

Andrew E. Oehmann Oral History Interview – RFK#1, 12/07/1970
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Biographical Note

Andrew E. Oehmann was Executive Assistant, Robert F. Kennedy, 1961 - 1964. This interview covers Oehmann's first encounter with Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], Oehmann's appointment under the Kennedy administration and work requirements, and the settlement of the General Aniline & Film Corporation, among other topics.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Andrew E. Oehmann

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Andrew E. Oehmann – RFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

ANDREW E. OEHMANN

December 7, 1970
Washington, D.C.

By James A. Oesterle

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Project
of the Kennedy Library

OEHMANN: . . . he insisted that the law clerks move on. My predecessor had gone to the Lands Division. We had an agreement with the judge we would move on and find replacements. That's how I came to the Criminal Division at Justice [Department].

OESTERLE: Where had you gone to school?

OEHMANN: I went to Georgetown Law at night, Foreign Service School at night. I passed the bar in 1937, graduated in 1938. In 1940 I went with Judge [Robert H.] Jackson.

OESTERLE: So you were Let's see, you started in '41, and then you left in 1943, I guess, to go off to the Navy.

OEHMANN: Yeah. In February of '43 I went to the Navy Reserve. In February of '46 I was released to inactive duty and came back to the Justice Department in the Appellate Section, where I had been before, writing briefs in opposition to petitions for certiorari and helping U. S. attorneys prepare briefs in appellate courts. It seems to me, about after two years, in about '45, I transferred into the section which handled regulatory agencies, the statutes under which the regulatory agencies like the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Trade Commission,--there were a lot--the Civil Aeronautics Act, Civil Aeronautics Board

I stayed there until 1948, about December 1948, when I went to the United States Attorneys Office in Washington as an

assistant. I tried cases there in the district court for six months. At the end of that time, I brought the grand jury over to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] for its usual tour. They had been to Lorton [National Training School for Boys]. And after I left them in Mr. [J. Edgar] Hoover's office with the aide who was going to take them on tour, I stopped by to see [James M.] Jim McInerney, who was first assistant, Tax Division, who asked me to transfer to Tax because they need attorneys with trial experience there.

I came back to the Department in the Tax Division and stayed there until early 1952 when McInerney, who was then Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division, asked me to come down to his office as executive assistant to him. Nineteen fifty-two was the year that [Theron L.] Caudle was indicted and [J. Howard] McGrath was fired by [Harry S.] Truman and the congressional committees were investigating the Department of Justice. It was a hectic year.

Early in 1953, after the administration changed,--[Herbert, Jr.] Brownell became attorney general--I went back to the Tax Division and stayed there until 1958. At that time I was first assistant in the Tax Division. I left to go into a private practice with a former schoolmate. Then in 1961 when Bob came to the department as attorney general, I came back as his executive assistant. I knew the workings of the Tax Division, the Criminal Division. And because at that time I was executive assistant, the Criminal Division also handled civil rights and internal security matters, I was familiar with the work of those divisions and the United States Attorney's Office. I suppose that's why he offered me that job.

I had known him briefly in 1952 when he first came to work for the department. He was the junior attorney on the case in New York involving the commissioner of internal revenue, Joseph Nunan, and the New York regional attorney in charge of fraud cases, [Daniel A.] Bolich, B-o-l-i-c-h, who were both indicted and prosecuted for either bribery or some kind of graft. Bob carried the briefcase on that matter for John Mitchell, one of our senior trial attorneys. That's when I first met him. I didn't get to know him then, but I met him.

OESTERLE: Is there anything that stands out in your mind about this first meeting?

OEHMANN: With Bob?

OESTERLE: With Bob. It was a casual meeting, and as you said, you didn't get to know him.

OEHMANN: It was very casual. I know that Jim McInerney, who was, of course, a very close friend of the Ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy] and Jack--later President Kennedy--was the attorney for the family in many

matters. Jim told me later that when the Ambassador asked him to put Bob on--now, Bob had either worked for the Hoover Commission [on Government Reorganization] before that, or just after that. Somewhere in there he did some work for the Hoover Commission which investigated or made a survey of the administrative agencies, I believe. Well, anyway, when his father asked Jim McInerney to put him on, I remember McInerney told his father, "Well, he'll have to bring in Form 57." And anybody in government knows that's a long application form. Bob came into work the following Monday with the form, and he had signed it, and that was all. So he went to work. He said, "Here's my form, signed." He was impatient with the detail work like a form would require.

It was during that time, too, that Roy Cohn, who was an assistant in the U.S. attorney's office in New York, was assigned to us for some matter. I can't recall right now what it was for. I may before this is over.

Now, we moved four attorneys, senior attorneys, out of two offices that they were occupying and crowded them all into a little room to give Roy Cohn two rooms. And the secretaries told me that all he ever did when he came down here was to call back to New York and make some arrangements for tickets for the show the next night. [Charles B.] Charlie Murray, who practices here in town and who had been Or to go back one step, it was in that year that [James P.] McGranery was made attorney general. McGrath was fired; McGranery came from Philadelphia where he was a judge. McInerney transferred to the Lands Division and Charlie Murray, a long time assistant U.S. attorney in Washington, came over to head up the Criminal Division. I guess after about three months Cohn, who had been more or less operating on his own, refusing to report in to us what he was doing or what he proposed to do, left. And the day he left, Murray told me he was on his way to see McGranery to tell McGranery that either Cohn was leaving or Murray was leaving. But before Murray could get there, Cohn had transferred to the McClellan Committee, where he began to get a lot of headlines, as you know, in the [Joseph R.] McCarthy hearings.

OESTERLE: Yes.

OEHMANN: Bob ended up with Cohn on that same committee, but I don't know the timing of that.

OESTERLE: That was after he had left Justice?

OEHMANN: That was after he'd left Justice, yeah.

OESTERLE: You don't recall the Robert Kennedy meeting with Roy Cohn during this period, do you?

OEHMANN: No. No.

OESTERLE: How did your appointment . . .

OEHMANN: They were on separate assignments. As far as I remember now, Bob was not working with or for Cohn. The only thing I remember him working on was the Bolich and Nunan case in New York with Mitchell.

OESTERLE: Is there anything about that one case that stands out in your mind?

OEHMANN: No. It was unique, or it was an outstanding case in that it was the Commissioner of Internal Revenue who was indicted, and his New York office chief. But aside from that, I don't recall any interesting stories.

OESTERLE: How did your appointment come about? Quite a period of time had passed in between this first meeting with Robert Kennedy and the Kennedy administration came into . . .

OEHMANN: After the election McInerney, who by this time was in private practice I guess, he left the department in '59. He was a holdover assistant attorney general of the Lands Division. They had some trouble qualifying a new Republican appointee, so Jim was there for about a year and then went into outside practice. After the election, he, like many of the others close to the Kennedys, was submitting names. And he said, "I'm going to put your name in for the Tax Division for Justice Department." I said, "Well, the only thing I would want there would be the Tax Division." I'd been fourteen years there, and I had had every job that you could hold without a Presidential appointment.

Well, we found out that Bryon [White] had committed that division to [Louis F.] Lou Oberdorfer. Bob told me one day, he said, "I would like to have you, but Bryon had already committed it to Lou." He said, "But I don't have an executive assistant." I said, "Well, I don't know what the job requires." He said, "Well, look into it. I'm not sure myself." Well, I checked into it and saw what the job involved, and I knew that I might be able to help there because I knew the work of about five divisions. That's how it worked out.

OESTERLE: What did your work require?

OEHMANN: Review of every legal matter that had to be submitted to the attorney general for review or for action on his part. At the division level, most of the decisions were made by the assistant attorney general. In each division, however, there were certain cases,

certain matters, which had to be submitted to the attorney general for action, for final action, and sometimes for preliminary investigative action. In all the divisions, too, if there was a unique question involved or a sensitive question involved--like, well, the [John W.] McCormack case would be a typical, sensitive case--the division head always referred that to the deputy and the attorney general for approval.

The Antitrust Division, every investigation of any major size--and most of those were major investigations--were referred to the attorney general for approval. Any consent order which would dispose of a pending case. Just about every action that the Antitrust Division took was submitted to the attorney general. I don't mean to say that once he approved something that everything took place in the investigation or in the development of the case came up, although he was kept well informed. But the initiation of a prosecution or a civil case or an injunction matter would always be submitted to him. That was one division whose work I had not been familiar with, and I had to learn its work rapidly because the first group of cases on the desk when I got there, or that came in, were the bank cases.

There was some question whether the banks being regulated by the controller's office and by the Federal Reserves Board, whether the Justice Department had any jurisdiction to prevent a bank pact acquiring another bank or applying anti-trust law to bank mergers, the so-called primary jurisdiction question, whether the banking agencies had the primary jurisdiction to permit mergers and whether that jurisdiction overrode that Antitrust Division's right to break up and prevent a merger not in the public interest.

One of the first recommendations from the Antitrust Division was that we go ahead and challenge. I think one of them was a Lexington bank merger. There was one in Philadelphia, and there was one in Texas. I don't remember who was against it, but there were some who thought we were going too far. I recommended that we go ahead with it because the Supreme Court had decided, or just about at that time decided, that in the regulation of gas pipelines, the Federal Power Commission which certificated interstate gas pipes lines, although it had jurisdiction to permit mergers, acquisitions, still the Department of Justice had overriding jurisdiction to apply to antitrust laws. And this was in the El Paso case. Am I getting away from . . .

OESTERLE: No, no. This is very interesting.

OEHMANN: Well, I think that about covers in a general way what we did.

OESTERLE: What is your early impression as you were adjusting to this new role as executive assistant

to the attorney general and the attorney general was adjusting to his new work along with many of the other assistants, deputies that had been appointed? What was your impression of these early days? Was it an exciting time, I guess, with high morale and a feeling that there was a lot to be done?

OEHMANN: Oh, there was a feeling and, of course, he was responsible for it, as far as I could see--that we were getting into high gear. I don't know how else to express it, but everybody seemed The morale seemed to just lift after he'd been there awhile. He took a definite interest in what everybody was doing, at least to the extent of the time that he could devote to showing that interest. We started Although not the first six months, it wasn't long before he was having regular meetings with the staff.

Now, ordinarily the attorney general meets with the division head and maybe the first assistant and second assistant. And once in a while one of the senior attorneys, if he's working a major case, will get into a conference with the attorney general and the deputy and the solicitor general. Very seldom is the attorney at the working level brought into those meetings. Well, we scheduled meetings--I think it was three times a week--so that within a few months, he had met every attorney from junior attorneys to senior attorneys in the Department of Justice. They came in and put their feet up on the desk and had a bull session. And some of them raised hell. You know some of them had gripes. Some were good, and some weren't. But it was a refreshing experience for those guys that had been in the department twenty years and had never been on the fifth floor. And it helped morale.

OESTERLE: Was this the attorney general's idea?

OEHMANN: Yeah. Yeah.

OESTERLE: Did you work quite closely with Bryon White?

OEHMANN: Oh, sure. Bryon was always acting wherever Bob-- when the attorney general wasn't here. And almost everything that came to us from a division head came through his office and either had his recommendation on it or his notation on it. And he was very good, too. He was a good lawyer, he is a good lawyer--good practical approach. And he's a scholar, too.

OESTERLE: Were you involved in any way as the appointments were being made, especially in terms of US attorneys and marshals?

OEHMANN: Once in a while I got involved, but not too much.

I was born here and lived here all my life except for fifteen years in Maryland in a suburb, I've been in the District [of Columbia]. So I didn't know much about the politics in the states. I got in on some of the appointments here in the District of Columbia, but the administrative assistant had more to do with that than I. See, [John] Siegenthaler had been there right all through the campaign with Bob. So had [James W.] Symington. And John Nolan is the other boy, N-o-l-a-n. He had been through the campaign. Well, of course, Byron and [Joseph F.] Joe Dolan, who came in as Byron's assistant, had been active in the campaign. Who's the boy from Cincinnati? [William A.] Geoghegan, Bill Geoghegan, Bill Geoghegan. He's from Ohio . .

OESTERLE: And John Reilly from Chicago.

OEHMANN: Yeah. John Reilly who was the federal trade commissioner until recently. And then Bob brought in from Philadelphia for a short time a man whose name I'll think of before we finish here, who was knowledgeable of politics up here.

OESTERLE: Grady? Was there a Grady from Philadelphia?

OEHMANN: [William] Brady, B-r-a-d-y. Bill Brady.

OESTERLE: What do you recall during these early days that particularly interested the new attorney general?

OEHMANN: I don't know of anything that stands out.

OESTERLE: How did he spend his time, especially early on in the administration? Did he stay at the desk all day, or was he involved in meetings?

OEHMANN: Well, he worked full-time at the job, and when I say full-time, I mean from 8 or 8:30 to 8 o'clock at night. But he wasn't always at the desk. He had a lot of meetings with the division heads. He started weekly staff luncheons right away at which we would discuss whatever case was, well, giving him the most trouble or giving him the most publicity or what might be coming up. But I don't know that any one thing stands out. Looking back now, it doesn't seem to me that he really got wound up about anything until Mississippi, University of Mississippi. And I can't tell you now when we started, when we really got going on [James R.] Hoffa investigation, the anti-racketeering.

OESTERLE: What do you recall about that?

OEHMANN: Well, only that we beefed up the crime and anti-

racketeering investigations, putting task forces in the major cities. Because the attorney general was a brother of the president, the FBI, the Internal Revenue [Service] and all the investigative agencies pooled their information and cooperated to an extent they had never, ever cooperated in before. A unit was set up in the Criminal Division to gather this information. I remember the first case that developed: A racketeer who had been picked up a number of times on serious crimes and had always been released was finally caught and convicted of filing a false statement with the Federal Communications Commission for a license. And it developed as a result of the pooling of the information over there.

OESTERLE: You recall his name?

OEHMANN: No. No. And I can't recall the mechanics of how it worked out. But it was an example of what could be done if some central agency, collected, and collated all of the information on a particular racketeer or lawbreaker. Of course, the FBI has always been jealous of its investigative file and its prerogatives. Internal Revenue is the same way. But I think, during those four years there was cooperation that there had never been before. We had month . . . well, I guess in the latter part of '62 and early '63 we had meetings every two weeks. The task forces would come in from Florida or from Chicago, from Ohio or from the West Coast and have a round table discussion. Each group leader would tell what they are doing, what leads they were running down and what was developing.

OESTERLE: Did the attorney general usually attend these meetings?

OEHMANN: Did he? He supervised all the meetings, and he knew what was going on. If a guy could come back to a meeting six weeks later and say something that didn't jibe with what he said before--and there'd be from fifty to a hundred in these meetings--Bob would remember it. He had a remarkable memory for things like that that he was interested in. But these were meetings he never missed.

OESTERLE: Of course, the Hoffa case was one that lasted for quite some time.

OEHMANN: Yeah.

OESTERLE: Did the attorney general maintain his interest in this throughout?

OEHMANN: Oh yeah. Yeah. Developments and the progress of the investigations were reported to him regularly.

I sat in, I guess, on most of them, but it got to the point where I'd have a desk piled like this with cases to be reviewed and gotten out, there would be a meeting going on, I'd sit in for five or ten minutes, then I'd try to leave. There just wasn't enough time. It was interesting, a whole lot more interesting than these reviews that had to be made of cases coming up from other divisions.

OESTERLE: Do you recall any difference in terms of working relationships between the attorney general and his deputy, between White's appointment and then later Nicholas Katzenbach?

OEHMANN: Well, Nick had been head of the Office of Legal Counsel while Byron was deputy. And whenever there was a question, a new question or a tough question to be decided, Bob would frequently get them all in, the division heads, the deputy, and sometimes he would include Archie Cox, who was solicitor general, you know, to get the reactions of all of them. Of course, they were all good lawyers. Burke Marshall would come in; Ramsey [Clark] would come in. [Herbert J., Jr.] Jack Miller was one of the best lawyers in the department. He was the only Republican on the staff. He had been attorney for the [Board of] Monitors of the [International Brotherhood of] Teamsters, for the Trustees.

So it wasn't as though Katzenbach was a brand new fresh face coming in when he just moved over to the other office. By that time he knew how the attorney general thought about most things, and Bob knew how he thought it wasn't such a great change. I don't think Nick was as politically sharp as Byron.

OESTERLE: Of course, most of the appointments had already been made under Byron White. And under Nicholas Katzenbach there were not that many appointments to be made, perhaps some of them ongoing ones.

OEHMANN: Just some replacements.

OESTERLE: Some replacements.

OEHMANN: Although, there were a lot of judgeships after Byron moved up.

OESTERLE: Were these appointments really difficult problems for the attorney general because of the political implications and having to check through . . .

OEHMANN: I don't know that I got into enough of them to really answer that, although my impression was they weren't any more difficult than they were for any other attorney general. There were always candidates for

the good judgeships. Every now and then it would be somebody with something in his background that he had neglected to tell us about, or somebody would go off at the last minute. All kinds of complications developed. I think that's just the way That's normal down there.

OESTERLE: Early in the Kennedy administration there had been some criticism on the part of, I guess the FBI, in regard to many of the appointments that had been made. And there was a question about whether or not the FBI reports were being taken seriously enough. Do you recall anything about that?

OEHMANN: No. No. Was that before the Bar, ABA [American Bar Association] committee was appointed or began to review appointments?

OESTERLE: I'm not sure. I just heard this alluded to quite casually that the Kennedy administration went ahead and made appointments even before the FBI . . .

OEHMANN: Report was in?

OESTERLE: . . . report was in. Of course, there's a great deal of pressure on any administration to fill the slots and not delay.

OEHMANN: That may have been in connection with the nomination of the man for [District of Columbia] commissioner here. A Negro White House assistant was nominated for commissioner of the District of Columbia. It developed at the last minute that he owed two or three years taxes. There were liens outstanding. But except for his case, I don't know of anything other where the department was criticized for moving too fast. I know of one where the appointment was on the president's desk, and was signed, when I got information from people I knew here in the Bar Association. I called the White House right away, and it was withdrawn. He never got it. But that's not a typical case at all.

OESTERLE: You remember who that was?

OEHMANN: Well, I'd rather not say. [Interruption]. One candidate for judgeship in the District of Columbia whose last name was [Charles T.] Duncan had failed to indicate in the questionnaire he filled out, which most of the candidates submitted, that he had been disciplined by the district court here in a case where he was acting in a fiduciary capacity by being dismissed from the case when the court learned that Duncan had misused the

client's funds. We did not learn this until a group of attorneys whom I had known in the District of Columbia for many years, called to tell me that if his appointment was approved they were going to publicize the fact that he had been disciplined for misuse of client's funds. We immediately contacted Duncan to ask him whether there was anything in his background, in his legal career, of a disciplinary nature, whether any adverse action had been taken against him by any court of record. And he said no. We then asked him about the specific case, and he admitted the facts, but insisted that this was not important enough for him to mention. We brought this immediately to the attention of the White House and learned later that Duncan's commission as judge has been signed, but it was withdrawn on receipt of this information. He was later made corporation counselor for the District of Columbia and is now, I think, in private practice. But it would not have It would have caused very bad publicity if the appointment had gone through.

OESTERLE: Do you recall any other cases where senators and members of the House of Representatives had any particular interest in a candidate and brought pressure on the attorney general's Office, either for a candidate or against a candidate?

OEHMANN: I can't recall the names of specific candidates, but the senators, of course, had the most to say about appointments in their states, always having the right to veto an appointment as personally objectionable to that senator. It seems to me that in most instances, the senator, the senior senator or the administration senator, would have several candidates, ranked one, two, and three. The administration tried to follow his desires.

OESTERLE: You didn't get involved in this though, too much?

OEHMANN: No. No.

OESTERLE: This is pretty much the responsibility of John Seigenthaler and . . .

OEHMANN: Byron White.

OESTERLE: . . . Reilly in terms of the attorneys and marshals?

OEHMANN: Principally Byron White's office: Bill Geoghegan, Reilly and Mr. White.

OESTERLE: Later on when the Mississippi affair occurs, does this really capture the attorney general's interest to a degree that it's difficult for him

to accomplish some of the ongoing work, day-to-day work that is on his desk?

OEHMANN: Well, the day-to-day work wasn't neglected. Usually by the time a case got to the attorney general there was a recommendation by a senior trial attorney, by a section head, by the division head himself, an okay or a question raised by the deputy; so by the time I got it, it had been thoroughly worked over. Most of the time he followed my recommendation, and most of the time I followed the recommendation of the division head. In the cases where there was a difference, I would go back to the division and sit down with the attorney himself.

This was the one thing I think about the department that may have been a little different from prior operations. The division heads, knowing that I had been there for, oh, thirteen or fourteen years--I knew somebody in almost every division; I knew a lot of men there--didn't resent my going back to the guy who had worked on the case, if I had a question that he could answer, without going down the chain of command to get to him. They preferred to, and they didn't question my going directly to the working level. And of course, it helped move things faster.

In cases where I didn't agree--and there were a few--sometimes he'd go along with me, and sometimes he wouldn't. I would work it out while he was devoting his time to these other things. This was one reason why I couldn't always sit in on everything that was going on in the front office, because I had to keep these other things moving.

OESTERLE: Is there anything that stands out in your mind as being different in emphasis in the administration of Attorney General [John N.] Mitchell and Attorney General Kennedy?

OEHMANN: No. I don't know enough about Mitchell's operations internally to answer that. It's a much quieter office up there. I sat in the office next to the attorney general's--I think there are about four secretaries there now--and it was almost like one big office. I had no problems going in and out. If I had something that he had to act on or had to see right away it was all right. I'd go right in or go in the back door and come around the back of the desk. It was very informal, the operation, compared to what it had been before, what I had seen of it before, and the little bit I've seen of it since then.

OESTERLE: How about the earlier administration of Attorney General [William F.] Rogers?

OEHMANN: Well, prior to Kennedy's administration, to be specific, the executive assistant was around the

corridor and down the hall from the attorney general with a suite of about four offices in a very quite setup almost like a library. And the executive assistant worked under much different conditions from what I did. When Bob moved in he said, "I would much prefer to have you right next door, right here." At that time [Angela M.] Angie Novello was there, right outside his door, and I took the next desk.

That was quite an experience. And it was quite different from the method of operating before in that it was informal. I knew what was going on all the time, sometimes too much. It was very difficult to work sometimes. If it got too bad, I'd take a pile of work and go around to the library. If there was something that I had to get out that afternoon and had to concentrate on for a little while and there was a group of protesters in the next room and they were in and out, I'd just leave and go down the hall.

OESTERLE: A group of protesters?

OEHMANN: Well, the sit-ins began to develop. Small groups would sit in the outer office and then they would trickle into the next room. They'd be right outside the door to my room, and there'd be people coming back and forth. At one time [Achmed] Sukarno came to see the attorney general. I can't fix the time exactly, but Bob had a group in his office. It may have been Arabian students--some group that was protesting about being deported, or they I believe that's who it was at the time. And I remember one of the girls, Angie, came running back to say, "You know that receptionist forgot to tell us that Sukarno was out there, and he's been waiting half an hour." She went in quick, and Bob begged off from this group that was still there. He wouldn't throw them out or dismiss them. He went into the back room--of course, there were several back rooms to his suite--and Sukarno went back there. But this little man, when he came thought the office, was so mad you could He was just burned up. They had let him sit out there for half an hour.

OESTERLE: Perhaps without realizing who he was?

OEHMANN: That's right. The girl in the front hadn't realized who he was.

OESTERLE: When did you first become involved in the settlement of the General Aniline & Film Corporation?

OEHMANN: Well, when Early in '61 one of the first things I had to do was to go to New York and sit in on the board meetings as the attorney general's

representative. Attempts to settle the case had been made for the past ten or fifteen years, I guess. So it was something that was hanging over the GAF [General Aniline & Film Corporation] operation the whole time. I can't tell you when the first contact was made, but I do remember that [Alfred] Schaefer from the Union Bank of Switzerland, who was very . . . Well, he was obnoxious to me. I refused to let him see the attorney general. He was insisting that they were entitled to 60 or 70 percent of the proceeds of the sale. I told him that was ridiculous; I wouldn't recommend it, and I wouldn't even make an appointment for him to see the attorney general. So he left.

He got to see the attorney general through somebody else. And I think it was through the sister in London.

OESTERLE: I beg your pardon?

OEHMANN: The sister, Bob's . . . Oh, the Prince, [Stanislas] Radziwill.

OESTERLE: Oh, yes. Lee Radziwill.

OEHMANN: Yes. I think they made the appointment with the attorney general. Now, he either saw Schaefer first in London--I know he saw him later in our office. And it was not long after that that he asked Bill [William H. Orrick, Jr.] to undertake the negotiations to settle.

OESTERLE: This is William Orrick?

OEHMANN: Yes. We had just assigned one of the senior Civil Division attorneys to the case to press the applications for discovery, to get access to documents and other evidence that the Swiss had been stalling on for some years. And this attorney, Jack Wolfe, got access to a lot of them, worked the case up. He felt strongly that we had a good chance of winning it; in other words, that we could show the Swiss ownership was just a cover for the German ownership and we were entitled to a forfeiture of the stock. Of course, the claim of the Swiss was that it was not German-owned, but Swiss-owned, so we weren't entitled to vest it and take it.

Well, I knew Jack Wolfe a long time. He was one year ahead of me at Georgetown. I knew he was a good lawyer. I didn't think we ought to settle. But if we won, it would have gone to the court of appeals and then to the Supreme Court and then probably to the World Court. That would have, as we projected it, required about ten years. And rather than let it go that long, even if we would win it eventually--and we weren't sure we'd win, but I felt we had a good chance of winning it. I think Bob felt--and I know he discussed it with Burke, with

Bill Orrick, with maybe Ramsey; I'm not sure--it would be better if we could wind the thing up and get rid of it if we could work out a reasonable settlement. That's when Orrick was asked to negotiate a settlement. I think it worked out they got 35 percent or 40 percent, and we got the rest. I can't give you dates on that, though.

OESTERLE: Well, you were later appointed to the Board of Directors [of General Anilines].

OEHMANN: No. That was the first thing. One of the first things we had to do was set up a new board because people like Elmer Bobst were on the board. You know, he had been Nixon's financial backer. The board was Republican and we replaced them with Democrats. One of the first things I did was to review the names, check with them and see if they were willing to serve and to submit their names at the annual meeting, which was in April of '61. And right after the annual meeting, the new board met for the first time; organized; elected a chairman, an executive committee; and elected officers, elected the same officer for the coming year. But that was one of the first orders of business, because the annual meeting was soon after the administration took over, to put in a new board. It wasn't until, I guess, a year later that the settled negotiations began to percolate.

OESTERLE: You're quite satisfied with the settlement, too? It was a good one?

OEHMANN: It was good. I felt they got a little too much money. But this is You never can get two lawyers to agree on exactly how much a settlement's worth.

OESTERLE: The Swiss got too much money?

OEHMANN: Yes.

OESTERLE: Did you have the impression that there was interest from the White House on down in settling this matter?

OEHMANN: If there was any impetus from the White House, I wasn't aware of it. I know that Bob had a feeling it would be much better for the government to get out of the chemical business and sell the stock than to be in it for ten more years with the possibility that we might lose it, lose the case entirely. If we could settle it and get out of it He was probably right.

OESTERLE: Were there any other pressures working against

settlement?

OEHMANN: The question in the lawsuit is whether the Swiss owned the stock beneficially or held it as a cover for the Germans who, a lot of people felt, were not entitled to anything on a settlement. Many people felt it was German-owned from the very beginning, that the stock had been transferred into Swiss names to avoid the very thing that had happened when the United States government seized the stock. If there was a strong I assume there was a strong Jewish feeling in this regard. But I don't recall being aware that they felt any stronger than others.

OESTERLE: How long did you remain on the board of directors?

OEHMANN: I left the department in April of '64 and I stayed on the board until, oh, May or June.

OESTERLE: Of that same year?

OEHMANN: Of that same year, yes. Until that stock was sold to the public and the attorney I stayed on as representative of the attorney general until it was sold. Then when it was sold, there was a new board formed and I was off it. But I didn't leave the board when I left the department. We knew at the time that the stock would be sold in a few months. Bob asked me to stay on it as his representative for that short interim period. Can we stop then?

OESTERLE: Yes.

END OF TAPE