

Christine Camp Oral History Interview—JFK#1, 1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Camp, a John F. Kennedy (JFK) Senate and campaign staff member (1959-1960) and Assistant White House Press Secretary (1961-1963), discusses JFK's Senate and presidential campaign staff operations at the Esso Building in Washington, D.C. in 1959 and 1960, the card file they kept of potential Kennedy supporters nationwide, the 1960 Democratic primary campaign, and JFK's public relations operation at the 1960 Democratic National Convention, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Christine Camp

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Christine Camp—JFK#1

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First of Four Oral History Interviews

with

Christine Camp

Washington, D.C.
1964

By Alvin Spivak

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SPIVAK: Chris, would you just start at the beginning, more or less, when you first became associated with President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], and how that came to be, and what the early stages were?

CAMP: It began in 1958 when I was interviewed by Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], who was the Senator's Administrative Assistant, and his associate, Mr. Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman]. I was struck first of all, on the basis of the interview, of how informal it was that a possible candidate for the presidency interviewed people and established his staff. They were apparently trying to set up a campaign staff at that time, although this was a good year before any announcement of candidacy came about. And they were not particularly interested in skills as a secretary that I might have; they were more interested in my background and how I felt about politics in particular and how I felt about the Senator as a leading Democratic possibility.

SPIVAK: Briefly, what was that background and what were your sentiments?

CAMP: To be frank—and I was frank during the interview—I knew very little or nothing about Senator Kennedy then. He was a leading candidate in my mind from my own personal standpoint in that he was a young, progressive, liberal senator whom I felt to be a potential leader within the party at that moment, and he was, of

course, very well known as being a potential vice presidential candidate in 1956.

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My association with politics at that time had been a brief tour of duty at the Democratic National Committee in 1956. Subsequent to that, I went abroad and lived in India for two years, so I had no connection with politics at all. So I had to be frank with them, that I liked his outlook and I liked his liberalism and I liked his progressive attitude and his calling upon excellence in youth. And that's all I knew about him at that point.

And I was struck by the fact that both of them [Sorenson and Feldman] were rather calling on the same things, too, to look forward to hiring staff but they didn't know at that point what it was all about. As it turned out later—this was in November of 1958 that I was interviewed—as it turned out, there was no opening on the staff. They were merely working up a backlog of people to call upon.

SPIVAK: If I may interrupt, what did they tell you when they were interviewing you? Did they say then that this was in terms of seeking the presidency of being on the Senate staff?

CAMP: No, they did not indicate that (i.e., the presidency) at all. They indicated then that the Senator's workload had increased tremendously, and they wanted to take part of that burden away from Mr. Sorenson, who was apparently overloaded with speeches and the legislative end of it, and they were thinking in terms of dividing the staff at that time to be directed by someone else at a later date.

SPIVAK: Where did this interview take place?

CAMP: In the Senator's office on Capitol Hill. They did indicate that if such a split did come about in dividing Sorenson's duties at that point, it would probably devolve on Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith], who was the then Senator's brother-in-law. And it so happened that Mr. Smith was in the office that day and I met him. And I daresay he's a very young looking man and he didn't seem to really know what it was all about either. In fact, we were apparently all feeling our way at that moment.

But I was engaged about this interview because Sorenson was interested in the intellectual outlook solely. He never asked me if I could take shorthand, if I could typewrite, if I had any writing ability. He was philosophizing and he was more engaged about what intellectual addition I could make as a member of the staff, I think, more than anything. For instance, he asked me a question about the ADA [Americans for Democratic

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Action] which, of course, figured quite a bit in the Senator's background then. And Feldman was interested in my previous background abroad indicating that they needed someone who had traveled and who was somewhat informed on some issues outside of the Senate.... But

never once did they indicate that this was looking toward anything beyond dividing Sorenson's responsibilities.

SPIVAK: Well, were you replying to any sort of a—well, I wouldn't want to say ad. But how did you know there was a job to be had?

CAMP: Well, in that case I had just gotten back from India. The husband of a friend of mine, a colleague with whom I had worked at the Democratic National Committee, was associated with Feldman—I believe socially and they may have once had some legal business because Ray Jacobson is a lawyer. And it was his understanding that Kennedy was hiring, increasing his staff; it was through him that he put me on to Feldman. It was just kind of an ad hoc sort of thing. They were not putting ads in the paper or asking people to come in and take jobs. They didn't have them then. It was perfectly apparent that they had no job at all.

SPIVAK: Well, then how long after did you join the staff?

CAMP: Well, the interview ended by Ted saying to me, "Frankly, we don't have a job for you, but if you need a job, we'll be glad to try to place you on the Hill if you're interested in it. In fact, we think you'd be able to fill a job on the Hill and be quite capable of doing so." But I said "No." I didn't need a job at that particular time so we let it go that if anything should come open where they could use someone with my background, they would call me.

SPIVAK: Well, if I may interrupt again, did you meet the Senator at that time?

CAMP: No, I had no contact with him at all. I did not see him; I saw only Feldman, Smith, and Sorenson.

SPIVAK: How long after that did they call you?

CAMP: That interview took place in November of 1958 and mid-February on a Friday I got a call at my home in Virginia from a man who identified himself as Steve Smith. "I'm opening an office on Monday and I'd be pleased if you could come down and join me in opening it." And he was very frank to say that he didn't know quite what I was being hired for. No question at all had ever come up about payment of salary or personal papers or what-have-you.

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This, I've found, was true all through my years, that the administrative side of life was rather devoid of formal procedure at all, and this was especially true during the early campaign stage. You never signed papers (e.g., employment contracts); you never worried about the salary; you didn't talk turkey about these things. It was getting the job done because you are

hired to support a man or candidate or the Senator in whom you believed. It was a fairly intellectual, philosophical approach.

SPIVAK: Well, without knowing exactly what you were being hired for or what you would be paid, did you then immediately say yes?

CAMP: I did. I said I would be on duty whenever he said because I would be very interested in working for Senator Kennedy. And this is what it amounted to.

SPIVAK: Now, was this at the Esso Building headquarters or was this in his Senate Office Building office?

CAMP: We started out—I first reported to the Senate Office Building and it was obvious at that particular time that they were in crucial need of additional space. I recall, Steve had already leased a suite of offices—two rooms to be exact—in the Esso Buildings, which is at the bottom of Capitol Hill. We started out there, within, oh, a week, I suppose, but we worked out of both offices until we could make the transfer. And it became immediately apparent that we really didn't know what we were in business for...

SPIVAK: When you say we, to what extent does that go?

CAMP: Well, the staff then, the Esso staff included: Steve, who was the director of it; myself, his assistant; Jean Lewis, who is presently with Larry O'Brian [Lawrence F. O'Brien]; and Pauline Fluet [Pauline T. Fluet]. The four of us were to open this office. The public idea was that we were doing overflow correspondence for the Senator, who was getting quite a bit of public correspondence because he was making a lot of trips and speaking and he was becoming more well known.

SPIVAK: And, of course, there was speculation about the presidency.

CAMP: There was speculation, right.

SPIVAK: Was there speculation in your own mind at that point as a staff member or as a fledgling staff member?

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CAMP: There was speculation, but, again, at no time during this period did anyone ever say that he was a candidate or a potential candidate. It was obvious they were expanding their staff to meet this potential, but they never really came out and said it. It's rather a feeling by osmosis; nothing sometimes needs to be spoken. You feel it, you understand it, and you use your own judgment on how best you can fulfill whatever duty is given to you. But it does not need to be in black and white necessarily.

SPIVAK: Well, there you were at the Esso Building.

CAMP: There I was.

SPIVAK: What was your role there? What exactly did you do?

CAMP: The role was—and it was kind of a funny role. It was trying to project the Senator's name on a nationwide basis, outside of Massachusetts, outside of the senatorial office, trying to project him as a more national figure. Now again, I gathered this by osmosis. My first duty, for example, as explained to me by Steve, was to try to lay a base for a public relations campaign, again, not knowing what the ultimate purpose was.

SPIVAK: Your first duty was this, although technically you were being hired at a secretarial level?

CAMP: Correct, that's right. But I also served as a secretary to Steve, too. I mean, this was not a ploy at all.

SPIVAK: There were no clear-cut lines of what anyone was doing which...

CAMP: No, none whatsoever. I could serve coffee, or one of my first duties was to go out and buy carpeting for the office. (I didn't even know where to buy carpeting in this city.) But this is illustrative of how the staff worked, that you do anything and everything but you're expected to do it well.

SPIVAK: Did Steve Smith have a title at that point?

CAMP: Steve had no title, no title at all. None of us had titles. None of us ever had titles until we got to the White House. This was another thing: during the subsequent primary campaign, the period I'm presently talking about, if somebody would ask me who the campaigning manager was, I couldn't tell anyone because I didn't know if it was Larry or I didn't know if it was Ken [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]

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or who. I knew how they fitted in and I knew on a project-by-project basis who was in charge, but we never had titles. And you didn't need them.

In some cases it made you mad that there was no clear-cut table of organization to refer to, because you found an overlap on occasion. But the general idea among the staff, and I think this went up through Kennedy himself, was that titles were things you didn't need to bother about. And Steve at that time had no title. He was helping out. He was a brother-in-law. He was not getting paid. He was an "assistant," [filling] the need for someone to take the overflow of the Senate building.

We did Senate work there; there's no question about that, but it was minor in comparison with what came later because that so-called public relations campaign, which I was assigned to, was a very basic one [but] which was too premature at that point. I think. It consisted of subscribing to [three or four] daily newspapers throughout the United States, state by state. The idea was to review the editorial opinion about Kennedy at that time to gain the tenor of public opinion; to try to get some idea of what his—I loathe the word “image” but I have to use it in this case—what it was at that particular point, how it could be built, how it could be expanded upon, how to project him a national figure rather than to keep him as an Easterner...

SPIVAK: How many papers in all were coming in through the country?

CAMP: Well, you can't imagine how many newspapers can fill one small office every day. I don't know at the moment. I'd have to check the files but I'm sure that we received over a hundred newspapers daily.... And it was my job then to review them, and particularly the ones that entered into a given trip that was coming up. For instance, if he was making a speaking tour in Ohio, then I had to take the Ohio papers and deduce what kind of editorial opinion he was going to be faced with or what possible public relations problems he might have before he even went on the trip. It served a secondary purpose of...

SPIVAK: Well, did you then send memos to the Senator or did you send him clips or how was this all done?

CAMP: Again, we were feeling our way at this time. I could do that, I could use that method, or I could take a particular editorial and, on the basis of what files we had, supplement it with additional information and suggest a plan that possibly he could—it the editor was strongly

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against him for a certain measure that he was working on the Hill, suggest that he call the editor and explain it to him; or if O'Brien or Steve were traveling in the area, to call on this man and say, “I think maybe you're wrong about the Senator's stand on this. Possibly you might like to see the facts and figures on it,” or a simple letter saying, “This is the legislative program and I hope you'll see my side of it.” It took that form.

It took a secondary form of keeping us abreast of who was in power in the state, down to a county level, in the Democratic Party. And we used every opportunity to extract the most minute information from those papers. For instance, I might spot the chairman So-and-So's birthday party was held on Saturday in the social column of a local gazette of maybe only ten thousand circulation. I would take that and I would compose a letter in the Senator's name, “I have recently heard that you had a birthday and I want to extend my congratulations.”

SPIVAK: This was how long before he announced that he was a candidate?

CAMP: A year, a full year.

SPIVAK: But it was through the year before he announced he was a candidate, in any event?

CAMP: That correct. This all started in 1959; early '59, February, I started. And this was the main idea. I later recommended to Steve that the project be disbanded because actually it was too premature and it was too much for a small staff. And the staff then consisted of me in this particular project. I think it served its purpose in some areas, but without a huge staff to review and keep tabs on something like that, it became unmanageable. I don't think it was really too worthwhile, but in some cases, it paid off.

SPIVAK: Well, this Esso Building office was pretty much a mystery to outsiders, as I recall. What else did go on there?

CAMP: Well, it became apparent that, I would say in the spring of 1959, that we were all engaged—and when I say all, I mean the four that I've mentioned—we were engaged in a pre-campaign move of some sort or pre-announcement move. Again, we were never formally told, "The Senator is going to announce his candidacy a year from now." We were never formally told that; it was never in black and white. The direction then was, through Steve, of beefing up a staff to supplement the Senator's engagements because he was speaking a lot. He was going around to colleges and meeting with labor

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organizations, and he was projecting himself into other states outside of the East Coast. So our staff became the clearing office for the materials [prepared for his use] on these trips, and Steve was the scheduling officer. And Steve also arranged for invitations when it became necessary for the Senator to go into a particular area.

This was, I think, one of Steve's main functions, was to try to place him around the country and get his name known, particularly among the Democratic Party leaders. Then, the follow-up work, of course, fell on the three of us back at the Esso Building. Steve would come back with a yellow pad full of names right through the police officers who were in escort, of people who had said hello or he had been introduced to. It was everybody, across the board. It had nothing to do with politicians or money raisers. It soon became apparent that they were voters and that was the overriding factor. Whether it was a police officer, an escort, or the Democratic Chairman of the state, it made no difference; it was the voter.

SPIVAK: Well now, we're up to about the spring of 1959 and I would imagine that things got hotter as the year wore on and as the announcement was becoming more imminent. I'm trying to recall when that announcement was. I think it was January of '60.

CAMP: January of 1960, that's right.

SPIVAK: Did things more or less continue in that same pattern through those following Months?

CAMP: Well, they did but they expanded and we reorganized. We expanded our staff in the summer of 1959. We brought on more secretarial help.

SPIVAK: If I may interrupt for a second, for anyone listening to this tape, those outside noises are airplanes flying overhead. We're not flying while we're doing this tape. But go on. [Laughter]

CAMP: It became necessary to expand the staff in the summer of 1959 because the response we were getting from our initial little program was paying off. We were getting letters back from the local county chairman thanking the Senator for congratulating him on his birthday. And we took advantage of this by then responding in good time, "We hope to see you on the next trip out and I hope you'll give me the benefit of your advice on what the Democratic Party in you area is doing and what you think it could do. I would welcome your thoughts on"—if it happened to be a county chairman, say, in Ohio—"about the current farm legislation."

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SPIVAK: Well, I was going to ask were these letters centered in any particular areas such as those where primaries were going to be held?

CAMP: No, nationwide, every state. They didn't miss one. This program, then, evolved to such an extent that it was necessary in the summer of 1959 to expand the staff and break it up into "areas." I remember Jean Lewis was assigned to the South to handle just this kind of thing because Jean was from the South. She was experienced in Democratic southern politics. I was handed, I believe, New England and the Midwest. And we had—I can't remember who it was we hired but we had someone specifically then for the Far West. It was [thus] broken down into regions with the same program being promoted nationwide.

We would reduce all this information then to a card file. This was that start of the famed Kennedy card file on delegates and alternates. So by the time we got to the Democratic National Convention in 1960, we had pretty much a basic history of people who—what the evolution was of their history with Kennedy. And that's how it all started.

SPIVAK: Relating specifically to delegates.

CAMP: Well, at this early stage, we did not reduce it specifically to delegates or alternates. We never had "the ultimate goal" in mind. We always worked to the next one. In other words, say in the summer of '59, it was a matter of, if he declared his candidacy, what primaries should he go into? So we wanted to be able to have

evidence on file that these were the supporters in any given primary state that he might want to file in. So if you don't know what primaries you're going to file in, you then necessarily have to have files that reflect all fifty states, you see. So once the primaries are over and you win, then you worry next about the Convention, at which point there are the delegates and alternates.

SPIVAK: Of course, you had to wait until the delegates were chosen before you knew who they were.

CAMP: That's correct, but we were hopeful that, having done the spadework in '59 and up until the Convention, that we would have information on all delegates and alternates by that time. And we did.

SPIVAK: Well, that's what I was going to ask, how good the spadework was in terms of how many of these people that you had been keeping file on actually became delegates and were useful to you?

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CAMP: I can't give you any percentages at all but, as I recall it, of the states that I had been particularly assigned to, we were able to produce enough information on the majority of alternates and delegates so that we did not at the last minute at the Convention have to go out and ferret out information as to how the support went. And mind you, by the time of the Convention, we knew in most cases whether a delegate was fully committed to Kennedy, whether he was leaning to Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], whether he might possibly go for another candidate. It was even down to that fine point. We had about five stages projected on each delegate and on the alternates: those that needed more work, i.e., that we needed to be in contact with more; or, say, those we could let alone completely and devote to somebody else, et cetera. I think this initial spadework is really the key to how he became president, and I give Steve most of the credit for working this particular administrative detail out in advance.

SPIVAK: Well, we're still in the summer of 1959; we don't want to get to the Convention just yet. You've expanded your staff. Did events more or less keep going that same way with the build-up that you would expect up to the time of his announcement in January of '60?

CAMP: Yes. The same program was in force. At the same time, the Senator was traveling more. He was traveling pretty much every weekend outside of Washington. Steve was engaged in arranging schedules. I recall one, particularly, in Ohio and...

SPIVAK: Your home state.

CAMP: My home state. And I believe it was September of 1959 where he did in two

days, I believe—I don't recall the exact number—I believe he covered six universities in Ohio, starting with Cincinnati, working up toward Toledo, Ohio University, and Ohio State, and a number of others. But the advanced planning on that was so good that we were able to pretty much predict what the audiences were going to be.... Mind you, at this time we had no advance men at all. It was strictly by telephone and [letter] contact and by the people that Steve relied upon.

SPIVAK: Through your office, through the office you worked in, that is.

CAMP: Through our office that's right. And we laid on a two-day tour that took him to major audiences throughout the state. Not only was scheduling involved, it was a matter of [coordinating the] writing speeches,

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(which we were not engaged in i.e., Smith's office during this period); trying to gauge the temper of the audience, whether it was going to be conservative or liberal or in-between. And we did this on the basis of our files and on the basis of our contacts back and forth on the telephone and trying to anticipate what the editorial coverage was going to be before and after; or what, if any, fundraising could be done at this stage. And so it was a very well done and very well handled type of planning.

SPIVAK: Did you work personally with the Senator very much at this point? Or was your work done almost entirely through Steve Smith?

CAMP: Entirely through Steve. In fact, I don't believe I had ever met the Senator up until that time. I don't think that personally...

SPIVAK: Up until the...

CAMP: This was September, the fall of '59. I may have met him once briefly, but I was never formally introduced to him as being a member of his staff. I know that he knew at that time I was a member of his staff because he used to call me occasionally on particular stages that I had been assigned to, and he would inquire about "who's who" and "what's what" and "what I can expect or what should I do?" But no face-to-face meeting at this point.

SPIVAK: When did you ever find out your salary?

CAMP: Well the salary end of it was rather amusing because, as I recall, I was placed on the Senate payroll within existing budgetary financing that he had in the Senate. I was later switched, then, to another payroll which was the John F. Kennedy Foundation. But finances...

SPIVAK: John F. Kennedy Foundation?

CAMP: I'm sorry. The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. But finances was a terribly sore point with all of us because you were hired at a very minimal salary. You were not expected to have overtime....

SPIVAK: That is, to be paid for overtime. You worked it but...

CAMP: You worked over time, but you never got [paid for] it.

SPIVAK: What hours did you generally work? When I say you, I'm referring, of course, to office staff there.

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CAMP: Oh, it was about 9 to 7, 8 o'clock, but you were never to mention the word overtime at all.... You were hired.... The point was, "If the Senator can work this hard, you can too." And you always had the option to resign. My salary then amounted to about seventy dollars a week. And that continued until...

SPIVAK: What had been your latest salary prior to that?

CAMP: Over a hundred.

SPIVAK: We're going to have to turn this tape over.

CAMP: Okay.

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

SPIVAK: Now, Chris, we were up to the fall of 1959 and we had just been talking about your salary, gigantic as it was at about seventy dollars a week. But the one this that did interest me, because I don't think this was generally known, that was that you said that you originally had been on the Senator's payroll and then you were transferred to the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation payroll. Were you the only one on the staff in this particular situation or were the others? Did that keep up for awhile? This is something that sort of interests me.

CAMP: I can't speak for the others, I don't know, but I assume that the basic [Esso Building] staff was being payrolled out of the Foundation in New York because our paychecks came from New York. Anything to do with our withholding tax, for example, was handled by the Foundation and by a man there who wrote us on Foundation letterhead. I can't recall exactly the date when the transfer took place from the Senate payroll to the Foundation, but it was effected sometime in the fall of 1959, and that continued up until we were put on the Democratic National Committee payroll.

SPIVAK: Well, that wouldn't have been until after the Convention?

CAMP: That's correct. As of the Convention, we went on National Committee payroll.

SPIVAK: So that from the fall of '59 until July of '60, you were on the Foundation payroll.

CAMP: Correct.

SPIVAK: That would have been through the primaries....

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CAMP: That's right, that's right.

SPIVAK: Still within the fall of 1959, then, did everything still keep on as you've already described it, or were there some other changes?

CAMP: Well, the only changes were additions to the staff. Larry O'Brien joined that year, I think, as late...

SPIVAK: Did he work out of your office?

CAMP: Yes, he came in. It was the summer, as I recall, of 1959. Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] was at it in September of 1959. And other office...

SPIVAK: Was he added with any particular title?

CAMP: Press Secretary. He was the first one to have a title.

SPIVAK: You still had no title through this.

CAMP: None of us had any titles. Pierre was the only one who had a title.

SPIVAK: I didn't know he was given the press secretary title at that point. I thought it wasn't until after the Senator announced his candidacy.

CAMP: No, he had a title then. In fact, he had cards made: Press Secretary to Senator Kennedy. [Laughter]

SPIVAK: Pierre was Press Secretary to the Senator then but did he still work out of the Esso Building office where you were?

CAMP: He moved to the Esso Building and established a press office there.

SPIVAK: He had been with the investigation subcommittee (Select Committee to Investigate Improper Activities in Labor-Management Relations, U.S. Senate) staff up to that point.

CAMP: That's correct, that's correct.

SPIVAK: Was this your first meeting with Pierre?

CAMP: Yes. I met Pierre as soon as he joined the staff. But his role at that point was to travel with the Senator, to lay on a basic public affairs program. I was not in that end of it then so I really can't speak on what

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it amounted to. But he came on as a full-fledged press secretary. He was identified by it. He had his own staff. He hired his own secretary out of San Francisco. He added...

SPIVAK: What was he name? Do you recall?

CAMP: Oh it's my predecessor, I can't think of her now.

SPIVAK: I think it was a very tall girl. I can't remember her name either.

CAMP: It'll come to me.

SPIVAK: One thing I am wondering, though. There seems to be a gap. When you first went to work in that office, it was, as you said, somewhat of a role of giving some guidance on a public relations program. Then you became one of the people assigned to a particular region. And then Pierre came in as the Press Secretary. Well, who was handling all the public affairs...

CAMP: Prior to his arrival?

SPIVAK: ...between the time you mentioned earlier and Pierre's arrival.

CAMP: Well, actually, the public relations end of it still devolved around those of us who were assigned on a regional basis; on our own judgment.

SPIVAK: Nothing very organized at all?

CAMP: Nothing at all. It was our own judgment because it was felt, at least we were given to feel, that we had the expertise on a given area. For instance, I might have had some expertise on Ohio because I had worked on it for six or seven months. Jean was given the same feeling about the South. Now, the broader public relations program was never defined at all. It was a matter of—I think as far as an overall comment on

public relations is concerned, throughout all these months we're talking about, it was a matter of common courtesy, that you say thank you when something is rendered to you or you take a particular approach which will be beneficial to you.

SPIVAK: Well, that you say thank you in the form of a letter from the Senator...

CAMP: It could be one of several ways. It could be in the form of a personal letter from him. It could be in the form of a letter from his staff. And

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if we felt, those of us who were dealing in the day-to-day political work, that someone was hostile to him or who was on the edge of supporting him—it might take a phone call. It was a matter of projecting the Senator's personality into a given situation.

SPIVAK: Chris, at that time in terms of the mail that was coming back to you, or in terms of the press reaction, or in terms of the phone calls, or whichever, could you detect any rising swell of backing for the Senator to be president, or certainly to get the nomination?

CAMP: Well, I wouldn't go that far. I would say...

SPIVAK: And we're still in '59, the fall of '59.

CAMP: Yes, say in the fall of '59 my judgment, having been on the receiving end of it, would be that there was an increased interest in Kennedy at that time as being more of a national figure, which is what we set out to do. This was about all. There was never anything defined. Well, yes, certainly there were many, many people who would say, "I think he's a potential candidate and I would be glad to support him if he ever felt he could run, but..."

SPIVAK: Well, I'm thinking particularly.... Well, go on.

CAMP: My "but" here is that there was even evidence at that time of the questions which later became issues in the campaign of: "But his religion," "but his wealth," "but his youth." However, we never addressed ourselves to these particular problems at that point. It was merely a matter of expediency at that particular time, of saying, "I'm here. I'm a senator. I'm doing my job, and I'm addressing myself to national issues which take me outside of my own state of Massachusetts."

SPIVAK: What I was trying to get at was that, by the fall of '59, by September or October of '59, had there been a great increase of interest in the Senator as a national figure from February of '59 when you began this effort?

CAMP: Well, I'm not a good person to ask because I'm not the one well enough

acquainted with what had gone before I came on the staff because I had been overseas.

SPIVAK: No, I mean just from the time you joined the staff.

CAMP: Well, I would think so. And I think where it was most keenly felt was in the lower strata of the

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Democratic Party because we had made a particular effort to particularize and to localize the Kennedy name and identify him with the lower strata of the party. For instance, in Ohio, I mentioned earlier a speaking trip to Ohio. Ohio has eighty-eight counties in it and in each of those counties is a Democratic county chairman. And I recall studying very carefully who those eighty-eight chairmen were, what were their political shades, what candidate were they going to back during the Ohio primary and the subsequent Convention.... We made a full-blown effort on every state to try to understand what the local level [candidate interest] was of the Party, not the high echelon of it because this is well known and it's a political animal to start with. But we felt that...

SPIVAK: We, meaning your particular office?

CAMP: We, the staff, yes, we, the staff. And I'm talking about the "regional assistants," just to use a title that we didn't have.

SPIVAK: And this being in '59?

CAMP: Right. We felt that if there were to be a ground swell, that you had to do it on a truly grass-roots level. This was another cliché that I don't like, but in any event in order to generate any enthusiasm, you had to get to the voter and the guy closest to the voter was the local [county] chairman. So we made—and I'm talking again we, the four assistants at this point—made a particular effort to do more for the county chairmen than we would for the state chairmen. I would say that the county chairmen in a southern county in Ohio probably got more letters from me than Bill Coleman [William L. Coleman], the Democratic Chairman in Ohio, ever did, not because we were against Bill or DiSalle [Michael V. DiSalle] at that point. We were all for the Democratic Party and we would certainly respond to either or both of their letters and give them every kind of assistance. But what we wanted to do was to try to penetrate the innermost workings of the state organization because if it weren't possible to work through the existing party command, which in Kennedy's case was true in most states, we wanted to be able to present a strong endorsement by the lower echelon to the top echelon of a state party. And this, in fact, happened in Ohio because, if you will recall, Governor DiSalle was the first governor to endorse Kennedy after he announced his candidacy.

SPIVAK: I do recall that.

CAMP: And my own feeling is that Governor DiSalle had no choice because he was presented with statistics and endorsements to show him that the majority of the county chairmen in Ohio would back Kennedy. And in order to

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salvage his own political structure within his own state, he had no choice. And this was one of the major tactical moves of the Kennedy early primary campaign strategy.

SPIVAK: Now, was this a tactic by design or did it just happen or...

CAMP: I can't answer that because I was never told.

SPIVAK: Well, but you did it.

CAMP: Yes.

SPIVAK: Did you do it on instructions or did you do it because you had a region and you thought this was this thing to do?

CAMP: I think it evolved naturally first of all because, again, going back to early '59, we were all feeling our way; I think that it evolved along one line and then it became apparent that this might be a good way of inducing top level endorsements if it ever came to that, by having proof positive in front of party leadership, by saying, "Here we're got this county chairman. We've got this national committeewoman. Call her up and ask her."

SPIVAK: Well, this is all grand strategy and I think it's pretty well known that it was done this way, but in your own particular circumstance in wondering, taking Ohio as a very specific example that you just used, did you do this because you felt it was the thing to do or did you do this because you were told that this was the thing to do in terms of Ohio and in terms of other states? In other words, was there a grand design or was this just something that the workers more or less did on their own?

CAMP: Well, I think that it evolved of its own natural accord but I go back to my original thinking of "osmosis," that some way the staff at that time under Steve's leadership and thereafter under Larry O'Brien's leadership was to encourage any kind of approach. And in my case, it happened here, and it was found to work, and then it was applied to over here. And Jean might come up with some other idea that would work in the South but it would not work in the Northeast. We were relied upon to know how it was that you accomplished these things.

SPIVAK: In your own particular area?

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CAMP: Yes. I think that what it really amounts to is that you became expert in your particular area. But you were also then expected, as it developed later, to become experts overnight in another area because the thing grew then like Topsy. And I was later switched to the West and had to inform myself...

SPIVAK: When did that happen?

CAMP: Well, that happened during the primaries or early primary stage.

SPIVAK: Well, we don't want to get that far ahead now. We're still in fall of '59.

CAMP: But it evolved that way but never by office memorandums saying, "You will keep in contact with county chairmen," for example. Steve never called me into his office and said, "Listen, I think this is the grand plan, or the Senator says to do this." It just went on and on, and you had the right of saying, "I don't think this will work." You presented your arguments pro and con, any kind of tactic or strategy that might present itself. Whether they acted upon it was another thing. But nothing formal.

SPIVAK: Was Steve still in command of this office when Larry came in? I'm a little confused there.

CAMP: Yes.

SPIVAK: Larry more or less became "director of organization" at some point.

CAMP: He did. Larry came down—again, Larry's arrival was terribly mysterious to those of us because he was never introduced around. We really didn't know why this redhead was there. He was a terribly personable and charming man and he talked to all the girls. He was quite and lovely and we all enjoyed him, but we never knew what he did. Also, there were other staff being introduced too. We had now expanded to about, oh, five or six offices. Pierre was there, too.

SPIVAK: Were you on one floor of the Esso Building?

CAMP: Yes, one wing of one floor. The Esso Building was quite large. But Larry was never introduced around as being the organization man, or "he will do this" or "he will do that...." And a couple of other people were brought in to write speeches and to...

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SPIVAK: Can you recall who they were?

CAMP: Oh...

SPIVAK: Did Ken O'Donnell come in there at that point?

CAMP: He did at a later date.

SPIVAK: But not at this particular point.

CAMP: I'm vague about Ken's arrival, although I heard about it by word of mouth. Ken rarely showed up in the Esso Building so his particular entry into the organization I can't speak to because I don't really know, although he had the name of being an advisor.

SPIVAK: How about Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]?

CAMP: Robert Kennedy at the time was still...

SPIVAK: Chief Counsel?

CAMP: Chief Counsel.

SPIVAK: For the McClellan Committee.

CAMP: For the McClellan Committee. Once he was through with that committee, then he was designated as the "campaign manager." And he, too...

SPIVAK: But that was after the announcement, of course.

CAMP: That was after the announcement. But up until the time of the announcement...

SPIVAK: He didn't show up at your office in the Esso Building?

CAMP: No.

SPIVAK: Well, Kenny O'Donnell was working for that committee, too, at the time with Bob Kennedy.

CAMP: And as I recall, Ken stayed with Bob as long as that...

SPIVAK: And he didn't show up at the Esso Building at that point, either.

CAMP: No, no.

SPIVAK: Pierre had resigned from the...

CAMP: Pierre had resigned from the McClellan Committee and he joined in September, as I recall. Larry was there. Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] was also employed as rather an office manager under Steve Smith. More secretarial help was added. We added a reproduction staff for mailing lists and we became mechanized in doing our correspondence at this point.

SPIVAK: Meaning you had electric typewriters or electric reproducing machines, or what did you have?

CAMP: We had a couple of electric typewriters that did the work for us.

SPIVAK: Do you mean, you fed tape?

CAMP: Yes.

SPIVAK: Now, you had started with four people in your office including Steve Smith. This is now October '59?

CAMP: Right.

SPIVAK: How many people were working there then?

CAMP: Let's see. I would judge somewhere between a dozen to fifteen easily. And we were terribly understaffed by this time because it had become obvious we were really rolling into something. And there was a lot of travel being conducted at this time. Also, I might add that a lot of people were coming to us, too.

SPIVAK: Can I break in at this point? Did Senator Kennedy ever show up at the Esso Building? The Esso Building, I might add, is several blocks from the Capitol and the Esso Building was a great mystery, as I said earlier, to outsiders. Newspapermen on the Hill knew that there was an office there, and we sort of had the idea that this is where the presidential aspirations were being more or less built up, but it was very hard to get yes or no answers about it.

CAMP: Actually, the Senator in my memory showed up only twice—at one time when I formally met him, and I believe he was there once in addition, so making it a total of two times—just dropped in, very informal, unannounced, on the basis of he hadn't met part of his staff and he came around to see how we were doing and what we were up to and if we were answering his mail. It was still being conducted along these lines publicly. And in fact, that's what we were doing;

we were answering Senate mail. You know, I'm not trying to imply that there was no Senate business being conducted there because there certainly was in conjunction with his being a senator; but he did not use that as a base of operations whatsoever. We had, of course, occasion to go up to the Hill and visit the formal office.

SPIVAK: It wasn't very far away.

CAMP: No, but it was all uphill. [Laughter] That was the worst part. But there was, of course, a very heavy telephonic interchange. I mean, we never felt that we were sidetracked necessarily; it was only a different type of work that we were doing. But we had a full access to his office on the Hill, and vice versa if they had any problems that fell into our area.

SPIVAK: Did you consider yourselves part of his Hill staff or did you consider yourselves a thing apart?

CAMP: We forced ourselves publicly to be a part of his Hill staff, which is very difficult to explain, at that time. But we felt sufficiently informed to be able to carry this intelligence operation to a logical conclusion if asked. [Laughter] But we tried to avoid it if possible. The facts are that two of the girls, Jean Lewis and Pauline Fluet, were legitimate members of his Hill staff on Senate payroll. They'd worked for him for years. So the transfer was not too difficult. I found it difficult in working for a man that I'd never met, for example, and informing myself on his activities by reading the local papers just like anybody else, but this is inherent when you're enlarging a staff and when you're enlarging a base of operations.

SPIVAK: Well now, if we could move from October to the end of '59, or more particularly to the beginning of '60 when the Senator made his announcement, did your particular operation then expand more or did it flow along at the same rate that you've already mentioned?

CAMP: We kept the basic form of the organization itself although we then had to reduce it to a matter of what we called "the primary states." There were the states that he considered going into. But all the rest of the activity continued nationwide. I mean, we did not let up just because he announced entering a primary in a given state. We did not let go of anything else.

SPIVAK: I'm trying if we can, Chris, to keep this prior to the announcement, between...

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CAMP: Oh, I see. Before the announcement.

SPIVAK: That's right, just moving along between October, or September and October, and January.

CAMP: No, I think it kept its same form, its same basis. There was increased activity, as far as he was concerned, in speaking. Moving toward January '60, will he or won't he? The press had started projecting him as a national candidate. There were indications in various areas that he would be welcomed as a candidate; others, not. By this time...

SPIVAK: And what did your office do in connection with that? Was it a matter of keeping track, keeping tabs?

CAMP: Yes, by this time Larry had formed his base of operation and he, too started to travel a great deal. I believe he was with Kennedy....

SPIVAK: Was he now in command of the office or was Steve?

CAMP: Well, that was divided. Steve did the scheduling and he got the Senator where he had to go. Now, how this was accomplished, I don't know. I would imagine that it was a confab of Kennedy himself, O'Brien, Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.], Sorenson, who was also very well versed in the national political scene. Mind you, Sorenson had done the scheduling himself before Steve came on. And I would imagine that Bob Kennedy, too, was involved, although I don't know.

To define the lines of organization, I can't at this point because Steve still did that, but Larry was more and more involved in the political end at this stage. In fact, those of us who were assigned to "regions" would hear from Larry who would call upon us for our advice, as he put it. Then what he would do after that, I don't know, but he was apparently trying to build up a nucleus of individual state organizations. Then, he gradually assumed the mantle of the organization man at that particular stage. But there was no definitive line of who was on top. You knew Steve was doing the scheduling and you knew Larry was the man to talk politics with. And that's how it ran.

SPIVAK: Well, let's then get to the announcement period, which I recall very well. Was there a sharp change? And I imagine there must have been....

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CAMP: No, I wouldn't say there was a sharp change. You might think that there was, but I think the things about the organization *per se*, the Kennedy organization, is that you took a step at a time. In other words, we worked up the announcement of candidacy. What happened after that was a great unknown, although we hoped to be prepared for it. Once the announcement of candidacy was on the books, then you worked through the primaries, one at a time. And after the primaries, the Convention and on and on and on.

SPIVAK: Well, confining it to your own operation, to your own particular role, the Senator announced—I recall this very well—in the Senate Caucus Room and

from that point on, the Esso Building office was no mystery...

CAMP: You all knew. It all came to light.

SPIVAK: It all came to light. Did your staff expand? Did your duties expand? Did your hours expand?

CAMP: Yes, in all ways. There was a slight change of gears because, of course, you had to think now in terms of winning an election which we had not thought of before.

SPIVAK: The next step.

CAMP: The next step.

SPIVAK: No, the winning of the nomination.

CAMP: Well, I'm talking about the primary elections, you see.

SPIVAK: Oh, I see. I see.

CAMP: No, we're not even up to the election, yet. You go from the announcement of candidacy to the primary elections and this was the next—you shift gears is what you do. And this doesn't take you very long because by now you are confident that you have the basic working materials in your files, in your contacts. I would imagine this would affect fundraising, too, although I was not engaged with that at all.

SPIVAK: Did your office at any point seem to be engaged in that?

CAMP: I was never involved in this at all. I came again by osmosis to understand that Steve was involved in this.

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SPIVAK: But it wasn't talked about. It didn't seem to be the thing to just talk about in your office.

CAMP: No. You were encouraged to say, "Well, Steve, I think maybe So-and-So would be a major contributor or a minor contributor," or "He'd like to do something along the financial end," but this was never discussed, never discussed with the staff at all. But you were aware that this was one of the major necessities of being in politics and one of the major problems.

SPIVAK: Well, there were no pep talks in any of the...

CAMP: No, no, no, never. Oh, this is another thing, never any formal staff meetings at all. You never had staff meetings.

SPIVAK: At any point?

CAMP: At any point. I can't remember ever being in a staff meeting.

SPIVAK: Starting when and ending when?

CAMP: Starting in 1959 and ending in April of 1964. [More precisely, ending in November 1963.] Again, like titles, staff meetings were just too much superstructure and a lot of wasted time because you could deal with most of these problems over the telephone or by an informal chat in the hall or over dinner, but you did not need to have a formal agenda and a formal staff meeting. And I think this is illustrative of the President's attitude about Cabinet meetings. This was true all during my experience anyway.

SPIVAK: It was true at the staff level that you knew.

CAMP: That's right. But as far as the change of gears was concerned, it was not a difficult task at all because this was the logical next step. The only thing that you had to be concerned with, of course, was the campaigns that you were going into. When he announced that he would go into West Virginia, for example, of course all the material at hand and all the expertise that could be gained for that particular state was applied to it. Of course, Wisconsin was our first test. Wisconsin was a proving ground for the bases of how a campaign should be conducted.

SPIVAK: Now, Chris, you should have been involved in the very early stages with the Midwest. Did that include Wisconsin in your own particular situation?

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CAMP: Yes, to a degree.

SPIVAK: Did you pave some of the groundwork, then, for the Wisconsin primary?

CAMP: Yes, I would say very minutely but I was engaged also with the eastern third of the United States at that point, you see. When you lump up a third of the U.S. at one point and then another third, and another third, you become less expert. But initially, yes, there was.... But I was not assigned to Wisconsin; I was assigned to West Virginia.

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

SPIVAK: Chris, we are now at the Wisconsin Primary. You spoke earlier of having a

primary? very extensive card file that you had begun building up through the early periods of 1959. To what extent was the card file of use in the Wisconsin

CAMP: Well, perhaps I'd better explain to you just what the card file consisted of at that time and how it was started.

SPIVAK: And we're right now in just about the spring of '60, very roughly.

CAMP: Right, right. We started the card file merely as an extraction of the correspondence for easy, handy reference. This was prior to the announcement of candidacy.

SPIVAK: Were these simply little three-by-five index cards?

CAMP: Three-by-five index cards, alphabetized by, first of all, on the card in the upper left-hand corner was the name, the last name, the first name, Mr. or Mrs. or whatever their title was if they had one. In the right-hand corner was the state's name. In the middle of the card was any identifying data as it related to Kennedy at that point. Some cards...

SPIVAK: Such as what?

CAMP: Well some cards merely said, "Met JFK Eau Claire, Wisconsin, spring of '58."

SPIVAK: Just that one fleeting meeting?

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CAMP: That one fleeting moment. It might have been at a reception of what-have-you. It could say, "Met JFK Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1958. Introduced him as speaker to such-and-such a group." It could go on to a third category, "Contributed five dollars to local Democratic Party campaign. Husband is [profession]..." if we knew that. The card could contain any kind of information that reflected the character and the leanings pro or con Kennedy. If we could determine at any given stage what the political leaning was, if the individual evidenced support of Kennedy at this stage or whether he or she evidenced support of another candidate or no commitment, this was valuable to us, too. This was the basis of the card file. We had it rather defined as to party status: if they belonged to a party, if they were an officer or whether they were just interested bystanders in Democratic—even if they were Democrats, this was valuable. Sometimes they could be labeled Independents.

SPIVAK: Or Republicans.

CAMP: Or Republicans or uncommitted or what-have-you. But some cards just merely reflected the name, the state, and met JFK.

SPIVAK: And in this sense, you're using Wisconsin as the example, but I assume this referred also and in the same way to West Virginia and the other places where there were primaries.

CAMP: Every state, every state in the union. This was.... And we did this not only in personal meetings of Kennedy with people at this time, we also extracted pertinent sentences from correspondence we may have had [from them]. If there was a letter from Mr. X in Colorado that said, "If you become a candidate, Senator Kennedy, I would be glad to lend you my support," that goes on the card, and the date goes on, which gave us then a later indication of how early the support started, how much you could depend upon the extent of somebody's leaning toward him as a candidate.

So by the time we got to the primary stage in early 1960, we had the basis of a very large cross section of the country's sentiment as far as his candidacy was concerned. So that, say, in Wisconsin, we were able then to break the card file down even further. We pulled out the known supporters, the ones who had expressed support, whether they were just a citizen, just a voter.... The point was at that stage: Who had verbally to him or to a member of the staff committed themselves, or in a letter committed themselves? This went into another index. That particular section was broken down then further into the political structure of the state, whether

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they fit into a county chairman role, whether they were fund raisers within the Party structure, whether they publicly had to support another candidate but privately would go for Kennedy, or exercise whatever power they had in behalf of his candidacy. This became another section of the file.

So that you could relegate it to a state-by-state basis, and a section-by-section basis, and a county-by-county basis, we could determine at any given time what our support was on a very localized basis. And this is the bases of the primary campaigns and how they were affected.

SPIVAK: Well, your own particular role, then, while the primaries were going on, was to maintain, I assume, files of this sort. What else was going on in your office at that time?

CAMP: We set up a staff headquarters here in Washington which reflected the primary campaigns. Now, I'm going to lump all the primary campaigns together because they were one, they all were conducted in the same manner.

SPIVAK: Would West Virginia be included in that sense? I gather that there might have been some differences there?

CAMP: Organizationally, yes, all the primary campaigns were conducted...

SPIVAK: As far as your own particular standpoint was concerned. In the field they may have been different but...

CAMP: There were overriding factors, the religious issue being most pertinent to West Virginia. But this was a superstructure which really did not confront us on an organizational, management level.

SPIVAK: And as far as that central office, the Esso Building office, was concerned, the general organizational theme was the same.

CAMP: Was the same for each one.

SPIVAK: I don't mean theme, but the structure was the same.

CAMP: Again, I'm working without titles and without a definitive understanding of who was on top [and what-have-you], but I think for the purpose of this discussion we can say that Washington headquarters in the Esso Building was a clearinghouse for...

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SPIVAK: Which floor was it on, do you remember?

CAMP: I believe it was the fifth floor but I really can't remember.

SPIVAK: Minor detail, very minor.

CAMP: It was up top, anyway. But the Washington headquarters was the clearinghouse for information which was coming in from, let's use the word "field." Say that we're now in the midst of a primary campaign in Wisconsin. The Senator is [there] campaigning. Salinger is conducting his press relations there. O'Brien is there organizing local committees and support factors. Smith is working on fundraising. People have been brought in to work in every county, some of whom we're never heard of—by we I mean the staff back here—but this is not important to the overall function. The overall reaction is to support the candidate, to get him elected, to see that he has the materials to work with, i.e., speech material, funds, data on other candidates, what they are doing, reports that we're getting from all over the country.

We are conducting a campaign back here in other states of encouraging anybody that you might know to write to Wisconsin.

SPIVAK: Oh?

CAMP: We are conducting our own little side campaign, too, of political leaders. This

works from the governor right on down to county chairmen, leading political figures, fundraisers. For example: Joe Doakes writes in from Colorado, "Well, I know Cousin X in Madison. Could he be of any help?" And we shoot back a letter and say, "Yes, of course he can. Why don't you write Cousin X and say you support him [Senator Kennedy] and see if you can't encourage him and his friends to exercise some support if they feel like it." So it really was a nationwide effort on a limited basis because we were very ill-staffed here in Washington at that point. That was a concerted drive, zeroing in on the Wisconsin campaign. The same thing was then effected in West Virginia.

SPIVAK: Was research done in your office, too; research, that is, for speeches, research for issues?

CAMP: No not in our office. This was still handled by Sorensen and he, as I recall, had added to his staff, too. We were in cooperation with him as far as the scheduling was concerned and what might possibly be needed, but he was not physically located in the Esso Building. He was still in the Senate Office Building.

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SPIVAK: Were financing details handled through your office?

CAMP: No, not to my knowledge. If so, Steve would have handled them, and I don't know how they were done.

SPIVAK: What was the general reaction in your own particular staff, and, of course, we start with you—the Wisconsin primary, of course, was one of the big things that started you all going...

CAMP: Well, this was.... Of course, the initial elation of winning a victory and a test case, I think, sets the tone for what you see as possibly happening other places; although all the time that I was ever associated with the Kennedy organization it was that you really never overexpose yourself, you never take into account that just because you won in Wisconsin, you're going to win West Virginia, or just because you win in West Virginia does not mean you're going to win in Maryland. You take them one at a time. You learned by what you had gone through. You apply what tests can be applied to another situation, but you don't count on them. You innovate. You work with raw material. You expect the best. And if you can produce, fine; if you can't, you're sidetracking and there isn't time to do it.

We learned a lot in Wisconsin; we applied a lot of it to West Virginia. West Virginia then turned out to be a wholly different campaign, not organizationally but because the issues were so much different.

SPIVAK: And the religious issue, of course, was so strong.

CAMP: I think in my whole experience, I think the West Virginia campaign was

probably the most demoralizing...

SPIVAK: Demoralizing.

CAMP: ...demoralizing campaign or demoralizing thing that happened to a great many of us because suddenly we were face to face with the reality of prejudice, which I personally have never—which has never figured in my life at all. But the base guts prejudice and how it can affect an organization is a terribly demoralizing factor.

I remember on the eve of the West Virginia election getting a phone call from one of the—we called them “the Kennedy men,” the man who was stationed in a given region in a given county—and it was Paul Corbin, who had been assigned to one of the western counties in West Virginia. And as I recall now, it was a county which was on the balance of going pro or con just on

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the religious issue altogether. And Paul called me to make a report on what he thought we needed. I might say that organizationally these regional county Kennedy men would report to Washington so we had a basis of judging the overall state attitude on any given subject. It could be the religious issue or how much inroad Humphrey was making at this point in a given area. It was rather an evaluation system that we had set up here which the field men could not possibly have taken into account on their day to day contacts. But anyway, Paul called me....

SPIVAK: It sort of coordinated all that.

CAMP: That's right. As I say, a clearinghouse. Then, we would feed back what our reports were from a state-wide basis to them. Well, I remember Paul calling me on the eve of the election and he was so discouraged and so demoralized that he said, “I don't think we have a chance because the mailing of the opposition”—and we never quite knew who the opposition was during this period because the West Virginians were being swamped with anti-Catholic and anti-religious material that just appeared in their mailbox. This I think was one of the worst things we had to combat because there was no judge of—no poll could produce what effect this had on any voter.

SPIVAK: At any point did you think that it was coming from Humphrey himself or did you think it was coming from Senator Byrd [Robert C. Byrd] or.... Do you have any ideas?

CAMP: I never made any judgment because I wasn't on the scene. I'm sure that those who were had judgments on it. But looking at it from a state basis, we had no indication at all. It could just pop up from anywhere. And it happened later, of course, in the national election, but it was fairly traceable to hate groups and to extremely prejudiced people. But in that campaign, it would just spring up overnight. Paul, up until that

point, had been perfectly confident that this county was probably going for Kennedy. But on the eve of the election, he didn't know. He could not judge.

SPIVAK: Do you know how whichever county was involved did go?

CAMP: As I recall, it did go for Kennedy but it was a touch and go situation. So this is one of the imponderables of a political organization, that an emotional issue can override any organization or any defined areas of responsibility or predictions. You just don't know what's going to turn the tide and it can be right at the last minute.

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SPIVAK: Well, Chris, while these primaries were going on—these are the field operations—was this Esso Building office of yours, was that sort of the general headquarters for the whole thing?

CAMP: General headquarters, yes. It not only.... There were two of us who were assigned to keep a tabulation of each primary state. Joan Sweeny was the other girl. We were taking phone calls from the field men as the campaign progressed, evaluating the data that they would report to us. The kind of data we were getting was, "I've discussed such and such with County Chairman A. He reports that 46 percent of his county will probably go for Kennedy; 20 for Humphrey..." on down the line. And this was not particularly on a daily basis but certainly by the end of the week. Then we were able to, with all of the other data that we were getting outside of the state, able then to feed information back to them [the Senator and campaign entourage] to give them a little bit broader picture.

SPIVAK: This was now being under whose direction?

CAMP: Under O'Brien's direction, who was in the field. Steve was still, as I recall, there in the Esso Building and he was the one on tap. But he then, by that time, was involved in fundraising and took on an extracurricular activity of dealing with networks for television time and this kind of thing, which Pierre did not have time...

SPIVAK: Well, then, from the statistical standpoint, just in terms of the numbers, in terms of keeping track of what was going on where, did this all devolve upon you and Joan Sweeney?

CAMP: The basics, yes. We were assigned to the primary campaigns. The rest of the country was being handled still in the same format; still, the old contacts, the card files were being kept up.

SPIVAK: By whom?

CAMP: By other staff additions that had been made. I don't recall how many now, but I would imagine there were about six on tap. There was one for the Far West, one for the Southwest, one for the South. Joan and I were assigned to the primary campaigns solely.

SPIVAK: Wisconsin, West Virginia, Oregon, and Maryland, wherever they were?

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CAMP: West Virginia, Oregon.... Right. This was an interesting side feature, that in addition to a going campaign, Joan and I were also assigned to keep our eagle eye open on the next campaign that was coming up. For example, while West Virginia was going on and while I was deeply involved in that, I also had to keep Larry fully informed on what was happening in Maryland all this time because this was the next jump off. After the last vote was cast in West Virginia, the next step was the Maryland campaign, and the candidate had to be fully informed on what to expect there. There was already a going Maryland organization, already a campaign headquarters which had been established. And this was Larry's part, of going from one to the other, actually more than one jump ahead, but still I think it was very well done that once we were through with one, we were through with it. You then went to the next one.

SPIVAK: For the time being.

CAMP: For the time being, that's right. But you had then to gear yourself from one directly to the other, and you had to be as fully informed and fully as factual and fully as competent as you were in the last one.

SPIVAK: Well now we went through the primaries.

CAMP: There we are.

SPIVAK: And we know just how well Senator Kennedy did there. Now, I guess, we might as well just head right into the Convention.

CAMP: Well we do head right into the Convention. The Oregon campaign was the last one, which was late May, as I recall.

SPIVAK: Now, in terms of the Convention and relating it specifically to your functions and your role, what happened then?

CAMP: What happened then was Oregon was over and done with; the primaries were all won, safely tucked inside our belt; but the next question was the

nomination. So we go now from the primary elections to a new phase altogether, the National Convention. As far as I was concerned, I was sent to California in June of 1960...

SPIVAK: That's a month before the Convention.

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CAMP: A month before the Convention, assigned to Salinger whom I'd not worked with at all.

SPIVAK: You had known him; you had met him, but had not worked with him.

CAMP: Oh, I had met him, yes, but I really didn't know Pierre at all because he'd been out in the field.

SPIVAK: Assigned to him in what sense?

CAMP: To aid him in setting up press headquarters for Kennedy at the National Convention.

SPIVAK: Did you have a title yet?

CAMP: No, no title.

SPIVAK: What was your function?

CAMP: Well, I soon learned. I didn't know myself when I left here and went there with him. It evolved that Pierre was to establish a beachhead in California and particularly at the—was it Biltmore?

SPIVAK: The Biltmore was the headquarters, yes.

CAMP: The national headquarters. To establish a Kennedy press headquarters, to get all the facilities available for press conferences for the candidate, to arrange for television coverage and the mechanical details of getting cables in and the telephones and setting up a real thoroughgoing office. He also decided to establish a Kennedy campaign newsletter or a bulletin...

SPIVAK: I remember that.

CAMP: ...which was a daily sheet on the candidate. Also initially in that one month's period before the Convention started was for Salinger to meet with his old friends of the California press in order to effect a little local image making...

SPIVAK: Which can have some impression on everyone reading the papers.

CAMP: ...on the California delegates as they come in [i.e., elected, appointed, etc.]. No question about that. So it was rather an informal sort of situation where there were just the two of us as far as the

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press was concerned. There was another [Kennedy] office already in being [at the Biltmore]. Jean Lewis was out there and Bob Troutman [Robert Troutman, Jr.] of Atlanta was sent out about that time to open up the Kennedy Convention headquarters. So four of us, really, opened that office, but Pierre and I, really, were off on our own because his idea was to be ready for the onslaught of press coverage the day that Kennedy arrived.

It ["being ready"] took several forms. He decided that a series of luncheons for the local press would be in order to gain local coverage in California only, particularly within Los Angeles. And he made a point of inviting maybe half a dozen to ten local editors or feature writers or wire service reporters that he'd known back when just to come in and say, "Hello. I'm Salinger and I work for Kennedy and I hope you'll come and ask us for anything you need during the Convention." This created a very pleasant local climate for a press relations base; for the candidate's arrival with the nation's press following him. So that we had a thoroughgoing press office when he arrived, when Kennedy arrived.

SPIVAK: And that was your first relationship with Pierre?

CAMP: That's right.

SPIVAK: Well, then taking it into July, the Convention is beginning. What happened in terms of your own role, in terms of Pierre's role?

CAMP: Well, of course, the Convention was a real test of the entire Kennedy organization at this point. It brought in all of the men who had campaigned with him in the various primary campaigns. They became floor managers or floor leaders or assigned to different delegations as liaison representative, lobbyists if you will. We were all working for one purpose at this point, again shifting our gears from election in the primaries to nomination. The whole apparatus of setting up for the Convention itself was just one more extension of the plan that had been going on before. Again, the basic card files came in for another change. We now then extracted—we've already extracted the escort officers was back here. We've now done away with the county chairmen if they have not become alternates and delegates. We now have our card file before us on a state-by-state delegation basis, and we can pull out one card on Madam X and tell you...

SPIVAK: Narrowed down entirely to delegates or alternates?

CAMP: Right. It has nothing to do with anything about

the state. But we can go to that card file and we can look back and see that Madam X, alternate for the State of Colorado, first met JFK in 1958; she introduced him to a Democratic Women's Convention in 1958; her husband is a known contributor to the Democratic Party, probably leans toward Humphrey; she personally leans towards Kennedy. All of this by then is on this card file. We know what positions she's held in the Party...

SPIVAK: Were you then working with the file, too, or were you...

CAMP: No, I was not. I mean, I had now been assigned to the press office but I helped prepare the delegate alternate card file before I left [Washington] with Pierre. But at the Convention, it was just a standard press office operation. Pierre's secretary back here—I remember her name now; it was Lenore Ostrow.

SPIVAK: That's the girl you were referring to earlier.

CAMP: That's correct. She stayed back here and compiled press kits for all the accredited correspondents who were going to cover the Convention. It was her responsibility to have these press kits in order and in envelopes and ready to mail out to us a day or so before the Convention started.

SPIVAK: It included the book, *The Strategy of Peace*, I recall, and biographies of everyone in the family.

CAMP: That's right, yes. And we had a press release production section which we brought out with us. Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher] was added to the staff then as Pierre's associate. Of course, most of our staff at the Convention was volunteer help.

SPIVAK: Were you still on the payroll at seventy dollars a week?

CAMP: Well, as I recall, I somewhere had been raised to a hundred a week but that was it.

SPIVAK: We'll turn the tape over again.

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

SPIVAK: Well, we're now at the Convention, Chris. In terms of your own personal role, how did your own duties change or how did they keep going? What did you do

at the convention?

CAMP: Well, as I said earlier, our main function, of course, was to keep the established press office going and to keep the nominee's name before the bright lights of the press and the public and I think rather a euphoric attitude inserted itself into the staff once he was nominated.

SPIVAK: Well, you're way ahead of us now. He wasn't nominated for a few days anyway.

CAMP: Well, the preceding days it was just a matter of trying to gauge the temper of the Convention, of trying to get the delegates who are in between on our side, as opposed to the other candidate's. It was good, solid, hard, dirty work. My role was in the press office but it was all part and parcel of the Kennedy organization in being functioning on a twenty-four hour a day basis.

SPIVAK: Now how did this relate in terms of volunteers who came to work for you?

CAMP: Well, this was our first exposure to the masses of people. Here were the people that we had actually been in touch with by telephone or by letter. These were the people who were in our card files. They suddenly appeared in bodies. They had forms; they had shapes; they had funny hats on; they sometimes didn't speak as well as we thought they might; but, by George, here were the voters; here were the party workers; here were the enthusiasts; here were the supporters; here were the contributors. So the face-to-face confrontation to my mind was the most drastic change, personally for me. Heretofore I had been not exposed to this at all. The people who had served in the primary campaigns certainly had; this was not a new experience for them. But to be confronted by people just pouring in your office—and in ours, just the press office alone, I would say upwards to hundreds would come in and say, "Here I am. I'm Joe Doe or Jane Doe and tell me what I can do."

SPIVAK: Was there acceptance of these people?

CAMP: Oh, yes. There was across-the-board acceptance because it was... I think on our side, the staff side, that it meant merely filling an immediate need of the Convention itself. You knew that they needed messengers on X number of floors just to run errands, or we needed people to stuff the envelopes or to carry press releases. So people were placed.

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SPIVAK: Did any sort of animosity ever develop; that is, between the regular staff and

the volunteer staff?

CAMP: Yes, I would say in a psychological subtle way that it did because numbers of these volunteers suddenly appeared to win the favor of your superiors or your colleagues, when you felt that you ought to be the one favored because of seniority or experience or merit or potential. You appeared to be sidetracked sometimes. Now, it didn't really come to be any major problem because you didn't have the time of day to worry about it, but you were resentful of it. I was. To see a high school student suddenly be handed a job knowing that I was the one who was better qualified to be called upon to do it and could manage it, there's no question about that.... But again, I can see that working in very tight circumstance in one that was fast-paced and fast-moving you couldn't have a restraint on it at all. You took all comers and some of them lasted.

SPIVAK: Chris, how would you describe the press operation during the Convention? How did it work? Who did what?

CAMP: Well, I have nothing to compare it to so I don't know if it was good or bad. This was something I haven't had experience with...

SPIVAK: No, that's not what I wanted to know. Just literally, who did what and how did it operate?

CAMP: Pierre was the man who was—he was the spokesman for Senator Kennedy. He was the one who issued the pronouncements of and about the candidate at that time. The associate press secretary, Hatcher, filled the role of being the gendarme of watching out for the office operation and being on hand to fill the void of meeting all press queries by telephone or in public or the mechanical, technical end of it.

SPIVAK: My recollection is that he handled the mechanical aspects of the Convention very well.

CAMP: He did and did it very well. He was a very good organizational man for the Convention. And without him, Pierre's operation would have fallen flat on its face because Pierre was not experienced in setting up a large organization at that time and in fact, he had no time to do it at all because he was the one who had to follow Kennedy around from caucus to caucus to delegation to delegation, to keep in touch with O'Brien, the advisors, with the day-to-day,

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hour-by-hour, and often minute-to-minute, changes. And if he were not physically on hand, the public relations press aspect would have fallen flat on its face. So what I'm saying here is Hatcher and Pierre complemented each other. Their lines of duties were well defined between the two of them.

SPIVAK: Well, Pierre was basically on policy matters...

CAMP: And consultancy.

SPIVAK: Policy and vocal matters.

CAMP: That's correct, serving as spokesman.

SPIVAK: And Andy more or less set up the mechanical aspects.

CAMP: The mechanics in order to carry all of Pierre's strategy out.

SPIVAK: Now, what did you do?

CAMP: I did the technical end of it and directed then the rest of the staff, gathered together the materials to be researched for press releases, biographic material, saw that our press releases met deadlines and saw that they got to the press room on time to meet the Eastern deadlines or Midwest deadlines, et cetera. And I was merely fulfilling the role of overseeing the rest of the staff which manned the reproduction room and the Kennedy Bulletin, which was across the street, to see that we were in liaison with each other, that we weren't saying one thing in one hotel and another being reproduced someplace else. It was a mechanical—to see that it was done and done on the spot and done well and representing Kennedy at his organizational best.

SPIVAK: Now, at any point of all this, and dating back to November of '58, had you met the candidate?

CAMP: Well, I had met the candidate, as I think I said earlier, on two occasions when he visited the Esso Building during the preannouncement days. He possibly came down after, too, during the primaries; I don't really recall. I can't recall any time when I actually was face to face with him during this period....

SPIVAK: I'm only trying to establish in this, more or less, a mood, a sentiment of staff in terms of, as I know in your own case, very great devotion but yet without very great personal contact.

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CAMP: That's right. In my case, there was no personal contact at all. I can't in all good faith say that I knew Kennedy at all. I feel sure that he knew me because there were occasions when he would call me directly on matters that I might be informed about and he would address me by my first name. And in passing in a hallway or in a crowd or what-have-you, and if he chanced to see me, he would single me out and say, "Hello how are you," but no personal confrontation on a day-to-day basis at that point, no, not at all. But this was not a bothersome circumstance and this was true of other members of

the staff, too, and even though you felt a personal devotion and loyalty to him and the cause that he represented, it did not mean that you had to be physically around him at all. But through the gyrations of staff work, through Pierre or through Andy or through Bob at that stage and through Ken and Larry, you felt a personal identification because they were, of course, in day-to-day, hour-to-hour contact with him and they translated this to you so that you were made to feel part of the inner workings.

SPIVAK: Well, getting through the Convention, and let's get through the Convention, let's say, up to the balloting. Were you involved at any stage with the mechanics of all that or did being with the press office keep you away from that? I'm thinking in terms of the tallies of the delegate votes and all of that sort of thing.

CAMP: No, I didn't personally take any role in this at all because it wasn't my function, but this was at a stage where Pierre was very close to Kennedy and to Bob and to all of the people who were conducting the mechanics of the Convention campaign—to Larry—so Pierre would come back from meetings of that level of the staff and report to Andy and to me and to the rest of our staff. We were certainly made to feel the progress or the non-progress—sometimes there would be no progress reports—and so we were certainly abreast of everything, and Pierre was very good about keeping us informed. So we knew ourselves what the inner circle was thinking.

SPIVAK: Well, now you knew what the inner circle was thinking and your man was nominated. What was your approach when the vice presidency came up? And you mentioned the word "euphoria" before, when I interrupted you and brought you back somewhat, and I wonder if we can just take it up from there?

CAMP: Well, of course, all euphoria blew its lid when he was nominated because this is what we had been working very hard at. All of us took a very great deal of personal pride in it because it represented not only that a deserving man was nominated by the Party but

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it also was a compliment to the rest of us who had devoted some energy and time, too, that our efforts were of great help. So it was "the-sky-was-the-limit" attitude at the point of nomination. And I think this might have been somewhat of a turning point in the [staff's] attitude. We were, of course, immediately engaged in who the vice presidential nominee would be, who was going to be the next chairman of the Democratic Party, how the campaign was going to be conducted, any number of things. But they were subjected to the immediacy of the nomination, and the next emphasis was the acceptance speech....

SPIVAK: Again going from step to step.

CAMP: That's right. I mean, our man has made it now; we go on to the next one—but with a little less emphasis on "our man" because "our man" has done it and

this is the hallmark and now we can possibly relax and enjoy it a little bit. But nonetheless, he was the one who never relented from going to the next step. He never allowed the euphoric atmosphere to overcome him. He was the balance, I would say, of keeping everything on the line and in perspective. But I can't say that about the rest of the staff from then on.

SPIVAK: Well, in terms of the vice presidency, then, what was the reaction the day after the nomination when you did hear—well, first of all, let's go to the nomination. Was it any surprise to anyone that he did win it on the first ballot?

CAMP: No, no surprise at all. And I say that unequivocally because everything pointed to a first ballot nomination all the way through. There were some...

SPIVAK: And you were the privy to the card files.

CAMP: I was. And there were some tight spots during the Convention—I don't deny that—but from what little I know of the actual conduct of the on-floor campaign, as we called it, from the floor managers, which went back to the Kennedy headquarters in those little houses outside Convention Hall where we had our TV monitors and where O'Brien and Bob were situated, even though there were some questions and some tight delegations, there was no question about a first ballot nomination then.

SPIVAK: Well....

CAMP: Maybe I'm speaking because I was so confident, but my judgment was that....

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SPIVAK: Were you then privy to the delegate count, that is, the candidate's own, the one that was locked up somewhere in a room in the Biltmore Hotel?

CAMP: No, I was not. No. No. I know it existed but I was not privy to it.

SPIVAK: Well, coming then to the vice presidential nomination, you weren't privy to that because nobody was.

CAMP: That right.

SPIVAK: But what was the reaction on your part and on the staff level to Johnson's [Lyndon B. Johnson] getting it after he had been, more or less, your blood enemy through the campaign?

CAMP: Well, I, personally, was nonplussed by this choice. I had not expected it at all because there were leading contenders for the second spot by the young, progressive, liberals in the party, Jackson [Henry M. Jackson], Symington

[Stuart Symington], and others that all of us took into consideration—Senator Humphrey at the time. Of course, none of us knew what was locked up in the nominee’s mind or what his choice was, but Johnson, of all of them, was the last one because he conducted a ruthless campaign against Kennedy based on the religious issue. I had personally felt very—disappointed is not my word because.... Well, I was disheartened, I guess, that blatant politics took over, far as I could determine, to bring a man in as number two who had been so volatile on an emotional issue against an individual even though I could see the political reasons for it and I could understand why the Johnson name on the ticket could do more good than harm nationally. I was personally disenchanted by the choice. I would not have placed any bets the night before at all on this name. But this is part and parcel of Kennedy, the politician, making his choice like this.

SPIVAK: Well, once he made the choice, what was your reaction?

CAMP: This is part and parcel then of politicians on a staff level that you embrace your leader’s choice. And although you don’t necessarily condone the reasons for it, you embrace the methods of it and you accept it and go along with it. So the Kennedy-Johnson ticket became a byword with us, but I must say on my own behalf that the Johnson part never became full-fledged equal with the Kennedy part in the campaign.

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SPIVAK: In your own mind.

CAMP: In my own mind.

SPIVAK: Well, how do you think that applies to other staff members, other workers, other Kennedy workers?

CAMP: I can’t speak for them but I think on the whole, on that level and below, it was generally felt that way, that Johnson rather was set aside. I mean, “Okay, he’s a burden we have to bear, and there are good reasons for it. We know that he’ll do his share, and we’ll do ours, but you just don’t mention it if you don’t have to.” And that’s about what the attitude was. I never felt during that national campaign in 1960 that Johnson was every—how do I describe it—back to back with Kennedy and he was the candidate, he was the leader, he was the number one....

SPIVAK: He was your tiger. He was your hero.

CAMP: That’s correct. And this is the man we were all for. And so if Johnson wanted to come along for the ride, fine. He’s welcome to it.

SPIVAK: Would you have felt that way about any vice presidential candidate?

CAMP: No, I would not. And this is a very personal thing with me because I think the

real thing that I was disenchanted about was the time that Johnson in the Biltmore made such an insinuating speech to, I believe it was, the Texas delegation where he...

SPIVAK: During the debate?

CAMP: Right. Where he baited Kennedy on religion and forced Kennedy to come into the Texas delegation and...

SPIVAK: I don't know if you're right about the religion aspect. He baited him mainly on attendance in the Senate.

CAMP: Absenteeism

SPIVAK: That's right.

CAMP: But there had been a build-up, though, behind the scenes, on religion. And I frankly couldn't take the idea that Johnson with his experience in the Senate and his political background, could allow this to happen at a National Convention where really it didn't make

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any difference. And this is really why I was not profoundly for the Johnson name on the ticket, although I could very well understand the reasons for a Southern Protestant on the national ticket, I could see what he could deliver. There's no question about that.

SPIVAK: Well, once he was chosen, did you feel you could accept it? You were overwhelmed and all that sort of thing, but was there any question in your mind about accepting it?

CAMP: Well, the overwhelming bit only lasted maybe a few days and it became just a campaign slogan, Kennedy-Johnson, to me. And I think it was easy for the staff to do because the two candidates were not campaigning together. You never saw the Johnson side of it at all. You knew they were conducting a campaign off on their own. You had no liaison with them at all. I wouldn't have known a Johnson man if I had met him on the street at that point and never did through the 1960 campaign. In fact, I never knew where the vice presidential nominee was at any given point and I'm not sure anybody else did. We knew that he was campaigning, and he was campaigning for the national ticket, but where he was, I hadn't a clue in this world.

SPIVAK: Well, wouldn't you think that under normal circumstances you would have known where he was?

CAMP: I don't know if I would necessarily.

SPIVAK: Now, you were working for the Press Secretary.

CAMP: I think so. But I can't give a judgment on that. I did not know; I frankly did not know....

SPIVAK: Is that by design because you didn't want to know?

CAMP: No, no, no. I have no recollection at all of ever knowing where the vice presidential nominee was in conjunction with our campaign.

SPIVAK: Except once when you all...

CAMP: Met in Texas.

SPIVAK: Met in Texas....

CAMP: Right, at the close of the campaign.

SPIVAK: No, it was at the beginning. I remember.

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CAMP: Was it at the beginning?

SPIVAK: Oh, yes, it was. It was during the first two weeks.

CAMP: That was when we had gone to California down through El Paso. And we made about four stops in Texas.

SPIVAK: That's right.

CAMP: That's the only time I ever remember meeting up with him when the two of them appeared together. But during those two months of hard campaigning I don't ever recall ever being in touch with him—not with him, necessarily, I wouldn't be—but with members of his staff or liaison, with what he was speaking about or where he was appearing. I'm sure that people in the National Committee were fully informed and coordinating—it would have to be done that way—and I'm sure the candidate was, but it never appeared on out...

SPIVAK: Well, putting it another way, through the campaign, did you ever lose your own resentment, more or less, at the fact that he was nominated?

CAMP: Oh, well, I'm sure I did because it never—frankly, the Johnson participation, as far as we were concerned, was not evident at all. I mean, if something is not

around you day to day, you don't really feel one way or another about it. You could talk philosophically about it and rationalize about it but—yes, I think I lost my resentment because he obviously was off doing his job somewhere. But it didn't personally intrude itself....

SPIVAK: Well, did your resentment more or less translate instead to Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]?

CAMP: Well, of course as the pickup of the national campaign came on and you were face to face on television debates with the candidate, with candidate Nixon...

SPIVAK: You found a new enemy.

CAMP: ...the enemy is changed. I don't have any personal resentment about that portion of the campaign at all, but in my mind it was a blatant political move to have a man on the ticket that could bring in a certain section of the country. And, by George, he did, he brought in Texas.

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SPIVAK: And you resented it at the time but now as you look back on it....

CAMP: In retrospect, it was the best possible candidate that Kennedy could have chosen. No question about it, A-1 choice.

SPIVAK: What does it prove to you?

CAMP: It proves to me that you have to have good, political acumen to be a judge of politics and to be a leader in politics. Aside from your own personal resentments and your own personal emotion—you have to be able to override them. This is why I am not a political animal. [Laughter]

SPIVAK: We have just run out of tape.

[END OF INTERVIEW #1]

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