embassy I went. I said, “Sir, can’t we do something like having the navigator and the pilot flown to Washington, and we’ll pick them up here?” He said, “You didn’t tell me that before.” I said, “No, I never thought of it.” So back again – accepted. The navigator and the pilot came to Washington; they were put into the airplane and we flew. And the amazing part, we won three world records flying *Air Force One* direct to Moscow. It had never been done so it was like falling off a log. The crew was so smart – I was a member of the crew, noted as a member of the crew, because I had no duties here, see – and we won world’s record between various capitals because we would report to the French FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] when we were over a certain town. Then we would report, but we never landed, when we were over Copenhagen, when we

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were over this place or another. We won all these world records. They were noted down. Since then the Russians have flown it nonstop and we have to again.

STERN: That’s fascinating. Did you also handle the trip for the delegation that went to sign the test ban treaty in the summer of ’63?

McHUGH: No.

STERN: You didn’t have anything to do with that?

McHUGH: No, I didn’t have anything to do with that.

STERN: I suppose they didn’t go on *Air Force One* then?

McHUGH: Oh no, I don’t think so.

STERN: Did you also handle Mrs. Kennedy’s trips, for example to Palm Beach, that sort of thing?

McHUGH: Oh, yes. On that one there is a very strange experience. I want to tell about that. The President had died and Mrs. Kennedy was in Palm Beach, and I felt – it was just a few days afterwards. She called me and said, “I’m going to be in Palm Beach and can you fly me back?” And, of course, my answer was immediate, “Yes, Mrs. Kennedy. What day? I’ll pick you up and fly you back to Washington.” So I took a Sabreliner and flew down to Homestead, gave a little speech there, talked to the commander and then flew to Palm Beach, refueled there, and picked up Mrs. Kennedy. Then I flew into Andrews and there was a car there to pick her up and she went.

When I walked into the White House President Johnson called me in his office and started cursing me, using the foulest language. “God damn....” I mean it was unbelievable. I was trying to

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figure out what had happened. “You have no right to fly Mrs. Kennedy. She has no right to be in any airplane of the government. How do you dare do that?” Poor Mrs. Kennedy was just widowed. I mean I couldn’t believe it.

STERN: This was very shortly after the assassination?

McHUGH: Oh, very shortly afterwards. What amazed me is that, first, it was not an executive type airplane. I have to fly four hours at least every month. I have to land several times to keep my rating as command pilot. This was a normal flight. We select where we are going to go. We select where we were going to land. The fact that I did select Palm Beach, I had selected Palm Beach many times before – I have a piece of property there near Mar-a-lago. I went there quite often. There was nothing wrong about it. I was to get flying time. You talk about Mrs. Kennedy, that was one flight that got me into trouble with Johnson, for no reason at all.

STERN: Generally I think it’s probably not particularly useful in these kinds of interviews to talk about events associated with the assassination. But there is one element in it that I think I would like to ask you, if you’re willing to discuss it. That is, I think, for example, your own testimony to the Warren Commission, all of that is known, and there’s no...

McHUGH: I did not make a thing to the Warren Commission.

STERN: Oh, I thought you did.

McHUGH: I don’t think so. I forgot about it. But I did not go to the Warren Commission.

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STERN: It may be my error, but I don’t think there is any need to rehash the facts which are pretty well known. But, for example, that pretty awful business on the plane coming back.

McHUGH: Let me tell you from the start on that, because it is strange.

STERN: There are so many accounts of it. They’re so bitter.

McHUGH: When the President died, he was not dead, he was medically dead maybe, but he was not dead when he was in the hospital. When he died, they put him in a coffin, and Ken O’Donnell came to me and said, “We’re going to have trouble leaving Dallas, and you’re in uniform and you’re young, and I want you to walk

in front of this casket as you push it or pull it, and whoever tries to stop us, say, “No, I have orders to go to Washington.” I’ll say the same thing and we’re going to try it.” So with Mrs. Kennedy walking behind, we started pushing the casket in the corridor of the hospital when the sheriff comes to me and says, “You cannot take this body out of Dallas. It’s against the law. It cannot be moved.” I said, “Sheriff, Washington has ordered the body flown back and it will be flown back.” Ken O’Donnell said the same thing very strongly, and we kept on pushing. The mayor of Dallas stopped us – he was Cabell [Earle Cabell], Mr. Cabell – and he said, “You’re not allowed to take it. The laws of Texas, and Dallas absolutely forbid the body to be removed in case of assassinations, crime. You cannot do it.” He had to be moved to a morgue here. I said, Mr. Mayor, the orders are to fly him back to Washington. That is what is going to happen. I am sorry.” He was very correct. He tried

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again to stop me, stop us, and we kept on going. Then he came running behind and he said, “But you must put him in a hearse. [Interruption] You must put this casket in this hearse and we have a hearse right at the door.” But I had ordered an ambulance also, because Mrs. Kennedy had asked that he not be put in a hearse but be put in an ambulance. I don’t know, she had an obsession about hearses apparently. So we had a hearse and an ambulance side by side.

As we got there, the men from the hearse tried to grab the casket. We pushed them politely and gently aside. We were sorry. We were very strong and we pushed the casket into the ambulance. Mrs. Kennedy sat in the ambulance next to the body. I sat with her right in the back, and we took off. When we got to *Air Force One* – I had called *Air Force One* to say, “Be sure that the airplane, wherever it is, it is in a guarded, secure position. If you have to move it, move it. Whatever you have to do.” Somebody said I gave orders to Swindal. I didn’t give any orders to Swindal to move any airplane. I allowed him to do whatever is necessary to provide total.... He did it. We had total confidence in the man. He said, “I’m not moving it because it’s in perfect shape and it’s well guarded.” Had two seats removed in the back so we can put the casket in the back in this place I showed you, on the left side. We carried bodily the casket up with my crew. I put it there and Mrs. Kennedy sat at the table – I showed you the four seats on the right side. I sat next to her. The rest of the people

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left. She said, “Why don’t we leave?” Now, it’s true that whenever the President got aboard, the plane left within a few seconds because three motors were running and when the time he got in the last motor was put on and we had started rolling. The President is aboard, the door is closed, and the airplane leaves. Nothing happened. So I got up and went through the airplane to the crew and told them, “Let’s leave, now that the President is aboard, and let’s leave,” and walked back. Nothing happened. Mrs. Kennedy was getting very warm, she had blood all over her hat, her coat. Her hat, his brains were sticking on her hat. It was dreadful.

She turned to me again and said, “Please, let’s leave.” I felt obligated to do something. I got back up, walked back through, got to the.... Oh, no. I got on the phone

because there was a phone right there and I said, "Let's leave." He said, "I can't do it. I have orders to wait."

So I didn't want to discuss it there with Mrs. Kennedy sitting there. I walked back and I said, "Swindal, what on earth is going on?" He said, "The President wants to remain in this area." You see, I could not remember – it was President Johnson at that time. I said, "The President is in the back." "No," he said, "I mean President Johnson." I said, "But he's the Vice President." He said, "Well, he's going to be President." I said, "That's true." And he says, "He's ordered for me to wait until his luggage is transferred from *Air Force Two* to here, and I'm told that there's going to be swearing in. I don't know because we were told to call a

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judge" – somebody, I don't know, a woman judge that he knew – "and that she's coming, so we're going to have to wait." I said, "Where is President Johnson?" He said, "I'm told, I don't know" – because he was talking about the policy to wait – "I'm told he's going to come, but I don't know about it. No, I'm told he's here; he's in this airplane." So I said, "I've walked the airplane twice" – and I know Johnson well, and I kept on walking back and looking at every person in the face and no Johnson.

I get back to Ken O'Donnell, who is now furious, and he said, "Didn't we tell you to leave?" I said, "I can't get the crew to do it because they say President Johnson is aboard." He said, "Obviously he isn't." I said, "There's only one place, he is in the bedroom" – Mrs. Kennedy's bedroom, which we called it because he didn't use it so often. We walked in the bedroom, and he was not there. I walked in the toilet, in the powder room, and there he was hiding, with the curtain closed, saying, "They're going to get us all. It's a plot. It's a plot. It's going to get us all." He was hysterical, sitting down on the john there alone in this thing. So I walked out and I said, "My God, he's there. Yes, you're right. He seems very, very upset." He said, "I don't want to upset him any more." I went back to Mrs. Kennedy and I said, "Mr. Johnson is here and he's asked that the plane not leave right away."

Now he got hold of himself and got dressed again, changed his shirt or something, and ordered everybody to attend his swearing-in

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ceremony including Mrs. Kennedy. Somebody came in the back saying, "Everybody is to attend including Mrs. Kennedy."

STERN: She was told, she wasn't asked?

McHUGH: She was asked, "Mrs. Kennedy, the President wants you to attend the ceremony, the swearing-in ceremony." She turned to me and said, "At least you don't leave him. Don't leave him. Stay with him." So I'm the only one on board that airplane that stayed with the casket. Never left it.

STERN: You weren't in that picture?

McHUGH: I'm not in that picture, because I'm.... The door is right there. I see them doing it, but I did not go in. I stood with the casket. I felt I was his military honor guard, that I should stay with him.

STERN: Was there a lot of bitterness on the plane between the two staffs? Essentially the Vice President's staff and the President's?

McHUGH: I'm told – bitterness, perhaps, is the word – but obviously there is a tremendous commotion going on between two groups. One having lost in a dreadful way a very, very loved President, and being afraid of the next President who they knew as very nervous and choleric and very strong, and they didn't know him very well. Because he was not very often in the White House. He had his own place. Johnson called us in a few days later and ordered me and everyone to remain in the White House. I remained six, seven months. Not happy at all, because we were not doing really anything, but we were told to be there and to do our work, and we did. We answered letters and all that.

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STERN: But you didn't.... Were you planning trips any more?

McHUGH: Nothing. Yes, he told me to.... The chancellor of Germany was going to come and visit him at his ranch. Angier Biddle Duke called me in and said, "Godfrey, fly me to the ranch. We have to go back again with the President and we have to organize things." So I flew down to the ranch in a Sabreliner, I think it was. I had Angier Biddle Duke with me and parked on his own ranch. The ranch has a runway near the house and has a parking apron. The help there said, "Park it there." So I parked the plane there. I went into and looked at every room with Angier, and Angier kept shaking his head, "I don't see how we can put the chancellor of Germany here. It's not right. We'll have to do this, we'll have to do that." Suddenly they came up to me and said, "Sir, your plane is sinking." I said, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "Well, it's going right through the parking lot." I had seen things that way before so I immediately got on the telephone and called the base that was right nearby and said, "It's an emergency. Send the crew to prevent a plane from going through the runway or the parking lot." We have these airbags we can use when something that way happens.

STERN: Because the runway was too weak for the plane?

McHUGH: But the parking place was too weak for the plane. The runway was not much better. The plane kept on going an inch or two every twenty minutes – boom, boom, boom going through the ground, all the way up to nearly the wing. The crew arrived, but the huge gas bag

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or air bag underneath.... It lifts it, very softly, lifted the plane up. They put planks underneath, put it in another spot.

When we flew with President Johnson a few days later, he was seated in the helicopter in front of me and I was seated on the other side of him, he suddenly saw a bunch of towers on his ranch. He went absolutely berserk, screaming, yelling, cursing, "I want those God damn things taken out of there. Who would dare to do that? They've got to be fired. I don't want anybody.... Who on earth...." I couldn't figure out where, because I couldn't see them as well as he could see them. I kept on looking because he knew his ranch way better than I did.

STERN: You say there were towers?

McHUGH: I remember LeMay [Curtis E. LeMay] saying "Now that he is President, we have to put communications and we have to have guiding beacons, and we have to have a fire truck there so if he lands there," because that's our own rules you see. We don't land any place without a fire truck there to come in case of.... And here were these towers, had been built for communications. They were not on his ranch but they were right on the border on another ranch but he didn't realize that.

So when he landed he said, "I want that beacon out of there; I want those towers out of there." Suddenly he saw three huge trailers side by side. One was for classified communications, one was for the press, and one was for normal communications, and they were there. He said, "Out with those things. Nobody has the right

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to destroy my ranch." Suddenly comes this huge truck; the fire truck came in. He said, "I never want to see that truck again. Take it out of there. Don't dare use my roads for these trucks." I said, "Mr. President, we'll do that, but can we get the small truck?" We had to buy a smaller truck so that we could put it on his ranch, so when he landed by helicopters.... It was very difficult.

STERN: I can imagine the transition. I had assumed that you had testified before the Warren Commission. I guess you didn't then because you were not an eyewitness, is that why?

McHUGH: Because I what?

STERN: You were not an eyewitness?

McHUGH: Oh, I was an eyewitness, because I was right behind and those three shots were as clear as I am talking to you now – one...

STERN: I can't understand why they didn't interview you then.

McHUGH: ...two, three, bang. Clifton was a guest of mine because he was not on duty – I was on duty – and he is a very capable guy, and he said, “My God, they’re giving him a twenty-one gun salute.” That was his statement then. And he immediately corrected himself and said, “Oh, my God, no. That’s riflefire, riflefire.” We all looked and saw the car ahead with the President gone down, and we followed them to the hospital. We were just right behind them and got there in the same time. We never left.... We left the parade thing and went to the hospital with the car. Because we had the Secret Service man driving the car.

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You see, for the first time ever on the plane going to Dallas.... We went to Fort Worth first. On the plane they were discussing what we were going to do. They asked, “Please when we go to Dallas, don’t sit like you always do in the front seat of the car because we want to give him full exposure.” That was their statement. “He will win them by his smile coming and going. We want him to be seen. It’s enough to have two Secret Service men without having a third body in front.” The Secret Service was not too happy with that, but they agreed and I went.... They told me I could go in the Secret Service car right behind. I took the decision not to do that because I felt that the Secret Service was already overcrowded with people who had no right to be there – staff people, that took it upon themselves to be close to the President, and I didn’t want that. So I commandeered another car with a Secret Service man driving and invited Clifton who was not on duty, “Won’t you ride with me? I’ve got a whole car.” So we had the doctor and Clifton in that car.

The shots were so clear, I hear them today as I did then. I didn’t know if he had been hit, but it looked very much like he had been hit. First of all, we were in direct communications at all times by radio with the car. The Secret Service talked back and forth. So it was confirmed that he was hit immediately.

STERN: I see. So you knew that right away. I can’t understand why the Warren Commission didn’t ask for your testimony. That doesn’t make any sense to me.

McHUGH: It doesn’t make any sense. But a lot of things don’t make any

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sense in the thing. I stayed for the embalming, for example. As you know, when we were in the airplane, it’s on – the recordings are there. I called the Navy and asked them to please have an ambulance sent to Andrews to put the casket in. The admiral said, “I cannot do that. It’s illegal. The laws of Washington would not....” I said, “All right, send the hearse and also send an ambulance. Send both of them. We’ll use whatever we have to legally, but we want the ambulance there.” They said, “All right, but we cannot do the autopsy at the Navy hospital,” – or the embalming there. The embalming they can’t do, I think it was. I said, “That’s not the point. We want to bring him back because Mrs.

Kennedy has said, 'I want him to be taken care of by the Navy.' That was her statement." So we were going to take him to....

This was done on the radio. We get to Andrews, there's a hearse, there's an ambulance. We put him in the ambulance, like Mrs. Kennedy.... I go on the side leaning on the casket. We go all the way down to the.... When we get to Bethesda Navy Hospital, the admirals and everybody – it's night, you know – they all stand there, and Mrs. Kennedy is ushered very, very quickly to the top floor and goes with Ken and Dave Powers [David F. Powers].

I am left with those men, those officers who said, "Do you understand that we cannot.... We don't have an embalmer. We just don't have the facilities. It takes...." I said, "I know all about that. But it's going to be done here because these are

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the orders from the White House." I used the White House as a vague thing but those were my orders and I felt I should carry them out. I said, "If there is an embalmer in town, we can get him here. Send two trucks, pick him up and take all his stuff. Whatever is needed, take three trucks. But you can do it. There's got to be an autopsy, and that's going to take several hours. You have plenty of time to do that." And he said, "Sir, if you order it, if it is ordered, we'll do it." I said, "I know those are the orders."

Against their will we put the President in a room and the doctors, military doctors, worked on him. I stayed for the entire autopsy. His body was totally nude, yellow, yellow, yellow, like he had been painted yellow. I could not understand that. I asked the doctor, "Why is the body so yellow?" They said, "Well, he had some medical problems and things, and when he was shot there was a chemical reaction, and it is very yellow."

STERN:            Parkinson's disease, wasn't it?<sup>1</sup>

McHUGH:        "It's much yellower than normal. What we're trying to do is find out where he was shot, how many times he was shot, what caused the death. And the embalmer is coming, we are told, and he will build a forehead, put the little part that had been blown off and rebuild the back of his head, and they will put him in a casket." Every hour or so Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] would call, "Why does it take so long? Mrs. Kennedy is here, she's in tears" – not she's in tears – "she's terribly emotionally upset and she

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can't stand it. She's been hours and hours, and here you are downstairs doing nothing." I said, "I'm not the one doing that. There are three doctors working, and they say it's going to take two more hours." He said, "Tell them to expedite it." I could not tell them exactly that. I said, "It has to be done as quickly as possible, but whatever you have to do, you have to do." Because I realize if ever somebody said, they'd say, "Somebody told us not to do this."

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<sup>1</sup> In this passage interviewer Sheldon Stern misspoke, meaning to say Addison's disease instead of Parkinson's disease.

STERN: That's right.

McHUGH: For years I've been doing this kind of thing. I said, "Do whatever...." Then there would be another call, "Is it through yet?" I said, "No, I have another problem. The casket that we brought him in is damaged." He said, "Go and get another one!" Ken O'Donnell ordered me to go and get another one. Leave there and go and get a casket. I said, "I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to leave the body. So you tell Dave Powers or anybody in there to go and buy a casket. They know what a casket is and they have transportation, and I'm not leaving." He said, "Why is there a need for another casket?" I said, "I don't understand it either, but they say it's damaged. The thing has been damaged, it's damaged. Let's get another casket." So they did. They got a very good casket.

When they put him in the casket.... I had helped put him in the casket. They showed me how to close it and open it. It became very important, because we brought back the casket when it

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was all over, we put the body into the ambulance at night in the rain. We went back to the White House. We carried and we walked, the military governor of Washington and myself walking ahead of the body in the ceremony, you see. We put the body in the East Room.

Either the next day or that night Mrs. Kennedy came to me and said, "I want everybody to leave the room after they have left and I want you to open the casket. I want you to turn your face to the wall." I knew she wanted to say either goodbye or something. It was not my business, it was hers totally. She had the right. So I opened up the casket. Whatever happened is her own secret, whatever it is. She asked me to close it again and I closed it.

But something historically important that happened is, when a body, a military body or the President, is put into a – what do they call that, on top of a...

STERN: Catafalque.

McHUGH: Catafalque, as it was – you put four military guards, one from each service. Always through history, and you look at all the paintings, all the photographs, all the drawings, the four guards are at parade rest with their rifles – you know what parade rest is – watching the outside, turning their back on each corner of the casket to prevent enemies from coming and robbing the casket. Mrs. Kennedy came to me and said, "Godfrey, I want you to order them to face the casket." I said, "Well, first of all, are you sure you want that?" She said, "Absolutely. I don't want them

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to turn their back on the President." But I said, "This is historically the thing to do. It is always...." She said, "I don't want it done that way." So I realized that I didn't want to give the orders to the four soldiers, one marine, one air force, one army, and one navy. I went to

the lieutenant of the Navy who was in charge of that detail and I said, "Lieutenant, there's an order and I don't want to discuss it. I want you to give an order to the men to face the casket." And of course this fellow did that all the time. That was his job at Fort Myer [Virginia]. He said, "It's not done." I said, "That's not what I'm asking you. I want every soldier, the guard on each corner, to face the casket." He said, "They'll faint. They can't stand looking at the thing. That's not the way to do it," he said. I said, "That's not what I want you to do. I want you to order them." He said, "I can't do it now. Can't I just change the crew and give them the order somewhere else and try to convince them where... I mean to explain to them what I want?" I said yes, that could be done. So he went back in another room, got four new soldiers – they change all the time, you know – and explained to them that this time it was not going to be done as it has always been done for hundreds of years. But they would now face the casket, and at parade rest. Then he came in walking through to the East Room, gave the detail to move out and all four soldiers, and that's the way the photographs show it for the first time in hundreds of years. Isn't it strange?

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STERN: Yes, I wonder why she wanted to do that?

McHUGH: Well, it was her privilege. But it's now being done, I'm told, in several occasions. They have done it again. It's something apparently that nobody thought of and think that maybe it's okay.

STERN: I had noticed the passenger lists for all of your trips. Did you prepare those, or did somebody do those?

McHUGH: No, what we did... We did it with the Secret Service, Ken O'Donnell, Mrs. Lincoln. The President would say, "I want so-and-so on board," and Mrs. Lincoln would send us a little piece of paper.

STERN: For example, who decided who would go, which press people would go? I mean that sort of thing?

McHUGH: The four press people were decided by the press people who would select the wire service...

[BEGIN TAPE THREE]

McHUGH: ... said, "So-and-so is our selection for going." Either Ken O'Donnell or somebody else, nobody would refuse. It was their privilege. They had four people aboard. They had to pay commercial rates for being aboard *Air Force One*. Exactly the same as if they were in the press plane. And that was reimbursed. In order to make the trip cheaper, the President would say to me for example, "I want to go to Los Angeles to do a political speech. I want you to organize it so most of the cost is charged to some other government agency, like the Air Force or somebody else."

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What we did was, go and visit a base, go and visit a particular thing that the President has to do and can do legally. So when we went to Los Angeles, I selected St. Louis, McDonnell aviation [McDonnell Aircraft Corporation], and I said, "Let's go and see how they are doing. They're making the fighter planes for the Air Force, the Navy, the Army, or whatever it is." Then that part of the trip was not charged to the Democratic Party. It was only charged from there to there. We did this, all the time. I'm sure it's perfectly legal because every President has done it.

STERN: I was struck, for example, by the passenger list on.... I mean, they were all very consistent throughout the whole period, but the one going back from Love Field, which we were just discussing, in which there must have been obviously great difficulty in determining how it was to be written because of the situation.

McHUGH: And it was changing all the time. People were suddenly running from *Air Force Two* and coming up, saying the President wanted them aboard. It was very, very hard to argue the point. I no longer was in charge of who was going to come aboard, which before that I was, because I was with the body of the President staying and never leaving the casket one minute. So I never talked to anybody or saw anybody.

When we landed at Andrews they had forklifts to pick up the President's casket with six soldiers on the forklifts to carry the casket. Mrs. Kennedy saw them and said to me, "I don't want him handled but by his friends. I want you and Ken to carry the casket

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down to that forklift. I don't want them to come in the plane." So I ran to the back door which was only a few feet away, I said, "Detail, down." They couldn't figure out why. I said, "Off the forklift." The forklift came by itself and we carried the casket to the forklift, and Mrs. Kennedy came down that way. As we were going down that way President Johnson left from the front door which was.... Then when we got the body, the casket, on the ground Mrs. Kennedy said, "Let's put him in the car," which we did. I again went and sat next to the casket with her and Bobby Kennedy, who had joined us in the back and was also carrying the casket out.

STERN: Did you see that incident which has gotten so much publicity, about Bobby Kennedy allegedly running by President Johnson who extended his hand at Bobby?

McHUGH: I have heard about that completely, but I have no recollection of that. I didn't see it. But what I do know is that he was running to be with Mrs. Kennedy and with the casket that they were taking off, and he didn't need to be in pictures up in the front, because they were taking pictures constantly, and he must have

hurried, and maybe by hurrying, he forgot... Because nobody refuses the hand of the President or anything. No one wanted to insult anybody, I'm certain of that. Bobby Kennedy was a fiery little fellow, but he was extremely clever and wouldn't have done something that publicly would be seen. I doubt that it's true. It may have happened but not on his own fault.

STERN: You say, if it happened, it was unintentional.

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McHUGH: I would think so.

STERN: I wonder if we could sort of... There are just a couple of minor points that I had left in my notes which I don't think will take us a great deal of time. For example, on a much lighter note, do you have any recollections or anecdotes about some of his more famous trips like the visit to Berlin or Ireland?

McHUGH: Well, on the trip to Berlin when he had to learn the word, "I am a Berliner."

STERN: He was not very good at that, was he?

McHUGH: No, he was not good at languages. He had this little piece of paper that he was reading and looking at it to try to say... I'm kidding with him and I said, "Sir, will you remember your speech?" He said, "I only have three words, 'I am a Berliner,' in German." He said, "I certainly can say that." He would repeat the word. He was very proud that he could say it.

Actually he did it very well. It brought down the house. I had tears in my eyes. I stood next to him and he had about a million people in this huge plaza listening to him with great attention. Suddenly he was explaining to them that, "The United States is proud of you. The United States is in back of you. The United States will defend you. We believe this is essential. Everyone in the world is a Berliner. I am..." Then he suddenly said it in German, and it brought down this mass of, ohhh, ahhh. This is extraordinary. He knew how to handle these things.

STERN: He must have been deeply moved by it.

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McHUGH: He was moved, and he knew how to handle a crowd.

STERN: Were you with him when he went to Ireland, too?

McHUGH: Yes, I was in Ireland. I went to the parliament. Jokingly he said, "My staff is full of Irish people. I've got O'Donnell, I've got so-and-so," and he was

naming all these Irish people. Then he didn't name me in this parliament thing. So jokingly on the plane I said, "Mr. President, you've got an awful lot of Irish people working for you." And he said, "You're not Irish." [Laughter]

STERN: There was another, as I say, small thing, but I wondered if you had any recollection of this little incident with getting a horse by the name of Sardar for Mrs. Kennedy?

McHUGH: This one is one of the most extraordinary things, I think. One day the President called me and he said, "Godfrey, Mrs. Kennedy has been given a horse by Ayub Khan [Mohammed Ayub Khan], of Pakistan. There is only one thing that can be done; he has to be brought back here. But there is another thing that has to be done. I don't want any publicity and I am charging you with bringing back this horse and not a word to anybody. I don't ever want to read about it. Do you understand?" I said, "Yes, Mr. President." And he said, "Do you really understand? It's most important that there's no publicity." I said, "I understand Mr. President." I went back to my office wondering, "What on earth am I going to do?" I called the Air Force to ask them what it had in Pakistan. They said, "Well, we have planes here and there. We have C-41s."

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STERN: He was essentially telling you to go around customs, that whole thing?

McHUGH: Oh, yes. He didn't want anything. He wanted me to handle it so there was no problem. "No problem, do you understand that?" "Yes, Mr. President." So I called and I said, "Look, we do have a problem there. We have to fly back a horse...." They thought I was crazy. "...from Pakistan. And I said, "We don't want any publicity." I said, "I want to talk to the people who are going to do it. I want you to tell whoever it is that there is no talking about it. This is just a very secret thing."

Finally it was organized, got an airplane on its way back. And I said, "No special trips. It's got to be an airplane that's beyond it. It has to come back. It has to fly over that particular town and then go on.... Or scheduled to come back to the states – it's not coming back to carry our horse. It has to come back for maintenance or something." I said, "Everything has got to be in writing, that is for that and not for the damn horse." "Yes, I understand." So now the horse is being flown back, and I'm getting calls all the time. It cannot land in that country because there is a – what, when you can't land?

STERN: Quarantine?

McHUGH: A quarantine. They would not allow a horse from Pakistan in whatever country it had to land in. "It cannot open its doors because of flies that it picked up in Pakistan and they cannot do that." It went on and on. They had to change their route, they

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had to go here, they had to go there. Finally I called up the Agriculture Department and I said, "Look it's a total secret, really, and it's of no importance, but we are going to get a horse back, and I know that there is a quarantine here, too, on horses." "Yes, you have to send it to Philadelphia." "No," I said, "We can't send it to Philadelphia." He said, "That's the only place where we have quarantines. You cannot land any other place with a horse." I said, "Well, this is different. We have to have this horse land at Andrews. So you have to have your men here, and whatever you can do in Philadelphia, you can do here. But we have to have you, for example, the top man do it, because we don't want big arguments about it. It's got to be done properly. I know you can do it properly." "Well," he said, "It's totally irregular, but you realize that he has to be in a special stall with very small thin screens that are no bigger than.... Regulations say so." I said, "We will have a stall." So I called Fort Myer and said, "Please build a stall in your...." Where they put horses.

STERN:           Stable.

McHUGH:        Stables. "Special stall completely screened with this kind of screening and be prepared to receive a horse." They said, "Why should we...." "It has to be like that." "Yes, sir, it will be that way." Now, in the middle of the night I get a call that the damn airplane is in the air, it's going to land at Andrews. I fly to go down to Andrews and the horse arrives with a man dressed

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like a maharajah of Jaipur – more medals, more things, turbans around, medals around. He was the groom. He walked away and said hello to us and said, "I came with the horse. President Ayub Khan said I could not leave the horse. The horse is used to me and he is very happy."

The man from Agriculture said, "What do you have there?" He says, "Hay, because the horse loves that hay." "Burn it. Burn it immediately." "No," he said, "it's the only thing he eats." "Burn it. What's that water there? We don't want the water. Spill it on there immediately. Spray the whole thing." We burned the hay, confiscated the water, sprayed the plane, and put him in a special wagon to take him to Fort Myer, and then transferred him to that special stall which was fixed. No publicity. Nothing happened. The President called me in there. He said, "Sardar is here?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You did a good job. But it's not over. If there is any publicity...." I said, "Mr. President, up to now it's worked. You don't know the problems it's caused." He said, "I don't want to know." I said, "All right."

Then suddenly I get a call from my secretary saying, "While you were out Mrs. Kennedy called you from Palm Beach. The Secret Service made a recording of the conversation because you were not there. The recording is on your desk." I told you I had all these gadgets and so on. I had the record somewhere and I was trying to find it for you, and I can't find it. It's somewhere here. The record says, "Sardar thanks you for the good care you gave him."

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He is happy to be in the United States. Godfrey, you can tell your girlfriend that when she gets her dress back on she can ride my horse.” It went on that way and I couldn’t figure out what on earth was going on. “I’m coming to ride him in a couple of days.” I knew that he wanted fifteen days in the stall. And the record stopped. I said, “Oh, my God. What is this thing about the dress?” Well, I remembered.

I was in New York at a charity ball and one of my girlfriends was a model, and as she walked on stage, her dress popped and fell and it was all over the paper that, “General McHugh’s girlfriend, a model, so-and-so, as she walked the on the stage of the Plaza, her dress fell off.” Mrs. Kennedy apparently read it and was very amused by it and wanted to tease me, you see. It was just a teasing.

Now I called Mrs. Kennedy and I said, “Please don’t ride that horse. Please don’t do it.” Unfortunately three days later she rode the horse, also at Fort Myer. I called the Agriculture Department and I said, “Look the horse has been deloused, has been washed, has been vaccinated. We’ve done everything and now it needed air, and the trainer said it just could not stand it in there. Mrs. Kennedy agreed to take him out and please don’t be upset about it.” He said, “Well, everything has been irregular up to now. Okay.”

STERN: That’s a marvelous story. Didn’t you have to pursue some blankets for her, too? There were some letters about that?

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McHUGH: Yeah, I’m trying to figure out that. I’ve forgotten about that.

STERN: Well, it’s not very important. One other thing, I was wondering, I saw the Zuckert [Eugene M. Zuckert] file, a number of his speeches. I wonder, did you have any role, for example, in going over those speeches, in perhaps censoring them? I know there was a lot of....

McHUGH: No.

STERN: Nothing like that?

McHUGH: No, we did not do that at all. We were most interested in what he was going to say, and read things ahead of time, and if he said something about a military matter like the Air Force, I would call and find out, is this accurate? Is this what he can say without getting into trouble? Things of that type. But never censoring him, and never.... And it never happened that they said, “No, he cannot say that.” It was always, “Yes, this is perfectly all right. No problem there.”

STERN: In your original interview you had a brief discussion of this business with the helicopters that were downed in Vietnam, and then they were changing the numbers on them by saying that they hadn’t really been destroyed, and that they had been damaged? Do you remember that...

McHUGH: Yes, I remember that very well. Very, very well.

STERN: I came across this document...

McHUGH: I was able to give him the answer, what had happened...

STERN: ...which I think is...[interruption]

McHUGH: While in Palm Beach one day, the President said to me, "I don't

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want to see you again today. Everything tomorrow, unless something is important." I knew he meant that when he said it that way. As I got back I got a cable saying that the UN [United Nations] was going to bomb a little village in Africa, and that meant American planes, because we were providing the planes for these people, and providing the ammunition. I knew that the President would like to know these things. They were going to destroy a village that was in the way of the troops.

So I came back to his house and he was very unhappy with me. His first word was, "I am having dinner." I said, "Sir, Mr. President, here's a cable that states that they are going to destroy this village and maybe..." "Oh, yes, I don't want that to happen because they are going to say the Americans are doing this. Get hold of Rusk [Dean Rusk], the Secretary of State. Get hold of the UN Secretary."

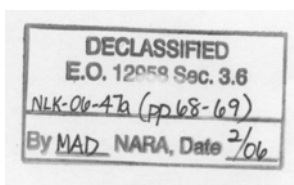
STERN: Hammarskjöld [Dag Hammarskjöld]? Was it Hammarskjöld?

McHUGH: Yes. "And our man in the UN." So I pick up the phones and they worked marvelous. Everything worked. We got hold of all these people. He said that he did not want to, if there was any way of stopping that raid on that village, he did not want U.S. airplanes used for that purpose. It was not used, and I always felt that I had saved the village. I had very little to do with it because the President took the decision, and it was all his doing. But I was able to bring him the news in time and action in time.

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STERN: Did you ever see any examples of his getting mad at somebody? I mean, other people. Because I know his relations with General LeMay were strained.

McHUGH: Yes, they were, because General LeMay was inarticulate. He could not speak. One day General LeMay came to explain to him that – because every chief of staff could see the President if he really wanted to with permission, of course, of the Secretary of Defense. But, that, in the law, it permitted the chief of staff to go even against the permission. LeMay kept on calling and saying, "I have to see the



President about this or that.” And I’d ask the President and he didn’t want to see him. But one day he said, “Yes, I’ll see him.” He said, “It better be good.”

LeMay arrived with a very brilliant man who was the head of plans, who came to me and said, “My God, LeMay does not understand this at all. I came with him because I hope the President will ask me or LeMay permit me to say what we want.” LeMay would not allow him to speak. He tried to give his explanation of why he wanted some more fighter planes and what he was going to use them for. The President got up. He barely talked for six minutes, and that was the end of the conversation. This is one of the reasons we went to St. Louis to McDonnells because I realized that one of the questions that LeMay had was, why can’t we get McDonnell to produce a fighter plane for the Air Force like the one they produced for the Navy, which was superb. It was very, very good.

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Later, I called Mr. McDonnell [Sanford N. McDonnell] and asked him if the President could land at his base and look at his factory. He was delighted.

When we were there, I wrote a little note for the President saying, “Sir, you should ask Mr. McDonnell whether or not he can increase production and produce some more airplanes and give one for the Air Force. The Air Force needs those planes, but we don’t get them.” So he said, “Call Mr. McNamara, the Secretary of Defense.” So we called him on the air. Mr. McNamara said, “Well, they can’t do that because they are already late with the Navy and the Marines, and they don’t have the production.” Then I looked at the page that I had in a notebook and I saw a little note from McNamara on the same subject to the President, that no fighter plane could be produced by McDonnell except for those they had in the Navy. They didn’t have the facilities. I said, well, then maybe.

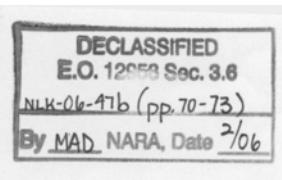
So we land there. Mr. McDonnell is asked by the President, “Could you produce more fighters of this type? The Air Force said they would like very much to have some.” McDonnell said, “It would be the easiest thing in the world because we have a whole wing here that we don’t use. We use it for storage, and it has equipment to build airplanes in it. I’d be delighted. It will take two months before I can produce the first one. From then on we can produce three a week, and then four.” It was completed and we got the airplanes. So the President got the airplanes for LeMay without

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LeMay being able to do anything. He could not explain it, correctly or not.

STERN: I know that he had some trouble with LeMay over another military....

McHUGH: I will tell you something that will amuse you to no end about LeMay. When he named LeMay the chief of staff, he came to me, and the President asked me, “You like LeMay?” I said, “Sir, I’ve know him for many, many years, but you’re not the first one who has named him chief of staff.” He looked at me and said, “What do you mean?” I said, “There’s an interesting story that is on record in the Pentagon, but nobody knows.” When General Vandenberg was chief of staff and I was with him on a



trip to Germany and looking over the troops that were there, when we came back, suddenly General Vandenberg was told that General LeMay had been named his vice-chief, which means he's chief the next time. General Vandenberg said, "LeMay is the head of the SAC [Strategic Air Command], and that's where he should be. He's a very good commander. Brilliant commander. I don't want him as vice-chief or chief." I said, "What are you going to do, general?" He said, "Get hold of the secretary, Mr. Finletter [Thomas K. Finletter]. I will go and see him." So we walked together and we saw Mr. Finletter, and he explained to Mr. Finletter. Finletter said, "I'm the one who selected him and I thought I could do that." That was illegal actually because you were supposed to talk to the chief to select his vice-chief. You can impose a man on him, but you first have to talk to him. That's the normal thing. And he said, "Not only

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that, the President, President Truman has accepted and is delighted, and has signed the papers on it." "Do you mind if I can go and see President Truman?" "No," he said, "You go and see President Truman."

General Vandenberg and I went to see him. I knew Truman very well, you see. I called and I said, "Mr. President, the Chief of Staff would like to see you." I called his secretary and made an appointment. We walked in and he explained that he did not want General LeMay as his vice-chief or the next chief of staff. Truman said, "I did not know your point of view on that. It was told to me by Mr. Finletter who apparently did not know either. I withdraw my recommendation. As of now he is no longer the vice-chief of staff." We walked out of there. Now LeMay was furious. He was already selling his house, he was already moving his furniture, and when we came back to Fort Myer, to the house that Vandenberg had, Mrs. LeMay was measuring curtains to come in.

STERN: Isn't that fascinating. Fascinating story.

McHUGH: It's amazing. So then he took a man called General Twining [Nathan F. Twining], who was a two-star general, who was the head of the Alaskan command, made him a four-star general overnight, and named him as vice-chief of staff which Mr. Finletter signed and agreed, Truman signed and agreed, and he was a marvelous chief of staff.

STERN: My final question, unless you have anything else to add, was just whether or not you would kind of like to sum up your assessment of President Kennedy after fifteen years. Do you feel any

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differently about him now than you did then?

McHUGH: No. I feel very much.... I am a strong conservative. I do not belong to any party, either Republican or Democrat. But I've always worked with

Democratic Presidents. I admired President Roosevelt not for his policies but for his extraordinary character, his way of handling things. His decision-making process. I admired President Truman no end. He is a haberdasher with no background except small politics in his area, who created the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, and took the decision to drop a bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Those things are so admirable. I have great love and affection for the man. When President Kennedy became president I realized that he had all the qualities of those men and many more. I was in total adoration of a great human being. I respect the presidency. Whoever was president, I respected. But I think he added extraordinarily to the presidency, and it was way too short for him to make a strong mark on it.

STERN: What do you think were, if you had to sum up what you think were his most admirable qualities...

McHUGH: His willingness to make decisions and change them in face of facts that proved they should be changed. For example, on this Bay of Pigs – ghastly mistake that was made. He really had nothing to do with it. They decided in South America, the Cubans there, that now was the time to go and invade it, and they were going to do it. The poor Joint Chiefs got a piece of paper saying, they are going to land in this particular spot. Is it possible, or is it not

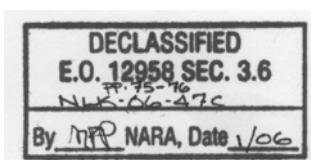
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possible? The Joint Chiefs were given two hours to answer that. They said, “Anything is possible, but that is not the place where we would do it. They cannot escape from there. It’s a very, very bad situation. But if you are supported by air, strong air support, they might be able to do it. But we wouldn’t do it that way.” That’s the only thing they said.

The President is at a dinner party when he is told it is going to happen. Tomorrow they are going to land. He stopped his dinner, his party or reception or whatever it was, and went to the cabinet room: I followed him. I did not know what was going on. The Joint Chiefs were coming in; the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was coming in. I couldn’t believe it. Wondering what on earth was going on. I waited and they explained to the President that they were going to land. Three ships were going to come. Two B-52s were going to fly and hit the T-33s on the ground, which were little jets, fighter jets. Very bad. Little trainer jets. But they could have demolished the B-25s or B-26s – the same type of plane, very similar to type of plane. The President said, “But I never authorized air support or any support for this operation.” They said, “Mr. President, that is not your airplanes. Those are the airplanes you’ve given out a long time ago to some place. They had those airplanes over there. They are flown by Cubans, but they need to have, if they are going to win at all, air support from the U.S.” The President said, “I will not do it.” “But, Mr. President, you are sending them to their death. There is no way for them

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to win. No way for them to even get the ships over there. The ships will be sunk before....”



With that fabulous strong statement from every chief there, and the CIA and all, he said, “All right. You can give them U.S. air support from the carriers that you have around there. But I want every marking of every plane taken off before they leave the deck. I want them to fly only one hour. One hour solely, and come back to that aircraft and never give another flight to supporting this again.” They said, “Mr. President, if you give them that support maybe it will help.” It was decided to do so.

Every man there wired back his service, and the Cubans, and all of that, I don’t know if the Cubans.... “The President has agreed to give U.S. support between...” The CIA is the only one that wired back, instead of Z time, they wired back in normal time. You know, they tried to do, the mountain time [Mountain Standard Time], eastern time [Eastern Standard Time].... They got confused and gave the wrong hour. So when the planes took off, the Cubans thought they were going to take off one hour later. The Navy planes flew all over the place, nothing was there. They landed back, as ordered, without supporting them. They didn’t get that air support. In my estimation, the CIA should never get into military operation because they don’t know what they are talking about. They don’t use the same expressions we do, the same time periods we do. Therefore, they messed it up.

But I saw the President then – he had done nothing wrong – go

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the next few days and say, “I am responsible. I accept the responsibility for this whole decision and operation.” It was admirable. If you don’t do something and it turns out to be a fiasco, and, you are willing to assume responsibility.... Presidents have to assume responsibility, but he went way beyond that.

STERN: Did you have any role at all in the Cuban Missile Crisis?

McHUGH: No, except bringing him papers that I was given on it, and no decision at all.

STERN: Did you, for example...

McHUGH: We brought in some Cubans that were coming in to see him, some of these shady characters that were coming in, back and forth. Yes, I did that. I knew what it was, but I did not inquire, did not talk to them, did not wish to get into it.

STERN: Did you have anything to do with getting him back from, I think it was, Chicago with that head cold, that whole story that was cooked up that he was sick in order to get him back without the press paying attention to him?

McHUGH: The Chicago trip was another trip.

STERN: Was it Chicago? I don’t remember.

McHUGH: There was a Chicago trip. *Air Force One* was ready to go to Chicago with

Ken O'Donnell and a few others, and the President. The helicopter was in front of his office on the ground. The President called me in. I was already on the helicopter checking certain things, and I walked back and the President said, "I'm not going, but I want you all to go. I want the trip to go on just like if

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I was going. Exactly the same, because I made a commitment to Daley [Richard J. Daley] and a few other things, and it's very important for me to.... But I cannot go and will not go." Foolishly, perhaps, I said, "What can I tell Mr. Daley?" He said, "You don't have to tell him anything. You tell him I don't feel good, I'm tired, I'm sick or something, but don't...." He said, "The real reason, I'll tell you." He said, "I just cannot face going there. President Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] was just assassinated today, and they are going to feel that America is responsible, and I don't want the press to question me on that because, first of all.... I just don't want to have anything to do with it." And because of President Diem he was feeling very bad. Apparently we had something to do with getting him either not protected or something, and he didn't want to go to Chicago. We went to all the political meetings and things with Ken and the others without the President, saying he had a cold. Maybe that's the story you're talking about.

STERN: I was talking about, during the Cuban Missile Crisis when he had gone, I think it was, to Chicago. I might be wrong about that. The press was told he had a fever and he had to go back to Washington. This was trying to put them off.

McHUGH: No, I have here a.... The same thing... [Interruption]

STERN: That's the famous calendar.

McHUGH: The calendar. It's a sterling silver one, very beautiful. I said to the President, "Mr. President, when my children see this, they

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will not understand." And he said, "It's your fault. Make them understand." I wrote this and put it in the back. Don't you think it's very well done?

STERN: Yes, yes. You're quite right, because it needs an explanation.

McHUGH: The explanation is totally given there.

STERN: It's very impressive. [Interruption] [After interruption interview resumes with discussion of inscription on a rocket model]

McHUGH: You read that one part.

STERN: "This is the Air Force Mark III reentry vehicle launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base, 23 March 1962 on an Atlas D missile. Flight time: 28 hours, 10 minutes. Range 43.80 nautical miles. Target: Eniwetok Atoll. Ablative materiel is from a covered Mark III reentry vehicle. Flight witnessed by President John F. Kennedy."<sup>2</sup>

McHUGH: When he was given that, he told me to change that as long as it displeased the CIA, and to make another inscription. This is the one we cooked up for him.

STERN: Even though, of course, all of this you say was in *Time* magazine.

McHUGH: Everything was in the newspapers, *Time* magazine, newspapers, the *New York Times* and all.

STERN: And you then prepared for him a plaque which went on the opposite side of the model which says "U.S. Air Force reentry vehicle fired on some missile, some place, recovered some time, somewhere;

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Launch witnessed by Caroline's [Caroline B. Kennedy] father." [Laughter] That's a marvelous example of his sense of humor.

McHUGH: Did we have anything on Von Karman [Theodore Von Karman] when he gave the President....

STERN: No, I don't think you did. Why don't you mention that.

McHUGH: Well, it's an interesting story because the President called me in one day and told me to arrange an award for Dr. Von Karman, Theodore Von Karman, who was going to receive the first presidential Medal of Science [National Medal of Science]. The President knew that I had worked for Dr. Von Karman, had been his executive of the scientific advisory board and group, and that I knew him well. He said, "Arrange for the award."

I called Dr. Von Karman and.... Before I called Dr. Von Karman I told the President, "Sir, we cannot do it in four months because it should be done as soon as possible. The gentleman is eighty years old and not well, and if you can do it before, sir, you wouldn't want to give it posthumously. But you want to give him...." He said, "Yes, you arrange it as soon as you can up to that date." And he gave me a date. So I called Dr. Von Karman who was.... Did we say what he was doing before?

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<sup>2</sup> This was read from a plaque on the base of a model of the rocket.

STERN: Why don't you go into that.

McHUGH: Dr. Von Karman was an extraordinary person, a scientist, who was hired by General Arnold. He is a Hungarian but also an American finally. He was the director of science for... [Interruption] He was heading M.I.T. [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and

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Cal Tech [California Institute of Technology] research on aeronautics. He also designed the first helicopter that ever flew, when he was a lieutenant in the Hungarian air force. For General Arnold he wrote a book with other scientists called *Toward New Horizons*. It's the first book, volume, that explained that we could go into space, that it was obvious that rockets could be used, jet engines could be used. And we employed this group, employed scientists for metals – what kind of metals will stand into space? Fuels – what kinds of fuels do we have to use? We used all the top, top fuel people. What kind of navigation equipment would be necessary? What kind of communications were possible?

Dr. Randy Lovelace [W. Randolph Lovelace] was there as the medical man. He was after that the space program medical doctor. He was the doctor on board this group. He designed the suits that you would have to wear if you went into space, what kind of equipment you had to have in your bag. All of this was shown, written, designed – top, top secret in those days in the forties. And it all happened. Every single thing happened. Of course, these people knew, each one of them knew their own specialty. It's only Dr. Von Karman who was able to take the whole group and make a project out of it with all their knowledge. Come back with, "We can get into space and we will have to be in space to save ourselves in the future." Now that is Dr. Von Karman. Also Dr. Von

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Karman designed how to save bridges, when he heard of the Tacoma [Washington] bridge falling down. He knew what it was.

When he was called by Berkeley [University of California at Berkeley] to see what could be done to save the Golden Gate Bridge in case of a similar wind or similar catastrophe, he said he could do it very well. They only had to design, to put an exact replica of the bridge into the Berkeley wind tunnel and as soon as they had done that, he would come and show them what to do. This was done about six months later or three months later. I flew Dr. Von Karman in a little Beechcraft, twin engine. We got to Berkeley and he simply said, "The Golden Gate Bridge will fall down in about sixteen minutes if you have about a twenty-six-mile-and-hour wind from 312'. Now do it." About sixteen minutes later the bridge started undulating and fell down. They got scared and said, "What can we do for it to save the Golden Gate Bridge?" He said, "It's very simple. You must prevent it from being an air foil. Bridges should not be designed by people who don't know that it is an airplane foil. It is an airplane foil. So therefore you destroy the foil by putting a slip through the whole length of the bridge and a grill in between, to permit the wind from going under and up through the bridge and it will never move again." He said, "You were lucky you never had these

conditions before.” Every bridge built ever since has had the grill in the center including many of the old bridges have been cut up and put the grill in the center. I was sent once by the Air Force to rescue him behind the Russian

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lines. He was in Budapest because he loved Hungary and he wanted to see what had happened. But Russians already had the town. I was in Paris and I got a frantic call from the Pentagon to take a B-25, fly down to Budapest, and get him out.

STERN:           What year was this?

McHUGH:        In the forties.

STERN:           During the war?

McHUGH:        Oh, yes. During the war, troops were all over the place. The war was still going on. Colonel Rodenberg and myself flew down to Budapest and looked all over the place. We were interned right away. The Russians interned us. But the amusing part, because we had done nothing wrong and we were their allies, they told us we could not leave the convent. They put us in a convent and told us to remain there. The nuns allowed us to get out. We went out during the night looking for him in Budapest. We found him. We brought him back to the convent and sneaked him aboard the airplane by giving false numbers. We had to give them numbers of people when we landed that was false. One sergeant went twice through the line, so we had one more person to get out than we had come in. Then we got Dr. Von Karman to come on board the airplane and we flew him to Rome and back to the states. So the man I knew well. I was delighted to see that the President had selected this great man for his first presidential medal of science.

STERN:           He did receive it just before he died.

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McHUGH:        He received it, and I have the photograph downstairs showing when he was at the White House.

STERN:           Okay, I just have a few more points. I don't think they are really major ones. I was particularly struck, for example, by the detailed advanced planning – for example, for the trips particularly to foreign capitals. Let's take as one example, the wreath-laying ceremony. I found the diagrams which would describe precisely how many steps it would take to.... Did you ever drill the President in any way?

McHUGH:        No, the President was told about that, but he didn't want to be drilled about anything. He was a terribly quick learner, an intelligent man. He wanted to

know what was going to happen. He only had to be told, "Sir, a few steps to that and this will happen. This sergeant will carry the flowers; he will walk backwards. You don't have to touch anything." He didn't want to lift anything, because of his back. They had these huge bouquets of flowers that weighted fifty pounds sometimes. Two soldiers would carry that. I said, "Mr. President, the only thing you have to do is to walk directly behind that." That's all he wanted to know and he would do it.

STERN: So you would just do the planning and he would carry it out pretty easily?

McHUGH: One thing that pleased him very much was a funeral that he saw, an extraordinarily well-done funeral.... No, I mean, memorial to the unknown soldier, and the way they walked to the tomb, the way

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they fired the rifles, the type of music they played, and the uniforms they wore. He told me, "I want you to take down what kind of music this is, because I want to establish something that way in the United States. This is fabulously well done, and it's way better done than when we do it." I'm sure that Mrs. Kennedy realized that, because she asked for the same unit from Ireland to come for the President's funeral.

STERN: Isn't that interesting. I didn't know that.

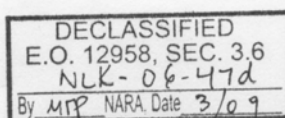
McHUGH: And they came. [Interruption] I have an anecdote that will show you how precise the President was, and how amusing he was, and nice. One night we were at Newport, and he called me in the middle of the evening and said, "McHugh, I want to see a submarine." I was a little.... I said, "Yes, Mr. President." He said, "I want it to go into the channel there and emerge so Caroline can see a submarine." I said, "Yes, Mr. President." I was on duty so I was the one he called. He used to call any of the military aides.

I called the Navy at Newport and I said, "Admiral, we need a submarine that will go up the channel and emerge right in front of the farm there." You know, the Auchincloss farm. He said, "Why?" I said, "Just because they have to do some training and they might as well do that. Can they submerge in the channel?" "Oh, yes. We can submerge in the channel and will emerge right at Hammersmith Farm." I said, "Let's do that; at ten o'clock tomorrow morning exactly it should come up." He said, "Yes, it can be done."

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I called back the President. I said, "Mr. President, it's arranged. At ten o'clock you can show the submarine coming out of the water right in front of the channel there." He said, "What type of submarine." I-yi-yi. I said, "Yes, Mr. President, I will call you right back."

I called quickly back the admiral and I said, "What type of submarine?" He told me. I said, "Who is commanding it?" He told me. I wrote it down. I said, "Is he married?" and he said, "What does that have to do with it?" I said, "I don't know, sir, but is he married? Does



he have a family?" He got annoyed with me, and I kept on asking these questions. I hung up and I called back the President, It's midnight. I knew he was doing something that he didn't mind me calling. So I called him back. I said, "Mr. President, tomorrow morning at ten o'clock you will have a submarine," so-and-so. "The name of the man is," so-and-so. "He's married." "What state is he from?" I said, "Mr. President..." Because obviously I should have thought of that because as politicians are very strongly.... His knowledge of that was so great. So I said, "Mr. President, I'll have all the information by morning." I didn't dare call back the admiral. [Interruption]

I came back from, back from paratrooper training and I had gotten my army paratrooper wings. I was very proud of them because I don't like jumping out of airplanes, and I did it because I also signed for the undersea warfare so that I would do Army,

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Navy, Air.

The President was kind of pleased that I was doing these things. He said to Caroline, "Caroline, do you know that General McHugh jumps out of airplanes and is a paratrooper?" And Caroline said, "No, he jumps out of parachutes." The President said, "No, dear." "Yes, he jumps out of parachutes," she repeated. The President turned to me and said, "Okay, that's what you do, you jump out of parachutes." He didn't want to contradict her. [Laughter] [Interruption]

STERN: Did you have any special problems concerning the construction of Air Force One because of the President's back? Weren't there some chairs that had to be designed specifically by Dr. Travell?

McHUGH: Yes. It was not very different from a totally normal chair. It was the same chair that we used, the best possible reclining chair that we used on an airplane. But we did make one side a little higher than the other. It had to be exactly so many quarter of an inches higher on that side. On the back so many quarters of an inches higher, lower, and all that. We did design the cushions to make the chair so he would feel very, very comfortable.

[BEGIN TAPE FOUR]

Anywhere, any length of time, we brought chairs with us. We brought a plank to put underneath his mattress wherever he slept because he wanted a firm mattress. We had those things on *Air Force One* and we could provide him with the comfort he needed.

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STERN: I think this is my final point unless you have anything else to add. I saw some source which mentioned you personally received some six thousand letters in the period, weeks, after the assassination. Were those directed to you specifically about those events or...

McHUGH: No, most of those after the assassination – because President Johnson took over. He told me he had a big staff that could handle most of those things. They were handled by his staff, most of those things. If they were sent to me personally, I would answer them. I used the staff of the Pentagon because there were so many things to do, to prepare the answers because they knew the data. Much of the data sometimes cannot be checked by one man, so, before you answer anything you have got to be sure of your facts. I had it checked by the Pentagon and then I would send a letter answering them.

STERN: I see. That's very interesting. Do you have any other points to add?  
[Interruption]

McHUGH: The President one day told me, "I like to be able to watch election returns. The only thing *Air Force One* does not provide me is a TV set. I need one on there if I can have one." My answer to the President was always, "Yes, sir, it will be done immediately." Then I called General LeMay who told me it was a stupid thing, that they could not put a TV set aboard. It would take months to put the aerials throughout the wings. We had to send the airplane to Wright-Patterson [Wright Patterson Air Force Base]. I discussed this

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more at length with him and explained to him that the President only wanted one TV and that we didn't need.... He said, "It has to be done that way. However, if you can't send the plane to Wright-Patterson, I do have a man that has worked for me many years who is an expert, and I will let him decide what can be done." I said, "Thank you, sir." I called the man and he said, "I can have that done overnight." I said, "Today. "Let's do it today." He said, "All right. Where is the plane?" I said, "At Andrews." He said, "I'll go there and fix it up. What kind of TV do you want?" "I want the best RCA [Radio Corporation of America] you've got, if that's what you can use." He said, "Anything you want." He fixed up antenna, wherever he put it, fixed up properly. We had a TV.

The next day the President flew somewhere and he was astonished to see a TV there. He said, "Does it work?" I was scared to try and I said, "Mr. President, everything on *Air Force One* works." I turned the TV set and we couldn't see a thing. There was a lot of noise and snow, and I played around with the TV and then I got the station. I realized then that the only thing we had to do was know where the stations were below us, because we had to change fast from one station to the other and know that they were NBC [National Broadcasting Company] – if that was what we were looking – which one was an NBC station. We took quickly a book having all of the data in and when the President was looking at TV we would switch. He would get mad and say, "Why do you change it? Why do you change it?" I say, "This one will get off in a minute and the other is

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better.” We’d switch for him. And he had his TV and had the election returns. That’s what he wanted to know. [Interruption]

STERN: Let’s go into that.

McHUGH: The President has to have with him at all times all the information in the world, what to do in case of atomic attack. This is contained, all of the various alternatives – there is another word they use, that I won’t be using – that he can do this or that, or whatever decision, he is told what consequence is going to result. This book shows, if a bomb is dropped on Moscow, this is what is going to happen, if it drops next to it, it destroys this; if it’s dropped on that.... Everyone of them shows how many millions of people will die and also the results throughout the world of the pollution in the air that was brought.

STERN: The fallout.

McHUGH: The Fallout. This is kept up to date at all times: where we have our own missiles, how we could send them aboard. The President had to be able to make a decision, but what if he was all alone in an airplane when suddenly this thing happened. So they charged the Air aides and the Navy aides and the Army aides with knowing what was in that book by heart, practically. To be able to call the joint chiefs on the phone on the President’s airplane, get all the joint chiefs together in a conference. When the joint chiefs would say, “Then we have proposition C that we can.... We recommend proposition C,” we could turn quickly to page 19 showing him what proposition C really meant, what will be the consequence to the United

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States, to the enemy, and to the world. He could make up his decision. This satchel was kept at all times by a warrant officer that followed him everywhere. Every time we went on a trip he was there with this satchel.

STERN: This was the so-called football, wasn’t it?

McHUGH: This was called the football. But we knew how to handle it, or what was in it, and where it was. [Interruption]<sup>3</sup>

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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<sup>3</sup> The final item on the tape is a repeat of a story that McHugh tells earlier in the interview, and is not included here.

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