

James T. Corcoran Oral History Interview—3/8/1976
Administrative Information

Creator: James T. Corcoran
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Biographical Note

Corcoran, coordinator of advance men for John F. Kennedy's (JFK) president campaign (1960) and a member of the White House Special Projects staff (1961-1962), discusses advance work on JFK's November 1963 trip to Texas, conflict within the Texas Democratic Party prior to JFK's assassination, and JFK's role as a campaigner for the Democratic Party, among other issues.

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James T. Corcoran

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Oral History Interview

with

James T. Corcoran

March 8, 1976
Washington, D.C.

By William Hartigan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HARTIGAN: Jim, when did you first come in contact with the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] organization?

CORCORAN: In July 1960, right after the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles.

HARTIGAN: When did you first meet President Kennedy?

CORCORAN: In October 1960, when I advanced the "Meet the Press" broadcast here in Washington, D.C. in which the President appeared on "Meet the Press."

HARTIGAN: That was a part of your activities during the campaign?

CORCORAN: Yes.

HARTIGAN: Would you like to tell us about some of the other activities that you were responsible for during the campaign?

CORCORAN: Yes. During the campaign, I worked in the advanced area of the campaign. I helped coordinate the activities of the advance men. When they called in

from the field. I recorded their problems in the field: where they were to go, what they were to do, when they came back to Washington, see that they got a hotel, see they got money advanced to go back out onto the field, see that the daily schedules were typed and got out. But primarily we tried to coordinate the activities of the advance men. If an advance man was in New York City, he would call up to the advance desk here in Washington and he would have his activities planned in New York. Well, it might be that some of the politicians wanted to do one thing and others wanted to do the other thing. So, he'd call in to Washington for directions. I'd write down what the problems were, where they were going

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to go, whether the candidate could go here or whether the candidate could go there, discuss that with the people in charge of the advance room. At the time, it was Dick Maguire [Richard Maguire] here in Washington. He'd then coordinate it with Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], who traveled with the President, and we would relay the message back to the advance men what the schedule was to be in any given city; where they were to go, and what they were to do. And I did that all through the campaign except for the advance trips, which I did in Oklahoma City, and the one here in Washington, D.C. where I went to "Meet the Press" in the afternoon. Later that night, I did the advance at the high school auditorium out in Silver Spring [Maryland], where we had Senator Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] and Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan] introduce the President and come out for him at that time.

HARTIGAN: Did you run into any unusual experiences or situations during this period of time?

CORCORAN: No, I don't think I ran into any during the campaign. I think when I was in Oklahoma City the most unusual experience I had was I spent two days with the ex-governor, Governor Turner [Roy J. Turner] and he was quite an individual and quite a character. But other than that I don't think there was anything extremely unusual about the experience.

HARTIGAN: Other than the candidate taking the car away from you?

CORCORAN: Other than the candidate.... Yes. When I was at "Meet the Press," after the program he wanted to go out the back way. We were walking down the corridor and we got out to the car, and he's got a, I think it was a blue or gray Pontiac convertible. So Mugsy O'Leary's [John J. "Mugsy" O'Leary] there, Mugsy's going to get in and drive and I'm going to get in the back seat, and he [President Kennedy] looks at me and says, "I'll take the car." "Well," I said, "Well you're not supposed to take the car, Senator." He says, "I'm takin' the car." So he got in the car and left with the car and I didn't catch up with him again until that evening over in Silver Spring. But, where he went in the interim, or what he did I don't know, but he certainly was on time for the rally that night.

HARTIGAN: Can you relate any other experiences in the cities that you advanced? Didn't you have something to do with the final rally in Boston?

CORCORAN: Yeah, the final rally, but that was [a fundraiser] in October of 1963. But in the interim period....

HARTIGAN: I'm talking about the final rally during the 1960 Campaign.

CORCORAN: No. At the time of the 1960 campaign, after they had gone to Chicago and Boston, Dick O'Hare [Richard O'Hare] says, "You open up an operation here in Washington," so that everybody and his brother wouldn't be running out

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to Hyannis Port. So I went over to the Mayflower Hotel, and we had two or three suites of rooms up there. I called all the advance men and a lot of the people who had worked on the campaign, and said, "Come to Washington. We're going to have the Mayflower as headquarters and we'll have some room and some refreshments up in the hotel suite rather than everybody crashing in down to Hyannis Port and everybody getting in the way of the candidate and the press." And so we had about fifty or sixty of the people who worked throughout the campaign. We brought them here to Washington and tried to keep the flood of four or five hundred people out of Hyannis, and we had a party for most of the people who worked on the campaign here in town. We must have had, you know, fifty or sixty party workers, in the Mayflower Hotel, upstairs that night, away from the general crowd and press.

HARTIGAN: After the election, what were some of your activities?

CORCORAN: Well, right after the election I worked on trying to set up the Inaugural Committee. The night of the Inaugural Ball, I was at the Armory in charge of the President's box or I worked on the President's box. There was another fellow with me, who was Frank Dooley, who was in charge of the Vice President's [Lyndon B. Johnson] box. And what I did was, when the President arrived at the Armory, I met him and took him upstairs to the room where he waited before he came out into the Inaugural box.

My function was to inform the Secret Service who the people were who could come to him, shake hands, and say hello. In other words, I coordinated between the President's people and the Secret Service because there were certain people, who were there that night, if I remember, like Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley], his mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] and father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], and other political people and figures from out of the country who the President may wish to see and shake hands with. To make it easier for the agents, I'd say "that one's alright" or "this one's wrong." They'd come up and shake hands or say hello, and he stayed there at the Inaugural Ball for an hour or so, and moved on to one of the others. It was mainly to coordinate the President's activities at the Inaugural Ball at the Armory.

HARTIGAN: Just as a sidelight, in the news media there was some reference made to imposters, or a particular imposter, that showed up at the Inaugural Ball, and there were pictures of him in the *Washington Post* not too long ago having successfully crashed the ball. Did it happen in the Armory, or was it at the other....

CORCORAN: Didn't happen at the Armory. The only funny thing that happened in the Armory, and I'm tryin' to refresh my recollection after sixteen years, is it? I think the President's father got his coat half off or half on, or the sleeves were.... But other than that nothing out of the ordinary happened at the Armory. A lot of his family was there; his sisters [Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Patricia Kennedy Lawford, and Jean Kennedy Smith] were there, Peter Lawford was there, Red Fay [Paul B. Fay, Jr.], Mayor Daley as I said, was there, the President's mother and father. Of course, he was accompanied by his wife [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy]. But to my knowledge, nothing out of the ordinary happened at the Armory that I can remember, and I was at the Armory early that evening, and stayed right through until after he'd left.

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HARTIGAN: After the Inauguration, where did you go?

CORCORAN: After the Inauguration I went over to the White House and I worked in what we called Special Projects at the time. I worked with Dick Maguire, and we worked on the transition team really. Right after the Inaugural I worked on the transition team, as well as the Inaugural Ball, because people had to be cleared for their jobs with the Secret Service. I was here on Connecticut Avenue, and I'd take things over to the Secret Service office so they could clear the identification or with the F.B.I. [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. Then after the President was inaugurated, I went over to the White House. We worked on the transition team, organizing the new administration; making things work smoothly between the White House and the Kennedy Administration. In fact, I worked closely with Bob Hampton [Robert E. Hampton] who stayed on from the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] years and helped us in our transition and went over to become a member of the Civil Service Commission. I also worked on the White House regional conferences, where I went around the country. I went to Washington [State of Washington], Oregon, Philadelphia, various places, California, San Francisco, Los Angeles, setting up these regional conferences so people would have a chance to come in and meet Cabinet members and express themselves and put their input into the new Administration on what they felt were the crucial issues of the country. Various cabinet officers went around including the President's brother, the then Attorney General, Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] who came up to Philadelphia, met the people listened to their problems, explained what the administration was trying to do, and what we were trying to accomplish as far as the American people were concerned.

In addition, I did a few advance jobs, such as I went to Puerto Rico and helped set up the trip in Puerto Rico. There was nothing eventful that I can remember in the Puerto Rico trip. We stayed at the San Juan Americana Hotel. The candidate stayed at the Fort Alece with

his wife, and I think Dave Powers [David F. Powers] and Ken O'Donnell stayed with the candidate at Fort Alece. The rest of the people, the press and the advance people, stayed at the San Juan International. I think it was owned by Pan American [Pan American World Airways] at that time. We had a very successful trip and we left from there and went on to Bogotá and then Venezuela. I'm not sure in which order. I went back to Palm Beach, this was kind of interesting, I didn't go on to South America. I was going to go back to Miami to rest for a day. In the meantime, coming back from South America, Washington was all fogged and clouded in that a lot of the press and people couldn't get in. But the President stopped off in Palm Beach to meet the plane, and get on the press plane to come back to Washington. That morning it was a bright sunny morning. I remember the President drove up to the airport in a Cadillac, and he was accompanied by his father, the late Ambassador Kennedy, and I remember, I believe it was a white car, and I'm standing there and he shakes my hand, says goodbye to his father, gets on the plane and of course, it takes off and we take off right afterward, with the press. I guess you'd call it the back-up plane. It was that morning, I think on the 16th of December, when we got to Washington that the President learned that his father had a stroke, and had to turn right around and come back to Palm Beach to meet his father, which I thought was kind of interesting as far as the times that I worked there.

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In the end of 1962, when we had the transition team, and worked out the transition between the two Administrations, Dick Maguire was appointed treasurer of the National Committee [Democratic National Committee]. About a month after he was appointed treasurer of the National Committee, I left the White House. We had got all the projects initiated that we were sent over there to do, and I went back to the National Committee to work for Dick Maguire in setting up fundraisers. In fact, we had the one in Madison Square Garden, if you remember, which was very successful. Jack Benny and many of the performers were there [e.g. Marilyn Monroe], and we filled the Garden. I worked on the election of course, of the Democratic candidates. For instance, that year, '62, Bayh [Birch Bayh] was running from Indiana. I would pick them up at the Mayflower and take them over to the White House so they could get their picture taken with the President. Sometimes I'd go over when Truman [Harry S. Truman] would be in town, in those years and pick up Mr. Truman and bring him over there. He'd stay at the Mayflower Hotel. [And] basically, kept busy raising money and getting Democratic candidates elected in '62. After I went back to the National Committee, I stayed on at the National Committee. The last dinner that I did there, I did fundraising dinners in Washington and throughout the country, the last fundraising dinners I did were the most eventful. I went up to Boston, lived in the Parker House, and helped coordinate that dinner in New England in the latter part of October of 1963, and then came back to Washington on a Sunday. The following Tuesday I went down to Austin, Texas to help coordinate the trip with John Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.], and the President's last trip to Texas.

HARTIGAN: Jim, before we go too far along to further identify these regional conferences, these White House regional conferences are pretty much the

same as the conferences that are taking place in the White House now. It was announced not too long ago by Roger Morton [Rogers C.B. Morton] that evidently, they've been going on ever since. Were those the same types of conferences relating to the people in the different areas?

CORCORAN: I'm not, you know, familiar with what Rogers Morton said, but I know that ours were relating to the people and to the different areas of the country. We were trying to take the Administration out of Washington into various areas of the country so the people would understand what Medicare was about, and what was going on in the Social Security program. I'm not familiar with [what] this present administration is doing in this area, but, I guess all administrations have had regional conferences.

HARTIGAN: And you found that there was a successful way of keeping in contact with the people out in the region?

CORCORAN: An excellent way keeping in contact with the people.

HARTIGAN: One other question on the trips to San Juan and to South America. Who was on the advance team with you on those trips?

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CORCORAN: On the advance team in San Juan, I didn't go down on the original team. I stayed in Washington, and I guess the original team was led by Kenneth O'Donnell. He went down with Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger]. When they got to stay in San Juan they didn't have any advance man to stay in San Juan because they had Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] and George O'Gorman [George D. O'Gorman]. Bruno was going to do Bogotá in Columbia and O'Gorman was going to do Caracas. And, therefore, they had nobody but Secret Service agents to leave in San Juan. So they called Washington. I was working in Special Projects at the White House. I grabbed the next plane and went down to San Juan to coordinate all the activities with the Secret Service, so they'd know who was what and what to do. Those were basically the three advance men as I remember it. Then, of course, O'Donnell went back to Washington and he came back after we got our instructions. And he came back through with the President on his trip to South America.

HARTIGAN: All right Jim, we're now at the fundraiser in Austin in October.

CORCORAN: All right. We left here in October. It was right around the 26th or the 27th, right in that area...

HARTIGAN: It was October, 1963 now?

CORCORAN: Yes, October 1963, and I had just gotten back from the fundraiser in Boston. We went down to Austin, Texas. We went down late in the afternoon and

there were four people on the trip: Jerry Bruno, Vince Gaughan [Vincent Gaughan, Sr.], Jimmy Athy [James A. Athy] and myself. We left here and my objective primarily, was going to be the fundraiser in Austin. Bruno was primarily going to lead the advance team and see what we were going to do in Texas when the President got there in November. We left there and we went into Dallas and then onto Austin. We got there that night and were met by two groups. One group was the Yarborough [Ralph W. Yarborough] group, and one group is the Johnson group. We met at the airport. I look at Jerry, and Jerry looks at me, and we don't know what to do, and whose car to get into because they both want us to ride into town to the Driskill Hotel with them. So Bruno and I go into the bathroom and have a little chat and we come out. Bruno and I got in with the Johnson group, and Athy and Vinnie Gaughan, as I remember it, got in with the Yarborough group. So, we ride into town, you know, and we stay with our group, and, I guess, they stay with their group until we could get it together later on that evening and try and figure what the heck is going on down there. Because obviously we were there for the best interest of the President and the country, and we weren't interested in the inner squabbles in the state of Texas.

The next morning we go over to the Forty Acres, I believe is the name of the restaurant in Austin, for lunch. Early in the morning we had gone over to the studio that the Johnson family owned and talked to some of the people there. And we go to that lunch. And at the lunch was Athy, Gaughan, Bruno and myself, then Governor Connally and, if I remember, Ben Barnes [Ben F. Barnes] was there, who later on became the lieutenant

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governor. There was a fellow by the name of Irwin [Joe N. Irwin] who became state chairman, or was state chairman, and I think, a fellow by the name of Scotty Sayers who worked for Governor Connally. I can't remember the rest of the people at that lunch, but I could refresh my recollection and look it up in my records, but we sat there at the luncheon. All of a sudden, you can see that it's going to be a confrontation between Connally and Bruno, about who's leading the advance team on where the President is going to go and what the President is going to do while he's in Texas. Connally, while he's sitting there eating his sandwich, says to one of his aids, "Get O'Donnell on the telephone." The aide goes to the corner of the room and gets O'Donnell on the telephone. There's silence while for a while. Connally 's talking to O'Donnell and, of course, we can't hear O'Donnell talk. But the gist of what O'Donnell said was, "Well I sent my guy down there with the schedule, haven't you talked to him?" We could hear Connally say, "Yes he's here, yes he's here," so he hangs up, he gets no place there. So, they discuss it for a while. Then they agree that Bruno, and, I think, Cliff Carter [Clifton C. Carter] are going to go around to the various cities in Texas and set it up the next day. I went over the next day to meet with Hank Brown [Henry S. Brown], the head of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. [American Federation of Labor Congress of Industrial Organizations], to smooth out the fact that we're going to have the fundraiser. We wanted them all to coordinate because there was some friction I gathered between the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and Hank Brown's operation and the Governor's operation the next day. And we want to bring the Yarborough people in, the Johnson people, the Connally, the A.F.L. Bruno, the next day, while I'm doing that, went to Houston, to San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Dallas and then back. We got together that night and discussed again the problems. We still don't know what

to do, because we're all at odds. So we figured then the next day the fundraiser's coming along fairly well, we've got the A.F.L. we decide to go to Dallas to look over the situation on our own.

We leave Gaughan in Austin, and Bruno and myself, and I believe, Athy and a fellow by the name of Scotty Sayers, who was working for the Governor, get in the car and we drive to Waco and to Dallas. We get into the Adolphis Hotel and we meet with a lawyer there whose name was Bob Strauss [Robert S. Strauss], who's now the Democratic chairman. We're trying to work out the arrangements of the Dallas thing. Bruno's mainly interested in the advance in Dallas, so we had a long conversation and got Strauss's ideas. But then the next day we're still not sure what to do. So we got in touch with a fellow by the name of Barefoot Sanders [Harold Barefoot Sanders, Jr.], who was the U.S. attorney down there at the time, and we got in touch with him through a fellow by the name of John Reilly [John R. Reilly], who was working at the Justice Department and was in charge of the U.S. attorney. Someone who we felt we could trust to get the straight scoop, which is good for the President of the United States because we're getting all kinds of political friction. We're trying to figure out whether he should get a degree from Texas Christian [Texas Christian University], and that's all fouled up, and everything's going wrong. So we get in a phone booth downstairs in the hotel so no one.... We meet Barefoot Sanders. He drives us around on the sly and shows us where we wanted to go.

Bruno at the time, and I remember distinctly, wanted to go to the Woman's Club out by the Dallas Cotton Bowl. He wanted the advance trip to go out there, and as I understand it, he told Connally that they couldn't go to the Newmarket, where they eventually went, were headed for the assassination, because of the security there and the beams and all. But

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apparently the Secret Service said that they could guard it alright, and that was eventually agreed to. I don't know the reasons why it was agreed to, I do know that Bruno did not want to go on the trip, and he wanted to go out to the Woman's Club, 'cause we sat and talked. He thought that was a better place to go. We looked around Dallas. So, we came back to Washington, and we're back in Washington a couple of weeks, and I don't know what the interim fighting was that went on that. But all I know was that when it was time to go back to Dallas, or Austin, about a week or two before the trip, Bruno doesn't go back. I'm sent back to Austin and I'm told to watch the money.

HARTIGAN: What date was that, now?

CORCORAN: I'd say, I can't remember the exact date, but I'd say it was about a week before the assassination. I'll guess a week, because I flew down on the plane with some of the Secret Service agents, on the commercial plane who were going on from Austin over to the ranch to make arrangements at the ranch, because the President was going to stay at the ranch that night with his wife. And then after the fundraiser in Austin I went back there and I helped set up the fund raising dinner. And my job was mainly to see that, you know, that as much money as possible was raised for that part of the trip. Working on that dinner were Bill Moyers [William D. Moyers], who was down there,

and Marvin Watson [William Marvin Watson], who both became quite popular during the Johnson Administration. I worked trying to smooth out all the fighting between the various factions. For instance, the morning of the assassination, I remember going down to the auditorium and they're trying to set up tiers, you know, so Yarborough wouldn't be sitting on the same tier with Connally, Johnson and the President. This was a continual bickering on trying to see that everyone got equal justice. I can remember it was a Friday. In those days.... And Catholics didn't eat meat. We were worrying about the menu and working on things like that.

But anyhow, I then went to lunch that noon with Moyers and Scotty Sayers and a few others. And Scotty Sayers, and myself and a state trooper started out to the airport to meet John Bailey [John Moran Bailey]. Bailey had come down there because that part of the trip, in Austin, was going to be political. It was a fundraiser. So he had to fly down by his own commercial means. He couldn't go on the presidential jet because you'd be mixing politics with the business of the trip. And when the President came to Austin obviously the National Committee picked up for that part of the trip, to keep the expenses separate. I remember it was about twelve-fifteen or twelve-twenty, and we stopped on the way out there, and we heard on the radio that the President had been shot. Obviously it was confusion. We were right near the airport in Austin, and I get in line, and when John Bailey got off the plane, I jumped over the railing and grabbed Bailey aside and told him that the President was shot and had, by that time, died. And, of course, I practically carried Bailey to the bench. He just completely collapsed. I think Drew Pearson was on the plane that came in on that trip, but I'm not sure. I didn't see him. I was told later that he was. Well, what I did was I got Bailey out of the airport and got him back to the hotel in downtown Austin.

We got all the Secret Service people together. We got all the telephone equipment and everything. And there were about twenty of us. And we went right back to Bergstrom Airforce Base, and we left Bergstrom

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Air Force Base on a jet tanker and flew back into Washington. I arrived at Andrews Air Force Base about, I would say, ten minutes after the President's plane had arrived, because the lights and all were still on Air Force One when we arrived there. I came right down to Washington and went over to the White House to volunteer to work on the funeral arrangements or do anything that we could. I believe Sargent Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] and Ralph Dugan [Ralph A. Dugan] were handling them. I recollect, my recollection is fuzzy, but then, of course, we all pitched in and helped work on the arrangements. And then after that I went over back to the National Committee and we all met, and Lyndon Johnson went up to Bailey's suite at the Mayflower Hotel. He asked us all to stay on and work, and O'Donnell asked us to stay and work for the transition period and Maguire and we all agreed to stay on and work. And I stayed on and worked through the rest of the '64 campaign for Lyndon Johnson raising money. But soon as it was over I left and went over to the I.C.C. [Interstate Commerce Commission].

HARTIGAN: You mentioned the city of Austin when you met Bailey, is that correct?

CORCORAN: Yes, Austin. I met him there, because that was where the fundraiser was that night. Now I've gone into more details on just that one trip. I could go into details on the Hawaiian trip, which I thought was a very interesting trip.

HARTIGAN: Why don't you tell us something about the Hawaiian trip?

CORCORAN: The Hawaiian trip was an interesting trip. That was in June of 1963 and it was prior to the President going to Europe. In fact, the morning he got back from Hawaii, at nine o'clock in the morning, he went out to American University. And that's where he made one of his best speeches that the President has ever given, after traveling all night from Hawaii. It was kind of interesting. We got a call, at the last minute, to go over to the White House. Bruno called me at night and said, "Meet me in O'Donnell's office." So I met him over there the next day. He said, "You fellers, we're going to go to Hawaii." Well, Hawaii wasn't even scheduled on the trip. So Kenneth explained what we were to do and how the trip was to be made. The President opens the door and says, "Come on, it's time to go." And they went out and got on the helicopter. They were going to go to the Air Force Academy, and then on to El Paso, and do a few other things. That day, and the next day, we were to meet some of the agents in El Paso and go on to Hawaii. But the Hawaiian trip wasn't on the schedule and we were going to go there to talk to the League of Mayors and the mayors. The President wanted to talk to them. So we're walking out of the White House and Marianne Means [Marianne Hansen Means] is there. And she says, "What are you two fellers doing here, and where are you going?" You see in those days the pressroom was right when you came in the West Wing. We said, "Oh we're just here to say goodbye and we're going back to work." The next thing, Marianne Means is getting off the plane in Honolulu, and she looks at Bruno and I and she says, "You bastards, thanks a lot for the scoop." But in the meantime, we went on to El Paso, picked up the agents, went on to Honolulu....

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HARTIGAN: Jim, I just want to apologize for the interruption, we do have to change tapes once and awhile. So, I think we left off where you just arrived in Honolulu.

CORCORAN: Yes, we arrived in Honolulu and Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher] was with us that day. So Andy, Jerry, and I are arriving in Honolulu and there's the Milwaukee papers covering the scoop. One of the fellers who had worked for the Milwaukee papers, where Bruno is from, is standing there, so we, Bruno spots him, and says we don't want to get out of this plane because they're gonna give us the rot in this Honolulu paper. They're gonna grab us. So we push Andy out first to handle all the reporters and all the other things. And then Bruno and I slip out the door figuring that we had escaped everybody. That night in the Honolulu papers it says two political guns, Bruno and Corcoran were seen slipping out the back door at the airport. Anyhow, though Andy, Jerry, and I, we set up the trip and coordinated it with the Secret Service. We had a rally there that Saturday night at the airport and the President came in from California, he'd been out on the Kittyhawk [U.S.S. Kittyhawk]. And we rode with the Senator [then Congressman] Inouye

[Daniel K. Inouye] over to his quarters in the Admiral CinCPAC [Commander in Chief Pacific]. We thought the quarters were nice. The next morning Bruno gets up, and in every room when you're on a trip, you have a White House telephone. So, Jerry says, "Look, I'll take the morning" it was a Sunday morning. And we made arrangements for him [the President] to go to church early, and go over to the Officer's Club to get a little pool and rest before he goes out to dedicate the Arizona and some flowers, and do some other things and then come over to the Hawaiian village. He says, "You pick it up this afternoon at the Hawaiian village, bring him into the village see that the speech is here and go then take him out to the airport. So I said to Bruno, "Fine, you start the first half of the trip this morning." So Bruno says I better check with Kenny, see if he liked that airport rally last night. Bruno picks up the phone and says, "Kenny," no, "Dave," no. So Bruno, I'm at the next bed, so Bruno starts stuttering, he turns white, you know. He know that if it's not Kenny and it's not Dave it can only be one other person at that house. And he says, "This is Jerry." And he says, "Oh Jerry, I want to thank you for the accommodations."

HARTIGAN: This was the President?

CORCORAN: Yes, this was the President. And he says, "They were just wonderful, Jerry." And Jerry says, "Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir." So Jerry gets off the phone real quick. Anyhow, Jerry does the rest of the morning and we get over to the, he comes into the Hilton and runs in and, you know, one of the funny things, coming into the Hilton meets him at the door, and we're walking in, and he leans over and he says he'd like to go to the bathroom, which is a normal thing before he makes his speech. But the lobby's crowded with people. So I said to the manager, "Get him into the office." So the manager takes him into the office and into the bathroom, you know, while I'm in there, I'm standing there, and there are hundreds of people standing in the lobby of the hotel. It's jammed packed. We've got the aisles lady's saying, "They must have been called in for something." "Some real sensitive secret agreement." "Must be something going on." [Interruption] "Must have been called in on some important national security matter." [I] said, "Well yes, he's got to go to the phone." Well anyhow, what he had to do was go to the bathroom. Just shows that he's

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normal, like every other human being. So then he went in and made his speech, and while he's making his speech, I walk into the bar, Kenny and Dave are sitting in the bar, and Salinger's in the back, and Bruno walks into the bar, and O'Donnell says to him, "Jerry, the President just wanted me to tell you that he isn't mad at you about the accommodations. He isn't mad at you about the guard standing outside the door with the rifles, you know, he wanted a little peace and quiet. He's not mad at you about the church accommodations and the pool. And he said he just wanted to know that he wants to get back on your good graces so that the accommodations at the next trip will be a little better. He says he hopes you're not mad at him, and that's why he got the lousy accommodations." Of course Bruno's white by this time. Meantime, Mansfield [Mike Mansfield] says to us, "Would you take Senator Fong [Hiram Leong Fong] out to the airport?" Well obviously, we say yes, but obviously we're not

going to give Senator Fong the great exposure that we're going to give someone else. So I said to Jerry "We gotta figure this one out." In the meantime, I'm lining up the motorcade, and I'm having all kinds of trouble with this guy General McHugh [Godfrey T. McHugh]. Jesus, he wants his car up front and all. And Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] comes out. And right when she comes out, I'm telling him off in no uncertain language. "Get in the car and get out." Anyhow, Mansfield says, "Take care of Fong; see that he gets back to Washington." We said, "Fine, we'll take care of him, Senator." But obviously he isn't going to ride on Presidential 1. We don't tell Mansfield this, so we check it out with O'Donnell. He says yes put him on the plane, the back-up plane. So Bruno and I tell the Senator to call his wife, get his stuff to the airport. So Fong gets into the motorcade. He figures that he's going to be waving to all the people. So I get on one side of him and Bruno gets on the other side, and we got him in the middle. And every time he went to lean, we'd lean. All the way out to the airport, he's trying to see somebody, we got him in between us. So when we get out to the airport we lead him right onto Air Force Two. He got back to Washington in no time at all the next morning, but not too much political exposure. So that was a kind of an interesting trip, it all went.... But I can't forget poor Bruno's face when he got the President, I'll never forget him on the phone the next day. Which I think is a kind of a human-interest story on the whole situation.

HARTIGAN: Are there any other stories on the other cities that you advanced for the President while he was in....?

CORCORAN: No, I can't think of any Bill. You know, I probably could, what I should have done before I came, was to go home and look over all my material. It's just that I can't remember. You know, I can remember the funeral and going to church early that morning. Afterward we went over to Harvey's Restaurant and we just sat there and sort of thought about it, but it's been sixteen years, well it's been thirteen years, and a lot of things I just can't refresh my recollection on.

HARTIGAN: Jim, I'd like to back up to the Dallas situation if you will.

CORCORAN: Sure.

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HARTIGAN: As you know, since the assassination, everybody who has any idea that they are a writer or an investigator has an opinion on this Dallas situation.

CORCORAN: Right.

HARTIGAN: One of the threads that seems to run through all the opinions of the Dallas situation is the conflict that was going on within the Democratic Party in Texas. From your experience down there, at the time, would you care to give any kind of an evaluation of what it was from your point of view?

CORCORAN: Well, it was a very brutal conflict. The conflict was brutal. Obviously the conflict between Yarborough, Johnson, Connally was brutal. It was brutal all the way through. I mean, as far as the political, I don't think any one of them, they didn't like each other. And I think, of course, I think Johnson was caught, because he was the vice president, a little between both of them, you know. Connally was the governor and Yarborough was the senator and just one was the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and the other was with the conservative business group. And it was just a brutal confrontation, not only between them, but between the people who worked for them. Obviously, we didn't want to get involved in it, and it wasn't to our interest. I can't, as far as the assassination goes, I don't think it played any part in that.

HARTIGAN: But you have had experience in advancing in other cities, and from my experience, and certainly from yours too, there's always been factions in cities. Was this more excessive than any of the others you ran into?

CORCORAN: This was the most excessive I've ever run into. And that's why I can remember this when I'm relating this conversation to you. I have not looked over any of my records, or any of my memorabilia and I can't even think of some of the cities. As I go along, I think, yes, I was in San Francisco, yes I was in Boston, Oklahoma City. That I—but I couldn't, I didn't remember even the cities that I advanced. I didn't even remember going out to the gym at Silver Springs. But the one Dallas trip remains in my mind. Now it could be because of the assassination, and I was down there at that, and it hit me specifically tragic that day, or it could be because of the bitter infighting within the Democratic Party. I mean the infighting was just terrible. You know, you wanted to go to Houston to see the Space Center which Thomas, Thompson Thomas, had a lot to do with. Every time we tried to do something in Dallas it was bitter. I can remember being in the headquarters there in Austin raising money. You know, the little girl calls me outside, a little Mexican girl, and she says, "Aw, these people are all against us." You know, and it was just a tough, tough situation. You know, I'm not trying to take sides and blame one group or the other. But there was a bitter, bitterness between the two political factions. Now as far as the assassination is concerned, I don't think it had anything to do with it. I can't say.

HARTIGAN: But it is an interesting study in politics. Governor Connally, he was aligned with Vice President Johnson, in that group?

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CORCORAN: I would think so, I would think so. Although the night we arrived, for the first time in October, the end of October, I'd say the 28th; I could go back and find the exact date. It was just Yarborough's and Johnson's people who met us at the airport. But I would say that Johnson was more aligned with Connally and his people. But in fairness to him, he was also trying to be fair to Yarborough. He was trying to be more of a peacemaker, if I can use the word. And I don't know, you know, I don't know.... In fact, while we were there, on the first trip in October of that year, Lyndon Johnson, the day that I was working on the fundraising activities, and Bruno was traveling

around, Lyndon Johnson flew, as vice president, flew into Austin that day and stayed over night at his suite in the Driskill Hotel, if I can remember correctly. You know and I didn't have any contact with him other than the fact that he came in while we were there. We were working on the trip.

HARTIGAN: So, as vice president he did make an attempt to rise above the...?

CORCORAN: I think he made an attempt to rise above both groups and be the peacemaker. And I think he tried to be a peacemaker as far as the motorcade was concerned, as far as the seating at the banquet that night was concerned. And I think his people tried to be a peacemaker. I know that Moyers came down there and tried to help raise money and tried to be a peacemaker and was working. I think Marvin Watson came up, think he was working for Lone Star Steel then. No, I think that he did try to help, but I think he was caught between both factions. But it was not.... It was tough. It was as tough you know, you talk about politics in Boston or New York or someplace, or California, this was tough politics. You talk about the tough politics of Jesse Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh], and them in California, this was tough.

HARTIGAN: So this really measured up to the tough?

CORCORAN: This got into personality, you know, as well as philosophies.

HARTIGAN: Deep and bitter?

CORCORAN: Deep and bitter. In other words this was deep and bitter.

HARTIGAN: Jim, you had other activities in the Kennedy Administration. Would you care to comment on them?

CORCORAN: Well, I'm trying to think of the activity. You know, the activities.... Did a lot of things. Took people over to the, you know, candidates running for office, take them over to the Rose Garden and have their picture taken.

HARTIGAN: That was the area I was angling for, the participation and concern that the administration had for electing congressmen and senators. Didn't they play a part in that?

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CORCORAN: Oh yes. We tried to get good Democratic congressmen elected. We would take the members over, not only people running on the Democratic ticket, and we'd go over to the Rose Garden, and the President would come out of his office and stand on the steps. And as.... We'd take one up, two up, three up, to have their picture taken with the President. In fact, we even took all of the Democratic senators who were up in 1962, and just to show you the concern we'd bring them into the Cabinet room

and the room outside of his office. There'd be Evelyn Lincoln's office, and outside the Cabinet room, and we'd bring the senators and for instance, he'd be at a meeting in there. One day when we went we had Carl Hayden [Carl T. Hayden] with us, who was a very elderly man. Well, the President was concerned. It was a hot day and he didn't want him, he was up for reelection in '62, and he didn't want him out in the sun or walking around. So we brought him down and took care of him. Then we'd bring him into the office and he'd sit and chat, and have his picture taken with the President all for their reelection.

HARTIGAN: So he was really a campaigner for the Party?

CORCORAN: Oh sure. He was a campaigner for the Party. He spent all this time really trying to help get Democratic candidates get elected. If he wasn't a campaigner for the party, look what he did for Dick Hughes [Richard J. Hughes] in New Jersey when he was running for governor. Right after he got elected he went up to New Jersey and helped him get elected. He set up.... We did a lot of campaigning for the Party when, for instance, that's probably what caused his downfall in Dallas.... He's down there campaigning for the harmony of the Party. In one respect although, had he not been down there, had he walked away from, obviously, I'm sure, although I didn't relate to him, that someone told him about the infighting that was going down in Texas. He could not have been oblivious to this. Someone must have told him about the infighting with in the party. It was in all the papers. And had he not been down there trying to play the harmony game and get Connally and Yarborough together for the good of the Democratic Party, he'd probably be alive today. Although I don't think that had anything to do with the assassination. The fact is, that he went down there trying to help. When we went up to Boston for that fundraiser, we brought all of New England down. In other words, Vermont, New Hampshire, all of the political people in New England came in. Bill Hathaway [William Dodd Hathaway], who is now the Senator from Maine, was state chairman then. He worked on the dinner, came down to Boston, participated. So, of course, he was.... We, he went out to California and worked for Governor Brown's [Edmund G. Brown] reelection, if I remember correctly. I can't remember whether he actually did, but we did. And.... Sure he was a worker for the Party. And we worked through Jess Unruh and a lot of the people.

HARTIGAN: You must have certainly read various reports about the assassination and the activity surrounding it and possibly you read the Warren Report [Warren Commission Report]. Or I'm sure you have read excerpts of it. Does your experience coincide with the findings of the assassination of John F. Kennedy?

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CORCORAN: I think the final findings are correct. I have no doubt in my mind, from what I've read that it was done by Harvey Lee Oswald [Lee Harvey Oswald] and he acted as a single individual. And that would relate to all of the people I worked with on the campaign and that I have known. I just have no.... All the other stuff is superfluous. In other words, the final conclusion why he was there and all the infighting and all, are one thing. But the fact that he was there, the fact that he did, was assassinated, I think

it proves in my.... I am firmly convinced. And everyone that I've known that worked that campaign, or anyone that I've known, the press and the people that were around. People were on the phones to the advance men in the advance car.... I think Bill Burns [William J. Burns] was down there.... Are all convinced it was Oswald, and Oswald alone.

HARTIGAN: And that the Warren Report in effect is...?

CORCORAN: The Warren Report is correct. I mean, you can bring up every reason that [it] is not correct, but the sole fact remains, is that you can always doubt something. Harvey Lee Oswald assassinated John Kennedy and he did it by himself. And I don't think that anyone who was close to John Kennedy, who worked in the political arena as I did, or worked in the White House on the transition team or who.... Were involved. If you take everybody who went to Texas, or all the people who were involved in that advance trip, I don't think there's anyone who knew what was going on would tell you any different. You know, a lot of people read reports and things that are speculative later on. Just like I'm talking now.... I'm talking thirteen years later from my recollection, it could be wrong. But I was there on the scene. I had been in Dallas. I had been in Austin. And I don't think there was one iota of a shred of interest or of evidence to prove anything else. You can always come back and speculate why.

HARTIGAN: Jim, in general terms, well, first of all there's one other question I would like to ask you. You have been involved in a lot of advance work, both before John Kennedy became president, and during the campaign.

CORCORAN: Right.

HARTIGAN: You were also involved in some specialized advanced work that took place while he was the president.

CORCORAN: Right.

HARTIGAN: This puts you in a position to work closely with the Secret Service people.

CORCORAN: Right.

HARTIGAN: And closely with the President on his trips. Now you're aware of the rash of accusations being made by more than one woman, with reference to their relationship with the President. Now, I've asked this question of

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Secret Service people and I'm going to ask you. From your recollection, and some of these occasions would have had to take place on the trips. From your recollection, personally, were you ever aware of any of these functions, extra-curricular functions that were taking place?

CORCORAN: No. I'm not only not aware, but I don't believe them Bill. I'll tell you why. Quite frankly not only did none ever happen on any trip that I was on, because it just is not possible when you're president of the United States, with all the people involved. For instance, if we were having a fundraiser in Washington, D.C., and I was working at the White House at the time, entertainers like Danny Kaye, and who was that woman comedian the funny one from Texas? I forgot her name now, she's a.... But anyhow and Judy Garland, a lot of these entertainers would come to town. Well you'd go over to the Mayflower and pick them up. Now I'm working in the West Wing of the Executive Office. You gotta clear them with the agents, clear them with the guards, bring them all in. I'd bring them in, and we'd bring them all up, and keep them there until it was time. There was no possible way anybody's running in and out of the White House without everybody knowing about it. Anybody who's worked at the White House knows that. First of all they've got to get upstairs. They got an agent at the bottom of the stairs, where you go up to the living quarters. They got all kinds of security, all kinds of checklists. First of all you call over there. You get them cleared. You get them on a checklist. You get this, you get that. It is inconceivable to me that you can do all this without somebody knowing about it, other than somebody who speculating about it or somebody who is dead and not alive. But those of us who were involved, and I was involved, heck I worked in the Executive Office and everyday of my I'd go to work. You had to have a pass to get in with your picture on it. You had to have security clearance. Now it's inconceivable to me that you can come into the White House with all of these things going on, and have this come out thirteen years later in all the press when half of the people are dead and everybody's trying to write a book or make a fast buck. So I just don't believe any of it. It's just incredible. I just don't see how it could have happened.

HARTIGAN: In other words, from your experience, just the physical make-up of the operation itself doesn't lend itself...?

CORCORAN: Right. The President doesn't have any freedom. I wouldn't want to be president of this country. But that's the one thing I found in the residency: the lack of privacy. You tell me when the President had any few private moments to himself. God, he couldn't even.... If you went over to take a, any time he was in or out of that office it was logged in. I mean, he just didn't have any private moments to himself. So it's inconceivable, the physical make-up, you know, you got butlers on duty. What, are you going to throw everybody out of the White House? I heard one story about some guy going up to the second floor. I think that's the most bunch of hogwash I've ever seen. I don't believe anybody went to the second floor of the White House other than his own family. And I don't think a lot of bureaucrats are running in the White House, and going up to the second floor. And you know it as well as I do. And everybody who worked in that White House knows bureaucrats weren't running up to the second floor of the White

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House, and going around the rooms. They weren't even going to walk into his office because access to his office was controlled. You know, people call you from the field and say, "Well

you're working at the White House, go tell the President something." Well that's foolish. Anybody who works at the White House knows that the President's schedule is tightly controlled. He has to see certain people. He's got to make his schedule. That he can't be talking to two hundred political appointments every day of his life, because everybody'd be in there vying for his attention. So it goes through certain people and.... It's all a bunch of hogwash.

HARTIGAN: Jim, just to finish up. In general terms, what were your personal evaluations of President Kennedy?

CORCORAN: Well, obviously I never was able to sit down and talk to President Kennedy personally, you know, for an hour or two. But President Kennedy was a guy to me who had dignity, you know, the common word for it was that he was a real class guy. You know, I mean, he was just, I was, the times I was privileged to be in his company, or around him. I was over there when the course, when the astronaut Glenn [John Glenn] was over there. And, you know, I'm thinking back, many times, you know, you'd be on advance trips, or you'd be called over there, there are all these other people in the conversation or around. But he was very dignified, reserved, classy individual. He had what none of these other candidates have today, he had dignity. You know, it was just something about Kennedy that inspired people. I was always inspired when I was in his company. I mean he was just a very smart, intellectually classy individual. I mean he was.... He had dignity. He wasn't coarse or rude or inconsiderate of people, didn't yell at you, you know, I mean, he didn't, he was just a.... I have nothing but the most admiration for John Kennedy. He was a great man. Obviously I wouldn't have worked for him if I didn't think that. And I think maybe I'm prejudiced. But certainly when you put John Kennedy on TV now and look back and look at the presidents this country's had since Franklin D. Roosevelt, who I was a great admirer of and you look at, you know, just look at, compare the dignity and the posture and the courage of the man compared to some of these other men.

HARTIGAN: You never regret having been associated with him?

CORCORAN: Nope, or the people with him. And I'd like to say this, you know Bill, you look back on other administrations, and obviously I'm proud because I worked with the Kennedy Administration, but there was never, never one scandal in the Kennedy Administration. Politically there weren't a bunch of subterfuge like Watergate, and money under the table, everything was above board. I'll give you a good example. When I was working over at the White House, we were obviously working on a transition period, preparing the papers to send over to the Oval Office, or wherever it was to see who would be an ambassador, some guy came in and he wanted to be an ambassador to some small country, company.... And I forgot who talked to him, whether it was Maguire or someone. He said, "Look, I want you to get this straight. There's nothing for sale in this Administration. That's it. You got the qualifications, we'll consider you with the rest of the

people. Get your papers. There's nothing for sale." And I think that's one of the things everybody forgets. There was not one scandal in the Kennedy Administration. There were no "vicuna coats," no Watergate, no money under the table....

HARTIGAN: No indictments?

CORCORAN: No indictments. And there hasn't been one person who worked for John Kennedy that I know of, who worked close to him, politically or in domestic areas like Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] had policy, or McGeorge Bundy in foreign policy, who worked for him, not people who are way out on the fringes, who never worked in the White House or the National Committee, and never made trips. Not one of them ever was involved in any scandal that I know of. And I think that's, that says a lot for John Kennedy and the people that he chose to work directly for him. And the people that they chose to work under them. That shows the man's character.

HARTIGAN: Thank you very much Jim. There's one other thought I'd like to leave with you. If you can think of anybody, in your experience, later on, who would be a source of an interview for the Oral [History] department of the Kennedy Library, I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me about it and possibly we can set up an appointment with them, and they can contribute also, to this great oral history we're making for John F. Kennedy. And going through your memorabilia, if there are anything that you feel that you would like to donate to the library that would be of interest to the library, I'd appreciate it, to let me and we'll have somebody from the library come down and evaluate it and give it proper use...

CORCORAN: Yes, I have pictures at home that I'll be glad to give...

HARTIGAN: ...in the history of John F. Kennedy.

CORCORAN: I've got a lot of things that I'd probably like to give. I've got telegrams, and I've got, you know, stuff left over from the funeral, and all kinds of pictures. Maybe some of them they have, maybe some they don't have. But I'll go look over my records, and I'll pick them out, and if there's anything they want, they're entitled to it.

HARTIGAN: And I'll have somebody evaluate it from the archives. Thank you very much Jim Corcoran.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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