

**Fred A. Forbes Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 3/4/1966**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Forbes, (1915 - 1990) Executive director, John F. Kennedy for President, New Hampshire (1960); campaign organizer, West Virginia (1960); editor Kennedy Convention Bulletin (1960), discusses the West Virginia campaign, Norman Vincent Peale's speech and religion, and traveling with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., among other issues.

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## Oral History Interview

Of

Fred A. Forbes

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Fred A. Forbes – JFK #2

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Second Oral History Interview

with

FRED FORBES

March 4, 1966  
Washington, D.C.

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GRELE: Mr. Forbes, from New Hampshire you went to West Virginia. Is that correct?

FORBES: Yes, immediately after the results of the New Hampshire primary which, of course, were most encouraging, and Senator Kennedy had gotten the most votes of any Democrat ever running in a presidential primary up there, I had a short session with Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien]. He knew that I had lived in West Virginia. In fact, just about five years prior to this, I had gone into West Virginia for the USO [United Service Organization] which was then trying to change its name to the United Defense Fund.

I had done a statewide campaign for the United States Organization primarily tying it in with the Community Chest drives in the area. After I had completed that, I had an opportunity to stay there as an associate editor of the St. Albans Advertiser, a weekly newspaper in the little city or town of St. Albans which is just above Charleston. Of course, I had a chance to know Governor Okey Patteson [Okey Leonidas Patteson], and I knew Governor Marland [William C. Marland] who, at that time, was the attorney general of the state.

I had been in all of the 55 counties in West Virginia so naturally I was of real value to them because I knew the ground. I had my newspaper contacts. I was also a stringer from St. Albans for the Daily Mail and the Charleston Gazette.

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GRELE: What was your duties and functions in West Virginia?

FORBES: Well, I went into West Virginia that first night. I remember I came down from New Hampshire and Boston, and I spent the night at Pierre Salinger's home in Lake Barcroft. I flew into Charleston, West Virginia, the next morning. That afternoon I met Bob McDonough [Robert P. McDonough] who was the chairman of the West Virginians for Kennedy in their primary. Of course, Bob later became Democratic national committeeman in West Virginia. I also met Matthew Reese [Matthew A. Reese, Jr.] who was designated at that time and continued for the nine week campaign as executive director of the West Virginians for Kennedy [John F. Kennedy].

I met with them, and we set up, as I remember, the first two rooms of the headquarters in the Kanawha Hotel which had been selected as our headquarters. Senator Humphrey's [Hubert H. Humphrey] staff had been in about a week before this and had set headquarters across the city in the Daniel Boone Hotel.

One thing that I remember that first day and that first night in meeting with these people and getting things organized because, of course, Senator Kennedy himself was coming in the next day for the kick-off of the campaign, was the fact that the prominent clergyman, Norman Vincent Peale, was the main speaker at a shrine [Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine] benefit that evening in Charleston. Frankly, I was quite shocked when I heard on the radio his speech, and also read it the next day in the paper, to find that he took a very definite stand against a Roman Catholic being president of the United States. Now for a theologian, a man of the church, to have taken this attitude was really quite amazing to me. I was quite shocked by it.

I was an Episcopalian by birth, and later of course, I became a convert to the Roman Catholic faith, but I had always had a pretty liberal outlook on clergy and churches. This was just something that really hit me right between the eyes, you might say, the first day I was in the campaign, that a man of that stature in the Protestant communion world would say such a thing against a prominent American.

GRELE: Did John Kennedy, or any of his staff, or any of the people that you met in West Virginia ever comment on this attack by Reverend Peale?

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FORBES: Well, as I remember it, I talked briefly later that week with Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] who resigned his position on the Hill [Capitol Hill] on one of the senatorial committees and had come in to join us. I talked to him about it, and I talked to Matt Reese about it. We did talk by phone to Pierre Salinger about it. This may have been one of the reasons why Senator Kennedy, for the first week or ten days in the campaign, hit directly at this matter of a Roman Catholic wanting to be president of the United States.

You remember at this same time, during the first two weeks that we were in West Virginia Senator Kennedy appeared before the annual meeting of the Associated Press and

made his first major speech on the religious issue. During the first two and a half weeks of the campaign, whenever the senator came into West Virginia, he hit and hit hard at the religious issue. And of course, I feel that this was the state to do it. We did this to start, and then we dropped it for the middle part of the campaign, and then wound up with it. I think this was a very sound campaign planning piece as we went because it certainly was effective.

GRELE: Did anyone ever comment to you about the Harris [Louis Harris] poll that had been taken in West Virginia prior to the announcement of entry into the primary in relation to the issue of a Catholic running for president?

FORBES: Yes, we were all familiar with the Harris poll. I know that it had been taken, and I knew the results of it. I don't remember right now. It is pretty hazy in my memory. But this was, I think, one of the guiding pieces of our program, policy-wise, as to what we would hit. Of course, in West Virginia, when I went from town to town especially outside of Kanawha County and in the mountain regions, we found all sorts of really scurrilous anti-Catholic literature. One thing I remember was a Methodist minister in a little church in the Montgomery area, just below Kanawha County and Charleston, getting up and preaching a sermon to his congregation on the Knights of Columbus [K of C] oath which, of course, had been repudiated and known to be a fantasy many years before.

Now, at this time, I was called in by a Catholic priest who was aware of what was being said. He asked us, at this time, to agree to let the Knights of Columbus come in and go to court

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on this matter. As I remember, we sat and discussed this, and we felt that this was not the time or the place or the vehicle to do anything about it; that Senator Kennedy would have to stand or fall on what he was saying politically about the fact that he was a Roman Catholic. I think this again was a fair judgment.

I collected a number of very vicious pieces. I remember another piece showing the picture of a Catholic priest who supposedly broke his vows in the church and married. This was a booklet that was passed around among the uneducated, I would say, in the poor areas of West Virginia. I made it a habit of collecting these things and sending them in to my own pastor so that I could help educate him.

GRELE: Would you say that religion was the overriding issue in West Virginia?

FORBES: Well, I wouldn't say, Ron, that it was an overriding issue. There were so many other things going in West Virginia about what could be done for the state, and what could be done for the poor people in the hollows. I think religion was certainly a major factor in the campaign. I think Senator Kennedy, by his masterful handling of this and timing of it, got rid of this as a main issue in the campaign. No, I think it was a straight battle between Senator Kennedy and Senator

Humphrey with this being one of the larger major issues.

GRELE: How was West Virginia organized?

FORBES: Well, of course, Matt Reese and Bob McDonough had already started a preliminary organization during the time that half of the Kennedy staff was in Wisconsin, and during the time that I was finishing up the New Hampshire campaign. We organized West Virginia into segments just the way we would any other state with the main headquarters in Charleston, another headquarters in Parkersburg, one in Huntington, one in Beckley to cover the southern part

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of the state. We had direct lines into a major switchboard, and a direct line from there to our headquarters in Washington. This was all tied in, but those were the main areas that we worked out of.

GRELE: Did you notice any difference between the New Hampshire primary and the West Virginia primary in terms of the use of the existing state organization? I ask this question because New Hampshire is such a notably Republican state, and West Virginia is such a Democratic state. In one you didn't have much of a Democratic organization, and in the other you had a very active one.

FORBES: Of course, this was an entirely different kind of a campaign, because while Senator Kennedy was running in the presidential primary there in West Virginia, you also had two candidates for governor: Wally Barron [William W. Barron], who was nominated and elected, and Hulett Smith, [Hulett C. Smith] the present governor, were the Democratic rivals. Then, you also had very interesting races in each county for sheriff. In some areas you had primaries in the sheriff races. Now, make no question about it, probably the most important political office in the state of West Virginia is the sheriff because he, of course, handles all the tax funds, the relief money, and is the top law enforcement officer for the area.

We had to move very carefully amongst our Democratic friends in organizing. Of course, in many instances we had to beat the Humphrey people to the influential Democrats in an area, and this wasn't always possible. But, by and large, I think we did.

Now I had a very interesting assignment given to me by Larry O'Brien. I was more or less, at that time, the go-between between the Kennedy staff and the staff of Wally Barron. This is where I first met Paul Crabtree who was later an executive assistant to Wally Barron when he became governor. But Barron and his whole organization was very helpful to us. This was rather strange because, as I remember it, Bob McDonough was a Hulett Smith man. I think that Bob McDonough was a wise enough politician to know that Barron was going to beat Smith.

But this was an entirely different complex when it came to organization. In this case, the Republicans were just not part of it. They weren't there. This was the primary in which everything was going Democratic-wise, and it was a great show.



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GRELE: Was there any slating, combining of the county level primary contestants with the Kennedy delegates?

FORBES: Yes, in certain instances, of course, there was this, that people who supported Kennedy were members of a certain slate. You had to be very careful on this, and of course, this was the way you built your strength. In our organization and in our getting of workers for the polls, inspectors, and cars to ride people to the polls and things like that, we had to work through an existing organization. Usually it was the most powerful slate organization that did this.

GRELE: How effective was Mrs. Lawson [Marjorie M. Lawson] with the Negro vote?

FORBES: Well, Marjorie Lawson again was one of the people who came in early with us. I think Marjorie came in here probably about the third week. She was very effective, as I remember it, down in the Williamson, Bluefield, Mingo County area which is, as I remember, where most of the Negro folks were. She was very helpful in Parkersburg and in Charleston. I would say that she was a very effective person. She got the most out of this thing. She got the majority, I am sure.

GRELE: And Eagleton Institute [Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University] pamphlet on the West Virginia primary talked about finances going to the local sheriffs. Is that your impression of how the campaign was financed?

FORBES: Well, by and large, I didn't participate too much in the financing end of it. This was handled by a very few trusted and guided people. The only thing that I know of was where we had to pay poll workers and do things like this, it was done largely through the sheriffs' organizations and through the county chairmen. I think I could say from my own knowledge that in both instances these were done by very reputable leaders in the Democratic party and on their advice. But as I say, this was something that was handled by a special top echelon group, and I had too much organization and too much schedule work to do to participate in that.

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GRELE: I have a question here. How did you get the name 'Fearless Fred'?

FORBES: Well, that's very interesting. I was working in the lower end of Kanawha County with a very well-known and able labor leader by the name of Emmett Early. Part of this campaign team was the very wonderful guy, Paul Fay [Paul B. Fay, Jr.] from California, who I met for the first time in the

West Virginia primary. He was handling the campaign in two other counties. He had misunderstood what Emmett Early had told him about contacts, and some of the people in these two counties were up in arms about some sort of a contact that was not made.

Emmett Early got this word and went to Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]. Kenny said, "Well, there is only one thing to do. You and Fred go up there, and I'll call Paul and tell him I want him to do something down here." When I got up there and greeted Paul and told him that we were to replace him to put some new measures he said, "That's great. I always knew you were a good organizer. From now on you're 'Fearless Fred.' And that name always stuck to me.

He is such a terrific guy. Of course, I worked with him in California at the convention and at other places, and he is such a vivacious and grand guy that I was highly honored that he picked the name out. I don't know how he got it, but we were in a rough spot and we had to move fast.

GRELE: You talked about a labor organizer. Was there much contact between the Kennedy organizations and the unions in West Virginia?

FORBES: Yes, by and large, Emmett Early and Miles Stanley, who was president of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] in West Virginia, were two of the labor people that we worked with. They were very effective, and I think that I can say that most of labor could be construed as Kennedy men during this primary because they knew that Senator Kennedy had done much for labor and stood high in their councils.

GRELE: Did you have any contact with either Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] or John Kennedy at any time during this period?

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FORBES: Yes, of course I saw Bob Kennedy probably every day that he was in the West Virginia campaign because, more or less, I took my orders from him. I remember very well the second day that I was in West Virginia was the day that the senator was to fly from Washington to come in to make the initial kick-off. I was sent to meet him with a car. I went up and greeted him as he got out of the Kennedy plane, the Caroline, and he just looked at me. I greeted him. He said, "Well, what are you doing so far from New Hampshire?" I said, "Well, the battle lines have moved." He chuckled and said, "That's right. I am glad you are here."

The one real memory I have of Bob Kennedy was during a very rare weekend when most of the staff in the Charleston office had been moved to another assignment for that day. I was alone at about eleven o'clock on a Saturday evening, and the telephone in the headquarters rang. I picked it up and said, "Kennedy campaign headquarters." A very charming voice on the other end said, "This is Mrs. Montgomery. Mr. Robert Kennedy would like to have you send a plane for him. He has just spoken at a meeting for my husband, Mr. Robert Montgomery." So I knew who she was, and I took her number and told her that I would make the arrangements and call her back. I made the arrangements at the

Kanawha airport. They sent the plane. I told her when and where it would arrive.

These people had told me when Bob would be expected back in their plane. I think it was about two-thirty in the morning. I had been reading and working out some programming for the next week which was the next to the final week. So I drove up to the airport at the appointed time. The little plane landed, and Bob Kennedy got out with his usual open collar and his suit coat flung over his arm. He came around the end of the hangar, and he saw me. He said, "Oh my gosh, Fred, I didn't expect you to meet me. You don't have to keep hours like this." I said that I knew I didn't. I drove him back to the Kanawha Hotel.

One of the things that I had been reading was his book, The Enemy Within. I had a copy in my hand and also a copy of his famous photo that was taken when he was counsel for the racket committee [Senate Select Committee on Labor-Management Relations] with the glasses up on his forehead. He autographed those two things, the book and the picture, to me on the front desk of the hotel there at a quarter of three in the morning. Those are two things that I treasure very much. The picture is always on my wall, and of course, the book is in my library. That was one of the interesting contacts that I had with him.

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He and I used to evidently hit the same schedule for mass on a Sunday morning. I would see him in the back or in the front. He was quite evident a great deal of the time. I had a lot of contact with him because of the things that I had to do.

GRELE:                Would you care to tell us about your problem with Governor Marland, or ex-Governor Marland?

FORBES:              Can I tell the whole story of this?

GRELE:                Yeah.

FORBES:              Well, former Governor Marland, as I mentioned earlier, was a lieutenant governor when I was first in West Virginia as a newspaper man. He was a very able man and a brilliant lawyer, and I think the youngest man to ever become governor of the state of West Virginia. He became governor at thirty-four. He had a very, I would call it, tempestuous or rough term of office. Without any question this was attributed to his heavy drinking. When he got through with governor – of course, he was replaced by a Republican – he went to work for the United Mine Workers [of America] first and then for a big coal company in Chicago.

Governor Marland had been in West Virginia a very popular Governor, despite what people may or may not think of his four-year term. He has some very valuable contacts, even now. The Kennedy strategy was to get a hold of him and to get him to help us with some of these contacts. He was flown in from Chicago, very much on the QT, and he was, I understand, most helpful although I did not sit in on the secret sessions, I guess. But Dick Donahue [Richard K. Donahue] from Lowell [Mass.], who was later one of President Kennedy's most trusted governor, fed him, kept him well supplied with as much alcohol as he wanted. We got from him, I think, some very helpful information and support, politically

speaking.

Dick Donahue and I had been very close friends, and he knew my background and knew that I was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous [AA]. He gave me the chore of getting Governor Marland out of West Virginia and into Washington where he was expected and to try to do this as inconspicuously as possible.

I met Governor Marland and Donahue at the [National] Press Club, which was a very famous headquarters for the Kennedy campaign team, and made arrangements to meet him at a little apartment early the next morning with his father. We had the tickets for the plane and the plane scheduled. He promised me

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that he would be there and ready to go. Being an alcoholic and knowing how some of these heavy drinkers operate, I got there an hour early. Fortunately, he was dressing, and he and his father were ready at the appointed time.

I remember him offering me a drink that morning before we got into this cab which I had waiting to take him to the plane. I looked at him, and I said, "Governor, no thank you. I used to be a morning drinker. I haven't had a drink for" – at that time – "eight years, and I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous." Now some people might or might not have said that. I said it for a very real reason, that I knew that this man had a drinking problem, and that I knew that any little hint that a member of AA might drop, you never can tell when it will do some good.

I was fortunate in getting the governor and his father, both of whom were drinking, into the taxicab to meet this 8:40 a.m. plane. I got their baggage checked through, and I got them through the doors and out onto the runway when this plane came in. Much to my consternation, I was standing there with Governor Marland and his father when two very prominent newspaper men got off that plane, both of them good friends of mine. One was Rollie Evans [Rowland Evans, Jr.], then with the Herald Tribune [New York Herald Tribune], and the other was Bob Casey [Robert Casey] of the Boston Globe.

They looked at me, and they smiled. They said, "Well, of all people, and who's your friend?" Of course, they had immediately spotted Governor Marland. I looked at these two men, two associates in the same business, and I said, "Fellows, if a guy ever needed a friend, you didn't see me here today." I think, as luck would have it, they never printed that story or in any way intimated that they had seen me or any other member of the Kennedy team with the former governor.

It is interesting to note, just for the record, that Governor Marland finally did get into AA in Chicago. He drove a taxi in Chicago for some two and half years before he was finally recognized in a railroad YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] cafeteria by a newspaper man. The newspaper man asked his permission to tell his story. He had been successful, and he had worked at a menial task for him, as most of us alcoholics have to do, to dry out.

Then, he was back in West Virginia and became vice president and general counsel, shortly after this story appeared, for a big West Virginia manufacturing plant. He worked successfully for them for almost a year, and then, unfortunately, died of cancer a short time afterwards. But what we like to think of is, here is a man who finally found AA, finally

straightened out, and died sober. But he was a very integral part of the whole West Virginia primary. My tying in with him, I think this

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whole story may add just a little to it. Is that too much?

GRELE: Were you ever called on to renew any of the earlier contacts that you had made with newspaper people in West Virginia?

FORBES: Oh, yes. The leading editorial writer for the Charleston Gazette I had known during my time when a man by the name of Knight was running and owning that paper. He was a contact that I renewed that was very helpful and became a real big booster for us and was tremendously helpful in the stuff that he wrote.

GRELE: Was this Hoffman [Harry Hoffman]?

FORBES: Hoffman, yeah. Is his name Eddie?

GRELE: I forget his first name.

FORBES: But I had known him before, and he became a staunch friend of ours and was very helpful. And, of course, then I renewed all my acquaintances with the newspaper men who came down from New Hampshire that I had worked with, like Rollie Evans, and of course, Bill Lawrence [William H. Lawrence], who was then with the New York Times. It was the same group, and a lot of the radio and TV people of course.

GRELE: Were the national press handled any differently than the local press?

FORBES: No, I don't think that there was any difference there because this was a national campaign, almost. Everybody was watching West Virginia. You had all of your major newspapers, wire services, and TV and radio people in there. They just worked very well with all of the local people. We handled them all together. There was no discrimination in any way that I remember.

GRELE: Why I asked this question is, on the one hand, there was a national center of attention, but on the other hand, you had to win the election locally, and I meant in terms of the kind of releases that went out to each group.

FORBES: No, we sent the same thing to everybody. We ran out of the press room with handouts for everybody. You may be sure that Pierre Salinger – and in the second half of that campaign of course,

Charlie Roche [Charles D. Roche], who had been Salinger's assistant in the Wisconsin campaign – came in and took over the press desk. He is a very able person who later went with the national committee as deputy national chairman. They instituted a very good system by which all of the West Virginia weeklies and dailies got exactly the same releases that were going out nationally.

They played them that way and, of course, we were making our news within the area so we really didn't have that problem with the local people, because it was happening in their town and their papers and their radios were picking it up. Of course, we never missed a bet to get on the local radio on every occasion. And then of course, we had some fabulous people coming into West Virginia to help us.

GRELE: Which brings me to my next question. You traveled extensively with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. How did you get this assignment?

FORBES: Well, that is a funny one. I'm not sure how I drew that assignment, but it was Kenny O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien who gave me that assignment and warned me ahead of time that I would have a difficult time with Franklin because sometimes he was liable to pop off and other times he was loath to get out of bed early. I think I started my relationship with him rightly because the first day I had to meet him in Clarksburg (we had to get a 7:30 plane in the morning), and believe it or not, I had him up and on that plane in the midst of a snowstorm. He rather enjoyed it.

When I first met him – of course, I had met him before at Democratic functions, but I had never worked this closely with him – I found him a most delightful guy to work with. I might add that I worked him real hard which is my reputation. For instance, many times I would have him in the car – and I had a campaign car with a big Kennedy roof sign on it, and then, on both doors I had a great big red, white, and blue sign which said, "Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. campaigning for his friend, John F. Kennedy, for President." And as we would get into some of these smaller towns, and Franklin would be dozing off after having made his fourth or fifth speech of the morning or afternoon, I would shake him, and I would say, "Franklin, wake up! Wave out there! Get us some votes!" Of course, he would mutter something at me, and then good naturedly, open that window and throw that famous Roosevelt grin.

I am convinced, after 23 days in total that I spent with Franklin Roosevelt, that he was one of the major reasons that we were successful in West Virginia. The Roosevelt name, both

because of his father's help in that state, and also for his mother [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] ... who you remember went into West Virginia during the early two terms of FDR and not only visited the mines, but in some of that area in the Mingo County, Williamson, lower section of West Virginia, helped in setting up furniture factories to take care of some of the

surplus mine labor which was, even then, showing up.

Many of those older people have never forgotten that. I remember going into several of the smaller towns around Williamson and seeing a florist window with beautiful big roses in it and a red, white, and blue drape around the portrait of Franklin D., Sr. [Franklin D. Roosevelt], the president, with a sign in the front, "Franklin D., Jr. will be here today."

I remember in this same town that he, Franklin D., Jr., spoke to a group of older people who mobbed the main dining room in the large hotel in that town. I remember his saying to this group, "I am delighted to be here. I am here, as you know, campaigning for my good friend, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and I want you to know that I am a Protestant campaigning for Senator Kennedy. I know that you people come here, not only to hear what I have to say and that you honor me because of my father, but I also want you to know that I am my mother's boy."

And, oh boy, this just about tore the roof off because this was the same area where his mother had done so much, and this is what they wanted to hear. He was like a hero in his own right there. This is why he was so effective. I think Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. could be elected to any office in West Virginia that he wanted to from governor to the United States Senate. This is how popular he was and his family name was.

I would also like to point out that during the time that he was in here, Franklin Roosevelt really worked. We covered a tremendous number of counties with him. He never begged off of an assignment that I asked him to do. He was extremely effective, extremely effective. I think he loved it. It was just a real part of the real show.

In talking about Franklin Roosevelt, I think to have a true part of the record, tell the full story of Franklin Roosevelt's statement about the Humphrey war record. Now, this was a very important item in the campaign. I might preface it by saying this, that anything is fair in politics. One has to have everything at his command if he is going to win. I know, as far as I am concerned, that anything that we ever did in the Kennedy primaries and in the main election was done fairly and squarely.

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We did have at our disposal the complete facts of Hubert Humphrey's activities during the War; what his rating was with the draft board at certain times, how he was classified 4-F because he was working with a labor farm group; how again he was classified when he was on a teaching staff of a college, and the whole record. Now, any politician has got to have his rival's data at his hand. He may or may not have to use it.

Now, Bob Kennedy gave me this folder and instructed me to read it, and under no conditions to say anything to anybody about it, to keep it in my locked briefcase, and when I met Franklin Roosevelt, to give it to him, have him read it and digest it, put it back in my locked briefcase. The following day I was to give it to him again and have him read it, and then talk about it, and then lock it in the briefcase, and that under absolutely no conditions was this to be used without the expressed, almost, command – that is not the word I want to use – that unless Kenny O'Donnell or he himself, Bob Kennedy said, "Use this now."

Now, at this time, there had been some things said, as I remember it, in the Wisconsin primary about the Humphrey war record. There were little asides. These were ducking the issue, but what I would call nasty innuendos, if I may put it that way. These were said by

people working in the Wisconsin primary who were very friendly to Senator Kennedy. These were not official Kennedy campaign documents or strategy. Senator Kennedy's war record, of course, was heroic and brilliant. Everybody knew that, and we all know for a fact, and I know personally, that he didn't particularly like to talk about this although it was part of a campaign picture and image you had to have.

Well, there were a number of members of the press who were very anxious, I suppose for a good story, to see this thing blown up and to see it used in West Virginia. On several occasions there were needling questions of this type that almost came into full focus and never quite.

GRELE:                   Who in the press, do you remember?

FORBES:                 I don't remember who it was, but I do remember this, that at a friendly bull session one night we discussed with Rollie Evans and with Bill Lawrence the fact of why we never wanted to use this, if possible. I think as good reliable newsmen and friends of Senator Kennedy that they were very much in agreement with us. But they also were smart enough to say, "Now, if you ever do use this, and we are never there, can we have your word? – in this case,

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they were addressed to me, and I don't know if it was Pierre Salinger or somebody else – "You be sure to let us know, no matter where we are." Now, Bill Lawrence, for the most part, was with us at all times. Rollie Evans was forth and back from New York.

So, one morning I met Franklin Roosevelt in Greenbrier County. He flew in in his private plane. He was late and he was under all kinds of pressure. This was the last day of the campaign which would wind up with a joint tremendous television show and appearance of Franklin Roosevelt and Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Charleston in the main square. We were running late. He made his first appearance at a school. Then, we had to go about a thirty-mile trip to another area where he was to make another speech. As a matter of fact, he had 5 talks before lunch, 3 after lunch before the final big meeting. So you see who how heavy we were running.

Now, he brought with him on this trip a member of his office staff. This made it very difficult for me because I couldn't say to him, "Look, I need to drive the car, I'll have to drive my own. You should really be with me." This is actually the only time that I ever let Franklin Roosevelt out of my sight or wasn't right next to him, which were my instructions given to me by Larry O'Brien and Ken O'Donnell.

The only reason I left him at this time was because NBC [National Broadcasting Company] had a portable TV crew with a big Lincoln car. They wanted to do a taping of him of this last day, which would have meant a great deal to us, not only in the state but nationally. I should have been in that car with him, but this other member of his staff was there, and I was in no position at the time...

GRELE:                   Was this his secretary?



FORBES: Yes. I was in no position to say, “Well, look, I think your secretary ought to drive this car, and I ought to be with you.” Well, at this time this newscaster – whose name I just cannot remember – from NBC, had in the back of this Lincoln car with him, with the klieg lights on in the front, with a guy leaning on his knees holding that and another man kneeling on the front next to his secretary, who was driving the car, taking his picture and taping this interview. This guy needed Franklin Roosevelt by saying to him, as I recall his explaining it to me, “Mr. Roosevelt, they are saying that you have a lot of material on Mr. Humphrey’s war record that you are afraid to talk about, and they say that you are just really scared to do this.”

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Well, this was all he really had to do to Roosevelt who was carrying his own main job and who had been in the state 3 times in the last 7 days and was now in on such a schedule as this. He was just keyed up to the point that he really bit on this one. He blurted out for this guy the whole story of the Humphrey war record. The fat was in the fire.

When I pulled up fifteen minutes later with my car, Franklin Roosevelt got out of the car, and he slammed the door. He came over to me, and he said, “Well, Freddie, I let it go.” I said, “You let what go?” He said, “I told the Humphrey story.” I said, “My God, Franklin, Kenny O’Donnell and Bob Kennedy said absolutely not a word of this. How come?” He said, “This guy, he claimed that I was yellow to talk about it.” Of course, the NBC commentator came out smiling as broad as could be. I said, “Thanks a bunch.” That was my only comment.

Franklin Roosevelt went in to get a cup of coffee. Fearless Fred went to the telephone, and I called Kenny O’Donnell, and I told him what had happened. I said, “Look, I had absolutely no control. I couldn’t get his secretary out of that car. If I had been there, it never would have happened. What do I do now?” Well, he was visibly disturbed and said that he would notify Bobby that this had been said. He regretted it. I regretted it. I don’t think Kenny O’Donnell ever blamed me for this because it was just something that I couldn’t very well have controlled in any way, shape, or form under the circumstances.

My next two calls were done according to my code. I got a hold of Rollie Evans in New York and told him what had happened. He knew the facts. And then, I called Bill Lawrence of the New York Times, whom I had also committed myself to, and told him the facts.

We continued after that. Our rest period was good. Everybody calmed down. I got rid of the I still think it was NBC. I will be very much embarrassed if I find it was some other network that did it.

GRELE: You can change it when you get the transcript.

FORBES: All right, but I am sure it was NBC. We went on. We had three more stops. Then we had a very delightful late lunch with a group of people in Montgomery. The party was given at a lovely home by a very nice young Italian couple who were the Pontiac dealers in that town.

And then Franklin Roosevelt had one more speech to make before we drove to Charleston for the finale. As we approached the high school in that town where he was going to make this speech, there were more members of the press there than I had seen anywhere before. I wondered and surmised that probably the story was on the wire. I was even behind the wire. I had no way to check it.

These people asked me if Mr. Roosevelt would hold a short press conference before he went in. I agreed to do this. I remember Phil Potter [Phillip Potter] of the Baltimore Sun was there, and there was some very able lady reporter from Scripps-Howard [Scripps-Howard Newspapers] there. The local press was there. Franklin Roosevelt talked about what he was going to say and also the fact that he was going to meet and be with Senator Kennedy that night for the windup.

As I thought that we had happily concluded this press conference, this woman from the Scripps-Howard paper turned to him and said, "Mr. Roosevelt, we understand that you had some remarks to make earlier this morning on Mr. Humphrey's draft record. Would you care to repeat those?" Of course, Franklin looked directly at me and said. "What do I do now, Fred?"

Being a newsman and knowing that the other media had it, that both Rollie Evans and Bill Lawrence had it, I said, "Go ahead." He repeated, briefly, the same thing that he had done on the television in the back of the Lincoln car.

He went in to make the speech. I immediately got on my phone and was finally able to contact Ken O'Donnell again. Kenny said, "Oh, how are things going?" I said, "Fine." He said, "The senator is in here now. He is waiting for you and your party at the Daniel Boone [Daniel Boone Hotel]. By the way, he had made a statement about Humphrey's war record, and he had decried the fact that this was ever brought up in the campaign. He said that he didn't think that it belonged in the campaign, and he regretted this very much. How are things with you?" I said, "My God, he just said it again!"

Well, again, this was being on the road – complete lack of communication. He said, "Well, damn it. You and Franklin get up here to the hotel as soon as you finish that and come in the back way." By this time, Phil Potter I saw on the phone telling this whole story, and I saw the Scripps-Howard gal telling the same story and I said, "Oh, brother."

So, the speech was over, and I informed Franklin of what we were up against. We beat it in a special car and got into the Kanawha Hotel and got up to Ken O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien's room.

We wrote out a statement, saying that Franklin Roosevelt regretted that he had said this, that this was done in the heat of campaign, and that he agreed with Senator Kennedy that this did not belong in a campaign. It was unfortunate, but he was tired and he had said this. He apologized to Hubert Humphrey for it.

Whereupon this statement was typed very fast, and gotten out to the press. Boy, when that hit Potter's hands, after he just sent a major story on what Roosevelt said, of course, he came looking for me. Needless to say, I got out, being the victim of

circumstances. Pierre Salinger just took one look at me. He said, "Freddy, you had better go hide for a couple of hours."

This was the result of campaign pressures, I feel. It certainly wasn't done maliciously. In reflecting on it now, I think this fact helped us at the momentary time in West Virginia because West Virginia is such a heavily veteran state. At that time, my gosh, things were in such a condition that when you graduated from high school, there wasn't much you could do except to get into the armed services. So they were aware of that, and a glamorous war record is appealing to a veteran where one of deferment is not.

We had a very embarrassing situation the next day. Franklin Roosevelt and I bumped smack into Senator and Mrs. Humphrey [Muriel Fay Buck Humphrey]. There was really cool air between them because...

GRELE:                   What happened?

FORBES:                 We were all at the same meeting. As a matter of fact, we were at the same meeting, and the main speaker was President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. This was in Clarksburg, after this Charleston thing. This was the windup. It was the Jefferson-Jackson [Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson] Day dinner. All of the principals were invited. Franklin Roosevelt was asked to represent Senator Kennedy because he couldn't be there. Of course, Hubert Humphrey was there. Lyndon Johnson had been sewed up as the main speaker for this dinner many months before. So it was a very interesting gathering. Boy, I felt the icicles between Franklin and Senator Humphrey when we just had this short encounter.

GRELE:                   Was anything said?

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FORBES:                 Yes, words passed between them. They were very mild and very guarded, but the atmosphere was chilly as hell. Actually, as I remember the story, Franklin Roosevelt later apologized personally to Humphrey for this and did so at the request of the New York State Democratic Committee before he was elected a delegate to the convention. But that was one of the most interesting things that we ran up against. And, as I say, it was strictly pressure. Things like that happen.

GRELE:                   I just want to change the tape.

(End of Tape 1; side 2)

(Beginning of Tape 2; side 1)

GRELE:                   Did John Kennedy or Robert Kennedy ever say anything to Franklin Roosevelt about this attack on Humphrey's war record?

FORBES: No, not in a complaining way. I think that both Bobby Kennedy and Senator Kennedy realized how this came about. Senator Kennedy was an extremely fair man and little things like this, which might be crisis proportion to some people, he handled in his usual wonderful manner. I think he said something jokingly to Franklin, "Well, I understand you talked about a war record today, and I had to sort of straighten it out." Franklin said, "Yes, I'm sorry." And I just made a statement, and I think it was dropped at that.

Ken O'Donnell never criticized me for it, nor did Larry O'Brien. You know, Kenny O'Donnell is a wonderful guy. In all the months I worked with him, I don't think I ever held longer than a ten-minute conversation with him because he is that type of an operator. He knew me well enough to know that this was not a deliberate thing or wasn't a stupid error. It was a circumstantial event. The fact that I brought Roosevelt to the place where we had to get him, and that we got the statement out, and that we made the most of it, I think, all goes with the picture. There was no harsh criticism of an event like this. As I said, in the overall perspective, I think it helped us.

GRELE: Did Franklin Roosevelt ever comment to you about the relations between his mother and Senator Kennedy?

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FORBES: Yes. Of course, I had a wonderful chance to talk about many things with Franklin Roosevelt after these events. I asked him on one occasion. I said, "Well, how does your mother feel about this? I know she is a great admirer of Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]." Franklin said, "Well, I know she is a great advocate of Adlai Stevenson. I know that Adlai Stevenson is her choice again for the nomination, but she knows that I am working for John Fitzgerald Kennedy. She knows how strongly I feel about this. I think my working this way and talking with her will certainly not keep her quiet, but will keep her from doing anything spectacular during this primary session. I can't promise what will happen at the convention, but I think I am also helping this way." He was very aware of this.

I am sure that Senator Kennedy was. I am sure Bob Kennedy was. I am sure that Franklin Roosevelt said some things to his mother. If you remember, she was very gracious, of course, having John Kennedy as her guest on that TV show the night that he made his announcement, which was a real good break because, of course, it was a nationwide show. There was a difference of opinion, and of course, Franklin had his own mind and certainly his wonderful mother had her own mind. But they never clashed so that it was out of harmony, you know. But I think it was important this way, too, Franklin Roosevelt's help to us.

GRELE: Did you ever have any contacts with any of the other personalities who came into the West Virginia campaign?

FORBES: Well, of course, I worked for a half a day with “Chub” Peabody [Endicott Peabody] who later became governor of Massachusetts. He came down to help in doing some of the field-work for a couple of days. I was so much involved with travel with Franklin Roosevelt after that first three weeks of organization that, really, I didn’t have an opportunity to do much with any of the other visiting dignitaries.

GRELE: During the first part of the campaign in West Virginia, the campaign in Wisconsin was going on. After the victory in Wisconsin, did you notice any great upsurge in your activity in West Virginia or in esprit?

FORBES: Oh yes, at the immediate end of the Wisconsin campaign, of course, they brought the whole staff into West Virginia. One of my duties the last two days of the Wisconsin campaign was to get things ready. Then we moved down from an upstairs office and took over the whole balcony on the mezzanine floor. I set up a press office

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for Pierre and Chuck Roche. Then we got the wonderful gals in – Christine Camp, and, oh, just so many that I can’t remember their names. That whole Wisconsin contingent came right in, including Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] and Bobby Kennedy.

We sat down and planned what we were going to do. Of course, Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne Billings] came in, and I got to know him. This, of course, was where I first met Paul Fay. Then we sat down and divided up the states into each area. This is where I was taken out of the overall organization and given the specific assignment to do the Roosevelt trips. So this was my assignment, to plan them, to go in, and to do them. Oh, there was a marked upswing. When Wisconsin closed, West Virginia really blossomed into a campaign, and for five weeks we went.

GRELE: Was this your first introduction to many of these people?

FORBES: Yes, this was my first introduction to people like Charlie Roche, and Lem Billings, and the girls on the staff. I had worked almost exclusively with Larry, Ken O’Donnell, and Pierre because, of course, we had our own campaign organization in New Hampshire. It had to be that way because at the time that the New Hampshire campaign was going on, they were organizing all these people from Washington to start the Wisconsin campaign.

Of course, at the very end of the New Hampshire campaign, I met this whole group in the Esso Building offices just for the one afternoon I was there. I met some of the people I corresponded with and talked with on materials and things like that.

GRELE: What was your impression of this group of people as an organized team when they first came into West Virginia?

FORBES: Well, there is no question about this team. This was a top team which has proved out to be the best campaign team ever set up. The amazing fact was that there was so many of them that were volunteers. The thing that I think was outstanding in my mind was that the whole organization that we put together in West Virginia just automatically fitted into this.

From there to the Oregon campaign and the Maryland primary, you got offshoots of this whole group doing the same thing in these other areas, and everybody knowing what to do and just fitting in. The same was very evident where we landed in

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California and set up the Kennedy headquarters and set up the Kennedy convention bulletin. I had the same enthusiasm and the same ability and the same dedication. My God, I don't think any of us ever slept more than five hours during the whole fourteen-month period except for a long weekend when you got a chance to go home, maybe. But it was all this continued fevered activity. Something new.... It was just unbelievable.

GRELE: Was there ever any resentment on the part of the locals turned against the outsiders who came in and more or less directed things?

FORBES: No, I never saw any of that business of local jealousy. The Kennedy team was just a vivacious, young, dedicated bunch that they just took anybody who was willing to work for John Kennedy in the state right into their heart, and we worked together. I never saw a bit of jealousy. If you would ask a question, you would get an answer. They would go all out for you. Oh, it was fabulous, absolutely fabulous.

GRELE: That about covers my questions on West Virginia. Can you think of anything that we haven't hit on?

FORBES: Well, let me give you just one recollection. After the West Virginia campaign when we won this – that night, and Senator Kennedy flew in – you never saw such a tremendous throng of thrilled people, both the workers, and the staff, and everything else. This, of course, was a great victory. I think this was where we won the nomination for him. And even dog-tired as we were, everybody that night had a new assignment. I had already been assigned to Baltimore, I went in and I met two of the same people in Baltimore.

I think one of the funniest things I ever ever saw in my life was that morning when I got up to the Kanawha airport. You never saw so many Hertz [Hertz Corporation], National [National Car Rental System, Inc.] and other rented cars sprawled all over that airport, all with these tremendous Kennedy signs on them. These were all the cars that the workers had used, you know. They had been assigned to different other places, and they were on their way. It was just like, you know, you leave your vehicles and the troops move on to the next campaign. It was fabulous. I shall never forget that, to see the sight of those cars with the Kennedy signs on them. [Laughter]

GRELE: You, then, went to Baltimore?

FORBES: I went to Baltimore and participated in a Sunday reception. The principals, at that time, were Robert and Ethel Kennedy [Ethel Skakel Kennedy], greeting workers who were going to go for the final three weeks in Baltimore. Then, I went home for two days and came back and did the campaign chore of the swing that he made with Joe Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings] and Mayor D'Alesandro [Thomas D'Alesandro, Jr.] on the eastern shore. This had been set up by Bernie Boutin [Bernard Louis Boutin]. I went home to get the facts from Bernie Boutin as to how this was organized. This was the time I first met Ron Linton [Ronald M. Linton] who was driving one of the cars. When I drove one of the cars, I wound up with all my same friends in the press, including Bill Lawrence, who were participating in this tour.

I will never forget one of the towns we went through on that Eastern shore was called Kennedyville. I have always regretted the fact that I wasn't with Bernie Boutin when he laid out that thing because that would have been a wonderful place to stop for a press conference. "Senator Kennedy speaks at Kennedyville, Maryland."

We completed that. He spoke at a big fair function down on the shore and stopped at two or three other places. Then we all finished up by leaving our cars down there and getting on the Caroline and flying back to Friendship Airport where we were met by Mr. Sasscer, Sr. [Lansdale Ghiselin Sasscer], and he addressed a big meeting in Richie Stadium (?).

This was the first time that I remember the woman with the sign who paraded in front of the senator when he got up to speak with this weird picture of Senator Kennedy leaving some house in Georgetown. It had all sorts of nasty connotations to it, and the senator handled it very well. Finally, some of the local leaders got a hold of this woman and ushered her out. I thought it was in very poor taste. I think you will remember this. She later paraded with the same sign after he had been elected president. She was some kind of, I think, a real misguided, sick, sick individual. Then I went back and spent two weeks in New Hampshire. My next assignment was Los Angeles at the convention.

GRELE: Back to Maryland, do you remember any of the specific problems in Maryland? Were you there long enough to become involved in the primary?

FORBES: No, I wasn't, but it was a fairly easy primary because we were in there running against Senator Morse [Wayne L. Morse]. While I didn't participate actually in the setting up of the primary, my very good friend and associate, Bernie Boutin, went in there and was assigned the task of talking to Governor Tawes [J. Millard Tawes] about this. There had been I think, what you could say, a not very enthusiastic appraisal by the governor of the senator coming in there.

Bernie always tells the story about going in to see Governor Tawes and telling him

that he was working for Senator Kennedy in his campaign. He wanted him to know that we were preparing to come into the primary in Maryland. Governor Tawes at that time looked at Mr. Boutin and said, "Well, I am very sorry, but I wish the senator wouldn't come in." Of course, Bernie, with his very keen and quick mind, sized up the situation and just looked at the governor. He said, "Well, I am very sorry to have troubled you, Governor, but we are in, and we are going to stay in." And he left.

We picked up our own support, of course, through Joe Tydings now a senator and who later became, of course, attorney general of the state. Of course, he won that going away. But this was just one of the reactions that I had from that.

GRELE: At one time, I understand, there was a bit of conflict between Congressman Macdonald [Torbert H. Macdonald] and now Senator Tydings. Do you ever recall hearing anything about this?

FORBES: Well, Torbert Macdonald was there the morning that I got there to do the eastern shore tour with Joe Tydings. There may have been a little feeling as there is sometimes with an outsider stepping in to your state. Now, I never saw this. I may have heard rumblings of it, but it went off very nicely. It wasn't that important.

But Torbert Macdonald, I remember, was with Bernie Boutin and a fellow from Everett, Massachusetts, whose name I can't remember. A guy who organized the Baltimore campaign, just the city. He was a newspaper editor from Everett. I will think of his name.

GRELE: Joe Curnane [Joseph A. Curnane]?

FORBES: Joe Curnane, yeah. They were the three big names in there. Joe Curnane organized the Baltimore setup. Joe Tydings was the state man. Bernie Boutin set up the eastern shore swing. Torbert Macdonald

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was more or less the official representative of the area for the senator because, of course, he was a close friend. That is the way, I think, that the Maryland setup went.

GRELE: After Maryland, you went to New Hampshire?

FORBES: After Maryland, I went back to New Hampshire for a one-week rest, and to help start setting up that state committee for the fall, and of course, to get all the materials and things I needed to go to California. Of course, I went out to California two weeks before the convention to help set up things.

GRELE: What was your initial assignment and when was it given?



FORBES: At the convention or... Well, my initial assignment went something like this. I was told to go back to New Hampshire and get myself a week's rest, if I was lucky. Bob Kennedy would send me a wire when he needed me. I think it ran a little bit more than a week, and I became very worried. The afternoon that I was worried the most, I got the telegram, "Get the next jet to Los Angeles." I packed my bag and went to Boston and got my airplane ticket and drew some money and was on my way. As a matter of fact, that was the first jet ride I ever had.

GRELE: Were there already people in Los Angeles when you got there?

FORBES: Oh yes, Bobby was there, and Pierre Salinger, and the headquarters was just starting to move up. I was assigned, first of all, to the headquarters and was given specific assignments to be prepared to work out on the floor. Let me stop here. Next time I can start with my immediate assignment to the Kennedy bulletin.

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