

Henry Brandon, Oral History Interview – 2/7/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Henry Brandon
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Biographical Note

Brandon was a personal friend of Jacqueline Bouvier and John F. Kennedy (JFK) and a journalist, associate editor, and chief correspondent for the Washington bureau of the *Sunday Times* of London from 1949 to 1983. In this interview, Brandon discusses the evolution of JFK's foreign policy views, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the reaction in the Soviet Union to JFK's assassination, among other issues.

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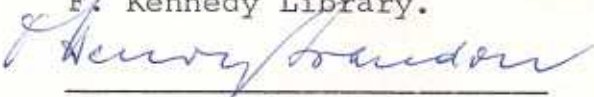
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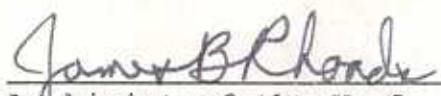
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Oral History Interview

with

Henry Brandon

February 7, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Mr. Brandon, perhaps you could begin this by telling us how you got to know John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy].

BRANDON: I met Jacqueline [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] first. I knew her before she married Mr. Kennedy. It was really through her that I met him and that I was invited to her house and that I gradually got to know him better. Then after they got married they came to my house and I went to theirs. In the beginning it was more a social relationship than a political one or a relationship of a newspaperman with a politician.

O'CONNOR: This would have been when? In 1954 or so, something like that?

BRANDON: Yes, about then. Maybe a little earlier. I would have to look it up in my diary, and I haven't done that.

[-1-]

I remember quite vividly a party in my house here. There was some congressional election going on in Massachusetts, and he was quite nervous and full of suspense all evening and spent a good deal of the time after dinner on the telephone

talking to his informants in Massachusetts to see how the election was going. I remember we had all sorts of people interested in foreign affairs that night. In those days foreign affairs didn't interest him, really, as much as later. I remember his saying (and I never dared to remind him of this), "Foreign affairs are for the experts." But it may have been partly his preoccupation that evening with the local political elections in Massachusetts that made him say that.

O'CONNOR: Would you care to contrast your impressions of him originally, or your impressions of him during the first years that you knew him, with what you thought of him later on as you got to know him better or what you thought of him as he became president?

BRANDON: Well, I...

O'CONNOR: What sort of man was he when he was, you know, just a young senator?

BRANDON: It was in 1956, I believe in May or June—I think it was in June—that I went to Newport for a wedding together with him, a wedding of a mutual friend of ours, and he was very preoccupied that weekend as to whether he should try for the vice presidency or not. This was about six weeks, I think, before the Democratic Convention in Chicago. To illustrate better what you are asking me, I said to him at the time—and I've got to admit it—I said, "But, Jack, you are still so young. You have a long future ahead of you." But he was very, he was really quite tense about it. I spent the night at his mother-in-law's [Janet Lee Auchincloss] house at Hammersmith Farm. This was the debate after dinner. It was quite clear that already then he was wondering what sort of chance he would have at this Convention to capture the vice presidential nomination, but I think he never expected to come as close as he did.

[-2-]

O'CONNOR: He didn't even seem optimistic about it at that point? He was generally optimistic.

BRANDON: No, he was really.... The question was, "Is the timing right? Is this the moment to try for it, and if so, how?" There I really saw for the first time the enormous drive in him, the ambition, the high target he had set himself.

O'CONNOR: Well, did he seem a very serious man at that stage?

BRANDON: Yes, he was very serious about it. He had these two sides to him. He could be gay and light-hearted and social and flippant, and then in the next minute he could be very serious, discuss very serious problems, ask very serious questions. He was always a very good question master and was always

fascinated to know, “Well, how would the English react to this? How would Europe react to that?” His first venture into foreign policy was his speech on Algeria; first venture into foreign affairs, and I think it was a carefully calculated move to draw general attention to his interest in foreign affairs. He was himself not absolutely sure whether the move was right, whether the position he had taken was correct, but I think at that moment what mattered really was to open up this new field. I remember he discussed this off and on before and after delivering it. I think from then on he took a very active interest in foreign affairs.

O’CONNOR: I’m surprised, really, because of his father’s [Joseph P. Kennedy] diplomatic background and his own travels, foreign travels, that he wouldn’t have exhibited a strong interest in foreign affairs, at least to personal friends, long before that.

[-3-]

BRANDON: Yes, he did. In that sense he did, but it was more in terms of questioning. It was not in terms of his presenting any clear set of views of his own. He was clearly very much influenced by what happened in England in 1940, and somehow he tried to live down the reputation of his father. His father had not much faith in Britain in those days. The dispatches issued by the State Department, the official ones, bear that out. I think in a curious way he tried to compensate for that. He also drew a certain lesson from that experience, particularly after the Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] meeting in Vienna. He then felt that this country must not be caught unprepared the way Britain was caught unprepared. But I think on the whole his time in London in those days—I didn’t know him then but from what other people told me, friends of his—he was not talking about foreign affairs in London while he was there on visits and various studies, but he did select this theme as a thesis. Obviously this was the first beginning of his awareness of the importance of foreign affairs.

O’CONNOR: How did your contacts with him continue after you, really after you first met him?

BRANDON: As a congressman and senator?

O’CONNOR: Yes.

BRANDON: Well, I saw him off and on. I saw him more socially than in his office. In fact, I don’t think I went too often to his office. As a senator, yes, but not as a congressman. I don’t remember at all being to his office as a congressman.

O’CONNOR: Well, you covered, you had covered Capitol Hill for a long, long time really. What impressions did you have of him from a business point

of view rather than from a social point of view? What impressions did you have of him as a senator?

[-4-]

BRANDON: Well, he was the easiest person to talk to from a newspaperman's point of view, and that continued even when he was the President. I think he had this marvelous gift of being absolutely frank, giving you the impression that he's telling you more than he should—and he very often did—and that you sometimes sort of looked over your shoulder whether anybody's listening and you said to yourself, "My God, I can't tell anybody about this." So he put you on your mettle, really. He never said, "This is for background only," or "This is off the record." He left it entirely up to you, which I think sometimes made it more difficult to decide what one could use and what one couldn't use and probably in the end one was more careful than one should have been.

O'CONNOR: This would be an interesting subject. I don't know whether you can remember any specific points without looking at your diary, but I was wondering if you could remember an instance where this sort of thing might have occurred.

BRANDON: There are so many, but I.... You know, there were, of course, comments on personalities that were very frank. Then there were....

O'CONNOR: I thought there might be, for example, some specific foreign policy issues, or domestic issues, as far as that goes, where he would be very critical of the regime, the policy being carried out day the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration.

BRANDON: Oh, you mean in those days?

O'CONNOR: Well, either before or later.

[-5-]

BRANDON: Yes. I don't remember too much about things that he said as a senator in terms of comments on the Administration because, you know, one accepted that a Democratic senator would be critical of a Republican Administration, although he was not as, you know, as sharp in his criticism of the Eisenhower Administration as others were. In those days he was quite measured. But I do remember once seeing him as president after a visit of Malraux [Andre Malraux], who was then, or still is, the Minister of French Culture, French Minister of Culture. And he had really, frankly, taken him over the coals and told him how much de Gaulle's [Charles A. de Gaulle] upsetting things. Immediately afterwards I.... He saw Malraux in the Cabinet Room and then walked out and took me into his office and told me more or less exactly what he'd told Malraux. Now obviously I never used that.

This is one of the Kennedy quotes relating to this conversation: “It is easy for De Gaulle to say that he does not want to negotiate with the Russians because it would be futile. Yet at the same time he refuses to make a proper contribution to the defense of Europe, he has no final responsibility for the decision of going to war and ordering the use of nuclear weapons as I have. I want to make every effort to find out whether I cannot come to some arrangement with the Russians over Berlin. What is the use of creating a prosperous, united Europe if the requirements of defense and the dangers of war are ignored?”

I also remember that at some point he asked McGeorge Bundy to call French Ambassador Alphand [Herve Alphand] not to send a diplomatic dispatch about his conversation with Malraux because he only spoke so openly in view of their friendship. (I am not clear whether he meant friendship with Alphand or Malraux).

[-6-]

O’CONNOR: Well, one issue that I thought—I didn’t mean to interrupt if you were going to say something—but one issue that I thought occurred quite early in your acquaintance with him was the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy] issue. He, throughout his career, took a lot of criticism or suspicion, at any rate, about that issue, and I wondered if he ever spoke very, very frankly or bluntly about that to you that you could recall.

BRANDON: No, I don’t. I don’t think I ever seriously raised this issue with him. You see, he was quite ill during that period, and I don’t think I saw him during that period. And then later on—oh yes, I did raise this issue. I’d forgotten about it. But this was when he was a senator and.... It was really only a very brief reference. I once discussed McCarthyism with him in connection with something that Arthur Miller said. Miller, with whom I happened to have a discussion about McCarthyism, said that if an international crisis sufficiently intense gripped the United States, McCarthyism would recur because it was the conservatives that defeated him, not the liberals or the left and not the people who really knew what he was all about. He then said, “I’m not sure that any historical period repeats itself in the exact same form. I do think the words ‘appease’ and ‘soft on communism’ and all the rest have been thrown around with some vigor in the last month or so since the U-2 crisis. Senator Scott [Hugh Doggett Scott, Jr.] of Pennsylvania stated that it was necessary for Governor Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] and myself to come and relieve ourselves of the suspicion of being ‘appeasers’ because we didn’t happen to agree with the way the Administration handled the U-2 flight. Now, it does indicate that there are those in the United States who would be glad to take the axe off the wall if political pressures sufficiently disturb them and go back to the old techniques.” And then I asked him whether he would take as strong a position in any future recurrence of McCarthyism. And he said, “I don’t agree with the technique, if that’s your question.” And that was all he said.

[-7-]

O'CONNOR: Well, of course, his criticism of McCarthy was somewhat different than the criticism of the most vigorous anti-McCarthy people in the government and public life.

BRANDON: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Okay, we can push on to another issue then, or another...

BRANDON: But I was just reminded of something as I was reading this.... Oh, yes. You see here, by saying that "I'm not sure that any historical period repeats itself in the exact same form," I remember a discussion with him after General De Gaulle had vetoed Britain's entry into the Common Market. And the official line that the State Department was giving out at the time was that this was only a brief deviation, that a united Europe would sooner or later emerge, this was only a delay. I said to Kennedy at the time that I didn't quite agree with this, that I was a Hegelian [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel] who believed that once history diverted from its original bed it never returned, the flow of history never returns to the same bed. And he said at the time, "I agree with you." But I just—thinking back at this remark here, it's already clear from this answer here that he took this Hegelian view of history.

O'CONNOR: You were, to a certain extent, at any rate, involved in watching his campaign in 1960, were you not?

BRANDON: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Can you tell us something about that? To what extent were you involved in that?

[-8-]

BRANDON: Well, I flew with him; I watched him making speeches. I was actually surprised that he didn't make the kind of.... You know, in the beginning he made some very interesting speeches on all sorts of subjects, and as the campaign continued I think he more and more felt that repetition rather than a lot of new ideas thrown about is the right approach, that you make a much greater impact by repetition, and so he limited himself more and more to half a dozen themes that were simply very critical of the Eisenhower Administration and of the Republican party rather than developing his own ideas. Although he had all these idea men around him, who were a little upset about this because he didn't use as much of their speeches as they thought he should, but I think his assessment probably was correct, that the constant emphasis of the same criticisms made much more of an impact than this idea of developing new themes. So his campaign was not really as positive and constructive as many people expected or perhaps think in retrospect that it was.

I was amazed at his stamina. I remember very well, we started one morning out at 8 o'clock in Chicago. He made his first speech between 8:00 and 9:00 in the suburbs. Then

we flew to Detroit that same morning. He made speeches from the airport, going into Detroit, and in Detroit, and we flew off at about midnight and got into New York at 3:00 a.m., something like that, and at 10:00 a.m. he was on Broadway speaking. I mean, I was fatigued and exhausted, but he didn't seem to....

O'CONNOR: Did you notice any change in him or development in his character as he progressed through that campaign or into the presidency?

[-9-]

BRANDON: Oh, very much so, yes. I think he had kept lots of thoughts, ideas to himself, and gradually he gained the confidence and the courage to develop them by discussing them more frequently. Of course, one of his great methods of gaining impressions and knowledge was asking questions. I think the campaign, during the campaign.... He grew definitely already during the campaign. He showed that he was much more of a brilliant politician than people had assumed while he was still in the Senate. He had a marvelous instinct for politics. He also gave the impression at the time that he really liked politics, but later on you got the feel that he really didn't. I mean, he liked politics as a.... He liked politics.... what do I want to say? He liked politics as a science, as a sport, as a gentleman's preoccupation, but not really to dirty his hands, you know, to become a workman. He, I think, used others to lay the bricks; he put the mortar on.

I think it was a shock to him that he did not win with as much of a majority as he expected. That was the first sort of cold douche. The second, of course, was the Bay of Pigs. Both must have had a very healthy influence because he was so confident when he moved into the White House that he might have easily done things without thinking searchingly enough. He suddenly realized after the Bay of Pigs that it isn't quite so easy to be a president, that it's a much more complicated thing, that you've really got to go much deeper into every problem before you take a decision. This must have been an absolutely cataclysmical experience and must have had a cataclysmical influence on his whole thinking and attitude to the presidency, and only he could have known. But it was quite clear that after that he was a different person.

O'CONNOR: Do you mean a more serious person, more aware?

[-10-]

BRANDON: Yes, more serious, more aware, deeper. I think at the very beginning he was so confident that he would do a good job that he perhaps took it a little too lightheartedly. And yet during the months before he actually got into the White House, when he prepared his Cabinet, he showed an extraordinary sense of judgment, not on the basis of personalities, because most of the people he didn't know, but on being able to somehow synthesize the views of various people about a single person and then on the basis of that making up his own mind. I mean, he didn't know Dean Rusk; he didn't know, really, McNamara [Robert S.

McNamara]. After all, they were his two key appointments. He did know McGeorge Bundy, but not that well. And yet somehow he knew exactly the kind of person he wanted, and based on the advice, the views and opinions of other people, he then was able to make up his mind whether this man was the right man for the job or not. I think it's an illustration of the analytical mind that he had.

O'CONNOR: Well, you know a lot of people have commented on his maturing or his development as he became president, or after he became president, but no one has ever attempted to point to a specific thing that might have played a role in that development until you mentioned, for example, the Bay of Pigs or the fact that he had gotten a relatively slim majority. I wondered if you could elaborate on that at all, if you had any strong reason, perhaps on the basis of conversations with him, that made you feel that way.

BRANDON: Well, I remember in Palm Beach—after the election—I went down there—and he spoke at great length about the shock that this very narrow majority gave him, that his victory had really depended on a hair line, and constantly trying to analyze why it happened. It clearly somehow tormented his mind. He wanted to have the answer. And this, you know, is one of his great qualities. When something went wrong he always wanted to find out why things went wrong, because he felt he could learn from every failure or semi-failure. I think it hurt his self-confidence and his pride that he won with such a narrow majority. He considered himself so much better than Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon], and yet there was Nixon, and he didn't do so badly.

[-11-]

[When this interview was returned to Mr. Brandon for his review, he was asked if he recalled any of the specifics of this. This is the answer he provided: He thought he had run an effective, far more intelligent campaign. He was also convinced that quite apart from his own tactics and his shrewd handling of the Catholic issue, Nixon had to defend the poor record of the Eisenhower Administration.] Why? What went wrong in his political calculations? Why did Ohio go for Nixon? I remember this was one thing that he.... Now there he wasn't asking questions. He was sort of musing himself.

O'CONNOR: How about the Bay of Pigs? Did you talk to him about that afterwards and have him discuss the...

BRANDON: I didn't see him afterwards, no. But later on he did say that it had an enormous impact on him and his thinking. One thing that helped him so much over this crisis was that he was willing to take full responsibility for it. I think it aroused sympathy. And so he overcame that catastrophe, I think, more quickly with public opinion than he might otherwise have. People are always more charitable with those who admit their mistakes than those who will try to either blame other people or find excuses. I think this was instinctive and his basic principles which

commanded that. He said, "I'm the President. I'm responsible." Although later on in the conversation I had with him, I remember, he blamed other people, in public he wouldn't do that. He was quite bitter about some of the people who he felt had let him down.

O'CONNOR: Could you tell us who it was he particularly felt bitter towards, or what organizations?

BRANDON: Well, it was between the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he blamed.

O'CONNOR: But did he get very specific in his discussion with you about who he felt had made the mistake or who bore the brunt of.... Well, who was it that bore the brunt of his wrath?

[-12-]

BRANDON: Well, I think he made up his mind then that he would retire Allen Dulles [Allen W. Dulles] fairly soon. This was implied. He didn't want to do it immediately because this would not have been cricket, but I think after that this was one of the decisions he had made. It also, of course, made him aware of the fallibility of advice in general terms, the fallibility of the military planning.

O'CONNOR: But, for example, General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer], I believe, was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs at that time. I didn't know whether he felt particularly strong about Lemnitzer or Arleigh Burke [Arleigh Albert Burke], who might have been involved?

BRANDON: I don't remember his mentioning his name. I think he spoke more in general terms about the military, that they had checked the plan and approved it.

O'CONNOR: How about Richard Bissell [Richard Mervin Bissell, Jr.]? He's another man from the CIA who....

BRANDON: Yes. I don't think he mentioned Bissell specifically to me. But I do remember that he sort of vaguely said that Allen Dulles has served this country well and long enough, and he put it in a very charitable form, but that he thinks that the time has come for a new man to be put in there.

O'CONNOR: Did he feel angry at all about his own staff in connection with that crisis?

BRANDON: No, I don't.... McGeorge Bundy was also.... I saw him the day after it happened. He was absolutely white in his face, I remember, and he

also said, "I'm guilty." He admitted having given the wrong advice, but I never heard the President say anything about him.

[-13-]

O'CONNOR: Well, some of the other matters that I hoped to talk to you about were specifically, for example, the Nassau conference, the Skybolt question, that sort of thing. But before we get into that, since that is rather late in his Administration, I wondered if there were any other particular items or crises that stood out in your mind that he had talked about or that you had thought were particularly significant for him or his development.

BRANDON: Well, you know, I was in Cuba just before the crisis occurred, and I came out on the Saturday before the President delivered his quarantine speech on Monday. I arrived back here on Saturday night, and I was supposed to go to a dinner dance for a wedding anniversary. I came later, came after dinner, and I realized that there was something going on, that people were suddenly leaving without saying anything, Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and others. I said to myself, "It could only be Cuba." And then on Sunday morning I had a call from Bundy asking whether, saying that the President would very much like to know what impressions I brought back from Cuba but he thought it was too tricky for me to come to the White House because, since everybody knew that I had just been to Cuba, it would give the guessing game that was still going on as to what the crisis really was a clear direction, and so he sent Carl Kaysen to me.

So we spent the morning, Sunday morning, here. I told Carl Kaysen some of my impressions. I had independently found out about the missiles in Cuba, not that I had seen them, but by a curious coincidence I had met a Cuban, one of those bearded Cubans, who in a rage, when I said that he shouldn't underrate the United States' willingness to move against Cuba if something should happen, he said, "But we now have missiles. We can defend ourselves." I said, "what do you mean by missiles? I thought you only had missiles that were anti-aircraft missiles with a range of fifty miles." And he said, "Oh no, we could hit Florida." So I really independently got some idea at least of what was going on.

[-14-]

O'CONNOR: Which bearded Cuban was this? Was this someone high in the Administration?

BRANDON: It's a man whose name is not known. He's not that high but he is certainly, or he was, fairly close to the whole movement.

O'CONNOR: Well, what was Kaysen interested in talking to you about when he came? He certainly must have.... He knew himself, of course, that missiles were there.

BRANDON: Yes. Well, he was interested in what the mood was toward the United States, what they were expecting, what kind of move they were expecting from the United States, what sort of people I had talked to, I mean, I didn't ask him any questions because I realized that this was too delicate a situation and he couldn't tell me anything, but it was quite clear that all his questions related to the speech that the President was going to deliver.

O'CONNOR: Were you able to help him out at all? Were you able to give him any information that he found useful?

BRANDON: I don't know whether he found it useful or not. I really doubted whether I was able to add much except the sort of mood picture that somebody brings back who's just got out of a country and it happened to be the center of American attention. I had seen Che Guevara and so, you know, he talked about the United States and Cuban-American relations and all that. No, I think in terms of the crisis as such I wasn't able to contribute anything.

[-15-]

O'CONNOR: How about then turning to the Skybolt problem? Schlesinger comments, for example, that you noticed an anti-American feeling among the British delegation at Nassau, stronger than you had seen in twenty years or so. Can you describe that feeling? Can you give us some idea of the reasons for that feeling?

BRANDON: Well, Macmillan [M. Harold Macmillan] thought that since the United States had said, "We are not going to give you the Skybolt," and refused to give any substitute, that British opinion would simply feel that the United States had deprived Britain of its nuclear deterrent. And that he thought would: (a) harm him politically, and (b) would create a wave of anti-American feeling. And he didn't know where this would then carry him in his relations with the United States, to what extent he could control it and to what extent he couldn't, whether this could really create the kind of harm that would make it very difficult for him to continue the kind of relationship that he had with the United States. But I think basically he was more worried about his own political future and his own political position, but I think he put it more in those terms to the President, too, in order to make an impression on the President. And I think the President was moved by two things: he was moved by his feel for Macmillan (there was some sort of a personal liking between the two and he didn't want to harm him politically), and the other was that he was very worried about Anglo-American relations and the possibility of their deteriorating.

This brings me back to a talk I had with Macmillan shortly after the President came into the White House. Macmillan had had a very close relationship with Eisenhower. He said to me, "Now look, I've known Eisenhower for years. You remember, I was in Algiers during the war, too, when he was there. I was able to, you could say, perpetuate it after he became President. We belonged to the same generation. We had fought the war together. We had

common experiences. And now there is this young cocky Irishman,” he said. “How am I going to deal with him? He belongs to a different generation. How on earth am I going to preserve the kind of relationship between the U.S. and Britain that I was able to preserve under Eisenhower with Kennedy?”

[-16-]

He was basically worried that his Irish origin, the memories of what had happened to his father (the unpopularity of his father), would all make him basically anti-British. I remember I tried to reassure him. He said, “Now you know him. You’ve known him for a long time. Tell me more about him.” And it did take some time before they hit it off.

Whenever I saw Kennedy later on he would always ask questions about British domestic politics. He knew everything that was happening, clearly read his newspapers and the reports from England. He would ask those informed questions that only a British politician would otherwise, ask, and say, “Now, how is Macmillan doing on this?” and “Is this going to harm him?” There was always a certain concern as to Macmillan’s political position at home, and that probably reached its climax in Nassau. Obviously Macmillan was sufficiently convincing to make Kennedy on the whole go against the advice of his own advisors and offer Britain the Polaris.

O’CONNOR: The curious thing about this whole Skybolt question, though, is how did it arise when heading the American government you had a man who was so aware of the domestic problems that this might cause for Harold Macmillan? You said he used to ask questions, for example, about British domestic politics, and yet he does not seem to have been aware specifically what sort of a crisis this would provoke until it actually had come about.

BRANDON: You know, if I may put in a commercial, I did do a long history of the Skybolt crisis which we published, but essentially there were two misunderstandings: one, that the British government continuously thought that the U.S. really is not going to abandon the Skybolt in the end; and the Pentagon, which felt that if it said that this weapon could not succeed, the British would accept that judgment. The judgment was based so much on technical grounds that the political implications were overlooked here at first. It was fairly late in the game that Ormsby-Gore [William David Ormsby-Gore Harlech] told McNamara what the consequences

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really would be if Skybolt were cancelled, and this was at a time when McNamara already had taken the decision on financial and technical grounds to cancel it. It was only after that interview that Kennedy really began to take an interest in it.

O’CONNOR: Didn’t Sir Solly Zuckerman, for example, know before this that the missile was running into major difficulties, for example, that it

probably would not become operational, would not be a useful weapon in the arsenal of Britain or Americans....

BRANDON: Yes, but he was against the Skybolt, and that may have had something to do with it. He didn't think that we should really buy the Skybolt. It's an extraordinary example of how, as you say, we have an ambassador here who was closer to the head of state than perhaps any foreign ambassador had ever been to an American president, and yet this happened.

O'CONNOR: And in addition the President had other friends, English friends, who were also close, who also could observe the channels of communication, like yourself, for example.

BRANDON: Yes. Now the press, you see, did not take notice of the whole controversy until much later. The British reporting from here for a long time was that while the Americans were saying—and they'd been saying this now for two years—that this is a very complicated weapon, that it may not quite work out, they nevertheless thought that the Americans would not give up on it. And so the warning signals that the U.S. might in fact jettison this whole weapon came fairly late, only in September or October, and even then they thought that it would still be possible for the British government to persuade the U.S. to continue it. They underrated McNamara's own estimates and his ability to simply say, "No more," and perhaps over-estimated the ultimate influence of the President. Curiously enough, it was first with McNamara that Ormsby-Gore intervened and only later with the President. It was only then that the President really began to study the whole situation.

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O'CONNOR: Let's go back to.... Well, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

BRANDON: Well then, you see, the criticism began to build up. In November it began to build up in the British press, and this is when the President really became very conscious of the problem. In one way he thought that the McNamara decision was correct. On the other hand, he didn't want this to seriously affect Anglo-American relations. So the search was for a compromise solution, and the compromise solution that he selected and which he discussed with Ormsby-Gore, as you know, on the flight to Nassau was something quite different from what came out in the end.

O'CONNOR: They were still talking in terms of the Skybolt on the flight to Nassau.

BRANDON: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Let's go back to the very beginning, where we started, really. You

said you had known Jacqueline Kennedy first before you knew John Kennedy. Well, I presume, as well, that your friendship continued. There's been a great deal of comment on the marriage of Jacqueline Kennedy and John Kennedy. Comment often centers around the pre-presidential years. I wondered if you'd care to comment on this. There have been many comments, for example, about the difficulties that they had, whether or not their marriage was a happy one or an unhappy one. I wondered if you'd be willing to comment on it from the point of view of your relatively close relationship to them.

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BRANDON: Frankly, I really don't know much about that. I was aware of the gossip; I was aware of the fact that sometimes they seemed more affectionate and sometimes less affectionate. But, you know, for an outsider—and anybody's an outsider in this sort of situation—it's really difficult to know and how to attribute it. I really don't.... You know, it would be pure guessing and largely influenced by gossip, and so it doesn't really add anything to history.

O'CONNOR: All right, unless there's anything else you care to comment on we can break this off. I don't want to hold you up from your luncheon date.

BRANDON: Does anything interest you about the—well, I guess....

[INTERRUPTION]

O'CONNOR: We have asked many people about the reactions that they've noticed in various countries. It's practically impossible to get the reaction in the Soviet Union.

BRANDON: Well, you know, I was the only foreign correspondent in Dallas when it happened. Then I flew back the same Friday night and worked through the night. And for about, I would say, two weeks I was so tense that I didn't actually realize how much the death had affected me personally. But then in January it became somehow obvious and my editor had the good sense to say, "I think you need a change of atmosphere. Go to Moscow." So early in March I flew to Moscow.

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It was absolutely fantastic the impact that this assassination had made in the Soviet Union, the loss of Kennedy. In a curious way he had in a very short time been able to give them the feeling that he was the man who understood the problems between the United States and the Soviet Union and that he was the man to introduce a new relationship. I think what impressed them most was that he had the courage to deliver the American

University speech so soon after the Cuban Crisis, which after all was a pretty naked attempt at aggression. Few presidents would have thought that they could deliver a speech like this so soon after their country had been threatened. And the fact that.... I mean, the Russians, even if they didn't say so, were aware that they were in the wrong. The fact that Kennedy did not rub Khrushchev's nose in the mud, that he handled this with great deftness and as a gentleman also impressed them and they therefore felt that this was a man they could deal with. So the sudden loss of the man in whom they had all these hopes hit them extraordinarily hard and, of course, from the very beginning set them against Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson]. The first Russian virtually I talked to asked me, "Do you think Johnson organized the assassination?" Now with their conspiratorial mind and their history this is not an unusual question to ask.

Now, I had a long talk in Moscow with Ilya Ehrenburg [Ilya Grigorievich Ehrenburg], the writer, who was also deeply upset about the assassination and in a very emotional way. He said to me—I remember very well—he said to me, "Explain to me how can a thing like this happen in a civilized country?"

O'CONNOR: Few people but Ehrenburg would say something like that. [Laughter]

BRANDON: Well, maybe by implication he meant that his own country was not civilized.

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O'CONNOR: Yes, that's what it sounds like.

BRANDON: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Who else did you talk to? From whom did you get this impression in the Soviet Union?

BRANDON: Well, I talked to, you know, ordinary people: scientists, professors, writers, editors. There was complete unity. They all virtually asked the same questions and had the same reaction.

O'CONNOR: Did others, as well as the one you mentioned, have the impression or was it pressing on their minds that possibly it had been Johnson?

BRANDON: Oh, yes. I got used to the question after the first surprise, but this is what they probably still believe. I don't know. With their whole conspiratorial history and their way of ridding themselves of rulers they don't like.... In fact, Ehrenburg said something else which—I don't know whether that really fits into this.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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