

**Hugh S. Sidey Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 4/7/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Hugh S. Sidey  
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**Biographical Note**

Hugh S. Sidey (1927 - 2005) worked as a journalist for Life Magazine (1955-1957), and later, at Time Magazine (1957- 2005). This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s senatorial career, various challenges faced by JFK during his presidency, and Sidey's work as a journalist, among other issues.

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By Hugh Sidey

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Hugh S. Sidey—JFK #1  
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Oral History Interview

with

HUGH SIDEY

April 7, 1964  
Washington, D.C.

By Fred Holborn

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HOLBORN: This interview in the Kennedy Library Oral History Project is with Hugh Sidey of *Time* magazine; the interviewer is Fred Holborn; we're meeting in the Conference Room of the Time-Life Bureau in Washington on the afternoon of April 7, 1964. We've asked Hugh to take part in one of these interviews; he's certainly one of the two or three men in the Washington press corps who followed Senator Kennedy most closely during the last two years of his campaign for the Democratic nomination, and he was assigned almost continuously to the White House and to the President on his trips during the three years that President Kennedy was in Washington. He is one of the authors of a biographical sketch of the President which appeared in 1963 and which was republished and revised shortly after his death, early in 1964. The easiest way usually to get these going is simply to perhaps, ask, one of the simplest questions, which is: what were the circumstances, time at which you first met and came to know the then Senator Kennedy?

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SIDEY: Fred, that was back in 1958, and it was in the fall of that year, as I recall. I was covering the Senate for *Time* then, and I remember getting into a

Senate elevator and running into Senator Kennedy. I don't know what I was doing in it -- I guess it was the senators' elevator -- but I saw this figure over in the corner, and with us at that time was Hank Walker, *Life* magazine photographer who knew Senator Kennedy, and he introduced us. That's the first time that we met. As I recall, neither one of us was particularly impressed then. We went on our way.

About the next meeting I had with him was as we were walking through the Senate subway, I recall, and ran into him again, and we walked on over to the Senate building. I remember George Smatehrs had a bunch of pretty girls from Florida posing on the Senate subway car, and he pushed Senator Kenendy into the photograph, and he willingly posed. Then shortly thereafter, as we walked away from that group, he grabbed me and said, "Get a hold or that photographer and destroy the negative." Whereupon I did -- I got a hold of, I believe it was Al Muto [Alfonso A. Muto] at that time, who was a Senate photographer, and he said, "Okay, don't worry, none of those will get out," and none did.

But then I covered all those candidates. For *Time* magazine I wrote cover stories on Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], on Kennedy and got to know them all well. Actually Senator Kennedy's campaign became almost full-time because it was so active and there was so much going on, it was so well organized. This struck me almost from the start: the contrast between them and the openness, too. This was one of the things. There were so many people to talk to: there was Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], there was yourself, there was Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman], there was the Senator, you know. And almost inevitably -- and I have no illusions about why he talked to me because at that time *Time* magazine and *Life* magazine were very important in that kind of national image creation, particularly *Life* magazine which had him on the cover a number of times and then those daily stories. I used to see him around every week once or twice when he was around, you know.

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Through 1959, of course, all his efforts at collecting delegates.... Whenever he'd get back to town -- I didn't travel with him much then -- but he'd always bring me in, and that was my first introduction to the rocking chair. He pointed to that beside his desk; I kind of looked at it questionably, and he said, "I'm just a country boy," you know. I really didn't know at that time what it was all about, that because he had the back trouble he used it. We used to, I remember, sit there many a time while we'd chat about delegates. And, of course, he always ended the conversation, "Now I want you to get this in the magazine." So, it was a pretty commercial arrangement in the early days, but a very enjoyable one and, I'd say, a very open one.

HOLBORN: In those first months that you knew him did he differ very much from the preconceptions that you had of him?

SIDEY: Yes, I guess, because the only way I really knew him was from that 1956 appearance in the National Convention where he almost became the vice presidential nominee. I hadn't really paid that much attention to him, and I was new in covering the Senate. Yes, it was a rather surprising experience. I remember I had

seen him around town once or twice -- I had just been in Washington since '56, a couple of years. I'd worked for *Life* magazine and really hadn't gotten up on the Hill much at all. I had seen him around town in a Pontiac convertible, you know, and the impression was of a rather gay, wealthy young man. And then when I discovered this rather intense interest in the presidency and then all the organization and then the people around him were all working for it, I guess it was a surprise, now that you mention it.

HOLBORN: Did you get to know him before you knew anybody in his office?

SIDEY: Yes, I did. I got to know the Senator through this way -- I ran into him -- and then I heard about Sorensen, actually. I remember the first night I came over to see Sorensen I ran into Mike, even before that Mike Feldman. They were having some kind of a little

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party. Mike poured me a drink -- that was kind of deceiving; that was the first and last time I ever saw anybody drink around that office. Everybody was too busy after that. And then I saw Ted, you know, with regularity when he was there, and yourself -- you were in the office -- and, as I say, Mike.... I guess that was really the crew at that time that I recall, except, well, that was before the Esso building -- and I think you and Ted and Mike.... was there anybody else?

HOLBORN: Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]

SIDEY: Reardon, yes, Ted Reardon, sure, but they actually came after the Senator. The Senator was really, you know, his own man, mostly in public relations, except Ted could always give those reports from around the country. He kept up on that: people calling him, prospective delegates, and that sort of thing.

HOLBORN: From the very beginning was he quite open with you as to what his goals were? Or was there any kind of charade about the presidency?

SIDEY: No, no, that specific question about the presidency -- I recall again walking through the subway one day with him going to the chamber, and I was still quite naive about Lyndon's intentions. This was in 1959, you know, and I used to spend every Thursday night with Lyndon. It was *Time* magazine's night, and he'd tell me about the Senate. I used to talk to him about his ambitions, and he denied them so vehemently and everything and I was rather naive about it that I almost began to believe that he didn't want to try for it. One thing that Johnson had told me at that time was that, well, he wasn't interested in the presidency unless he was certain the American people wanted him. I told Senator Kennedy, I said, "I don't really think Johnson is after this as much as you all credit him." Senator Kennedy kind of grinned at me and said, "what makes you think that?" And I said, "Well, I talked to him the other night, and he told me that he wasn't

interested in it unless the American people wanted him.” I remember Senator Kennedy laughed and said, “Well, we've all decided that

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long ago.” By “all” he meant Symington and Johnson and everybody was convinced that the American people wanted them. Then he said, “Of course Lyndon wants it.” So then he went on to explain his own operation. He said, “Of course I want it.” From the very start I had the feeling that he was out after it.

But my relationship was a professional one, Fred, all through those years in that I always felt he knew a whole lot more than he told me, but he always told me a lot. I always sensed there was more, but he always knew I was a reporter and that in a way I worked for the enemy -- I mean, I worked for what had been identified as a Republican magazine, and he was always guarded. I think it was just a skillful performance. I never resented that, but I...

And one thing about the relationship, even from those early days: he never lied to me, he never lied to me, that I know. He used to try to mislead me occasionally or not be totally full in answering things. I figured that was all part of the game, but there was never an occasion where he or his people really ever out and out lied to me, at least in that stage of the game. I think that contributed to a relaxed, really frank, open sort of feeling.

Many times, I remember, I would, and searching for Democratic news (because I was covering all these men up there), I would just go to see Sorensen or go to see the senator, and he'd say, “ why don't you check Oregon?” He'd say such and such happened, and, not taking his word for it, we'd have our office go there and it would be right. In other words, the caliber of the information out of Kennedy's send it office was superb. I wasn't deceived by it. I can't remember a single case of having sent my office to check such and such that they didn't come up with essentially what I was told you'd find out there -- this in the course of gathering delegates.

HOLBORN:            Could you reach him easily on the phone or just drop in the office or how did you go about it?

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SIDEY:                As a matter of fact, I didn't talk to him on the phone much. I was a foot man; I always tried to go over and catch him. I don't know, I've always been that way, kind of frightened of the phone. it wasn't the phone, it was just in person -- off the floor a great deal. I remember sometimes I'd bring him in an early copy of *Time* Magazine and slip it in and he'd read it under the desk in the Senate. I'd see him up there (I'd be in the gallery), and he'd summon me down and I'd come around and, you know, he'd either be a little sore but something or he'd say, “That's a good piece,” and “ why don't you check this.” I saw him often times in the halls and on the way to.... I never saw him socially; as I say, it was a strictly professional relationship.

HOLBORN:            Did he at any time call you on his own initiative?



SIDEY: Not very often -- occasionally -- I'd say only three or four times did he call me on his own initiative. Ted used to get a hold of me occasionally, but not often because I was just around there. I used to seek it out. And then, of course, as you know, as the thing went on, then we'd begin to go out, like, I was in Wisconsin with him when he announced...

HOLBORN: What was the first trip...

SIDEY: Well, the first one was when he announced in Wisconsin that time. I had just come back from Alaska with Hubert Humphrey -- I was doing a cover story on him -- and I dropped off Hubert's plane and got on Kennedy's. He had motor trouble, and we had to charter a little plane -- I remember they asked me for a contribution. I was doing a piece, and we flew from Milwaukee to Omaha, I guess, that same day. I guess he was going to announce in both of those. Was he in the Nebraska primary?

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HOLBORN: Yes.

SIDEY: I guess that was a trip in the middle of winter, bitter cold, you know, and that was the first kind of little bit of campaigning that we did. The kids -- I remember the Omaha University students out in the cold and waiting for him with a big banner and he was 3 hours late because of the plane -- the introduction to the Kennedy schedule, you know.

I remember that's the time we had stopped in to get some soup at the Milwaukee airport. We had the soup, and then I paid the bill, and he gave me hell because I hadn't tipped enough.

HOLBORN: During those two years did you write the cover stories on all of the four principal candidates?

SIDEY: Yes, I did the original cover stories: first on Stu Symington [Stuart Symington], then on Hubert, and then Lyndon, and then actually the one on Senator Kennedy turned out to be the one on the family -- it had the whole family on the cover.

HOLBORN: And you announce the birth of the child?

SIDEY: Well, now that's one other thing about my relationship is that, you know, through all these years he never really gave me a scoop. He was always wary about that, and I can't blame him very much, but I always wanted him someday to come in and hand me a secret document or something and say, "I'm going to do this and you're the first to know it." That never happened except in the case when we were

doing the cover story. One day there was a call, "Can you come over?" I was in the Senate then, and I went over to his office -- it was either that or Saturday morning. I forget. Anyway, it was just the two of us, and I remember he just said, "I've got something for you here." He said, "I want you to have it, Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] is going to have a baby in" -- when was it, August?

HOLBORN: November, I think it was.

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SIDEY: November. I forget. Yes, that's right, he said in November. He said, "I'd rather have it come out this way in a story like this than in the society columns." So I remember I took this bit of news and treated it in the highest secrecy -- he also gave it to Ben Bradlee, I noted -- but it was a marvelous little kind of closer for that piece. That was one of the few times that he ever really gave me anything except guidance, which, of course, was excellent, his thoughts, you know. There were a lot of things, really, that were kind of exclusive in that, I felt, that he gave me, but not hard facts, that was... but I do remember, I think it was late in the afternoon in the office there, when you told me that. He was almost embarrassed, you know, to kind of bring this kind of subject up, but it was a good piece of news, anyway.

HOLBORN: At the time that you did those profiles of these candidates, did you have the sense that each felt he really had a chance? How did they look upon Kennedy? Did you have any great sense of tension, or were they each pretty much aware of the other's strengths and weaknesses?

SIDEY: Yes, I think, with the exception of Vice President Johnson, that Symington and Humphrey knew it was an awful long shot. They were in it, they were kind of a warm up, particularly Humphrey with the thought that if he didn't make it this time maybe next time or he'd be a power at the Convention. It was apparent each guy had his own strengths; each guy was very likable. I kind of like them all. I liked old Stu, found him to be a personable fellow; Hubert, of course, nobody can really dislike him; and I knew Senator Johnson from his days in the Senate. But Kennedy was the only one that really wanted it above and beyond everything else, who was really organized and dedicated to the job of getting it, who kind of had the fire about him that it takes in the know-how. It was really a combination of skill and determination that just seemed from the very start to have it.

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I confess that I was quite a bit influenced by the simple fact that he was my age and he could communicate better. Somebody has said that what this age needed was Teddy Roosevelt; a combination of the cowboy and the scholar. In many ways, Kennedy was. He wasn't a cowboy, but he was not so sophisticated that he was removed from you. We could

talk together. There was never any question of my background, for instance. I did have a couple of people, as you know, subsequently in the government who, because I came from the Midwest and from a state college kind of question that at first. But as I recall he had never brought it up. It didn't worry him a bit. there wasn't any question about that or anything. It was an easy relationship, that's all. we could talk together and understand each other.

Anyway, in the course of doing both Humphrey and Symington they made small cracks about Kennedy, but they were never bitter. They knew the game, and the closest they'd get to being bitter was that he was a rich, spoiled kid who had never had to make it. There was never any real bitterness, and I would say that particularly of Stuart Symington. I don't recall that he was ever really nasty about the Senator, Kennedy. Hubert was a little more passionate. In all honesty, the most vicious evaluation of Senator Kennedy was from Johnson and that got quite violent at times.

HOLBORN: Was that in terms of his performance as a senator?

SIDEY: Yes, mostly, and just how he had taken it and how -- for instance, he would tell with great relish how Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy] had called him up and pleaded with him to get his boy on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, how he'd done it and this sort of thing. And later on, of course, in the campaign, it got very personal about Sam Rayburn and everybody looking at that skinny little fellow that had all the diseases and how could he ever run this country? You had to be a big, tough Texan to know all this stuff. How Kennedy was never there for roll call and Lyndon had to front for him and had all this money in that.... that was in typical Texas style. It was vicious. and then Lyndon would turn suddenly and

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praise him. He was very erratic -- as he always was. He'd say, "That Kennedy's really going. look at the polls." And of course Lyndon was never yet quite admitting that he was interested in it.

But I really had little doubt from mid-1959 on that Kennedy was going to do it. I suppose it was hope or desire because I wanted him to get it. There was no question my heart was with him in this. So much better organized, better informed, and the thing went so much better and as I say the evidence -- and this is the thing that was underrated, I think, by a lot of people, as our news gathering organization is damn good all over the country, and we could sound out these things. I mean, our people go to Los Angeles or Dallas or wherever they wanted to go and the reports back were the same. So in my mind it seemed all pretty well sewed up from at least a year ahead, well, not pretty much, but, you know, quite likely that it was in the bag. I remember the Senator used to ask me to get reports, what did my bureaus think. And I could tell him to the extent I knew, and I suppose that encouraged a relationship there.

HOLBORN: Did your access to him, your relationship change at all, beginning the

latter part of '59 when he hired Pierre [Pierre Salinger] as a press secretary, or did that not change your own?

SIDEY: No, not so much. It was still very informal. The point of it is he just got busier, the Senator did. There wasn't much we could do about it, you know. We flew on the *Caroline* when we could, and he'd talk with us. That was a great institution by the way, that *Caroline*, and he'd have the people on with him. You'd learn a lot.

HOLBORN: Small enough so you could talk...

SIDEY: That's right.

HOLBORN: ...and not so large that you had to give a performance.

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SIDEY: That's right, and he could be very selective about who he had, so that he had a good crew.

HOLBORN: And a good meal.

SIDEY: Yes, and a good meal. It was a lot of fun and it was comfortable, a very luxurious interior. In all this time he rarely told me anything was on or off the record. I can never recall him saying, "Now that's off the record, and this is on the record," except very rare instances, because we built up a trust over these months, and he would just tell you, "Use your judgment." My judgment was pretty much what his was, and if it were a tough proposition, why then I'd take it to him and ask him. I can't remember ever having any trouble. He may have felt he was violated once or twice, but he never mentioned it to me if he did.

I remember really the only time when I didn't get anything from him was the night before he flew off to the Convention. I was assigned to him, and he was up in Hyannis there. I said, "I want to talk to you before you go," and he said, "Well, why don't you meet me at the International Inn at Idlewild." That was the Friday before the National Convention. So I met him that afternoon -- or that evening actually and I went up to his suite with him and Jackie. I was the only one, and we just sat and chatted a bit. And the only thing that I can remember from that night before we flew out was that I said, "Have you decided on a vice presidential candidate?" And he said, "Yes, that's one thing I did up there." He had spent a couple of days up at Hyannis. I said, "Who is it?" And he said, "Well, I'll tell you, but you can't use it." And I stopped him and said, "Gosh, don't do that, Mr. President. There might be a slim chance I can find out some other way, and we go to press tomorrow, so don't tell me." And he said, "Okay." Well, it was silly. I assume it was Symington, but I never knew. Anyway, we didn't talk about it anymore.

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HOLBORN: Let's go back for a minute to the pre-Convention period. This is not an easy question to consider now, but supposing Kennedy had not gotten the nomination and you simply had to evaluate him as a Senator from what you'd observed in '58 and '59 and '60. He was really on the road almost all the time except for the August session, but what qualities did he have that made him a good senator or a mediocre senator? What was there in his Senatorial performance that stands out in your mind?

SIDEY: Well, I suppose without a doubt it was the old labor reform bill. I thought he was a good Senator. Number one, I felt the era of the giant in the Senate had passed. Heck, we hadn't had a bill named for anybody since Taft-Hartley, really, that amounted to anything. And sure, he didn't really work at the Senate in the last years, but when he went on the floor with the labor reform bill and took such a bounding in the early days, he never gave up, stayed right in there all the time. And they took some awful setbacks and came back and got some of that back and then had it all destroyed in the House. Now, I may have the sequence of that mixed up. Then it all got wiped out in the House, drastic, just bang, bang, bang. And then back into the conference committee and never gave up, just fought right on, right on, and came out with what was a damn good bill in the end. I think that was a hell of a performance; I really do. A great deal more, because both Neil MacNeil, my colleague here on *Time*, and I watch it, Neil much closer than I. I relied a great deal on Neil's word because he was covering the whole bill, and he said it was a remarkable performance just to stay right in there and fight, you know. Kennedy never lost his sense of humor, never lost his determination, had Archie Cox [Archibald Cox], I remember, in there in that conference committee and answering every question patiently and went over all of that.

HOLBORN: Well, was it mastery of information or tactical skill or what was it that...

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SIDEY: Well, I think again it was a combination -- the ability to stay there and keep his dignity, not lose his temper, deal with these guys. And he had the information.

HOLBORN: The whole episode was really four or five months, the major part of four or five months.

SIDEY: Yes, that's right. It was on and off. But anyway, yes, it was just that same old bit; well organized, well thought out, he knew what he was doing, knew what he wanted, and never lost his temper or anything about it, went right at it.

I really don't know much more about his Senate career because it got all fogged with politics then. He became such a figure, as you know, people hovered on the doors out there to see him and the guests came in to look at him, and he wasn't around, so that in terms of being a senator, it got awful clouded. You couldn't evaluate those last years, really, because he spoke as a candidate, too, and it took on a lot of added importance. But I say had he not gone for the presidency, I think he would have been a good senator, yes, without a question. Whether a great senator -- what is a great senator? -- I don't know.

HOLBORN: Do you think he could have recovered from a defeat at the Convention?

SIDEY: Yes. I don't think there would have been any question about it -- just like he recovered from the defeat in '56. And had he won then and lost -- I know his father, used to tell him that it was the luckiest thing in the world for him that he lost that vice presidency, but I'm not sure it was. But knowing the Kennedy family, they'd just have gone on differently. Had he lost either the nomination or the election, he'd have still been at it, you know, trying for it, and I think he'd probably gotten it, yes.

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You know, one of the things that strikes me now that I look back is the sense of quality here, the high level of performance. You know, once you get up against it constantly, you tend to forget about it. Now that it's gone and you look around and you have some view of other candidates now, without him -- I think he raised everybody a notch. Now that I look back, it was just the level of performance; the level of the people around him was really amazing, really unusual. I know of no comparable experience of mine in politics or in reporting.

Since his death, I suddenly recognize a great gap between him and others, you know. I think that was really illustrated by comparing the Lyndon Johnson operation, which was really an inept business. Here was the master politician, Lyndon Johnson. You could say the same for Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], you know. I suppose in the heat of the campaign I didn't really step back to compare it that much, but boy, it's even more pronounced now that you look back, the difference.

HOLBORN: Well, wasn't some of it that Kennedy had the ability to profit by his mistakes and to sense the nuances in different states and different situations and was able to, you know, see local problems in their local setting?

SIDEY: Yes, he never denied a mistake, either, and that's another thing as I deal with these people and have with all these other major candidates -- I don't say all of them didn't. I mean, Hubert Humphrey, for instance, confessed his own errors and that, but Nixon never did, and Johnson rarely did. I can't ever remember those men saying that they'd ever made an error, whereas with Kennedy it was the human experience in which he laid out his performance and examined it himself. He'd say, "Well,

we shouldn't have done that" or "We're wrong here; you're right." It was to learn by it, it was an educational process all the time. And he'd discuss it with you. And that sort of thing was a rarity -- still is. I must say he carried that right on through into the White House, even though it became more dangerous to admit a mistake publicly. He still did it privately. He understood.

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The working relationship was always fine, and it was always with humor. I recall when the Methodist bishops came, his confrontation with the Methodist bishops came, his confrontation with the Methodist bishops. It was quite a story, and he was concerned about that because that's when the religious issue was...

HOLBORN: The Methodists here in Washington, was that?

SIDEY: Well, they were from all...

HOLBORN: Gathered in Washington?

SIDEY: Gathered in Washington, yes. Bishop Oxnam [G. Bromley Oxnam] was the head man. And I remember he was very concerned about my story on that, because we did quite a lengthy story on that, and I followed them all over. And he did very well with them. This was just after the Fletcher Knebel piece on Catholicism in *Look*. I went to him afterwards and said to him, well now, here such and such a bishop says this, Oxnam says this. Oxnam's approach on this whole thing was that, well, Kennedy had done well but he hadn't really convinced him. I remember he was quite amused by that, because Bishop Oxnam had always been kind of against him, had never quite warmed up. But the thing that impressed me was his sense of humor intact all the way through it. We ran a story that was kind of on the line, you know, saying that he'd made a little headway with them but a lot of them still had doubts.

HOLBORN: Now, as you say, the person you came to know best, on the Kennedy staff was Ted Sorensen. Could you sense from the very beginning the closeness of that relationship, the importance that Ted had to him?

SIDEY: Well, I don't think so, not at first. I knew Ted in terms of an operator at that time, which really wasn't his main function later on, but in terms of a delegate gatherer. I really didn't understand his mind in those early days because he was so busy just going around pinning pins on a map and looking up delegates that I really didn't understand all that until a little later on. I'd say in early 1960 when he started, when he got out in Wisconsin and West Virginia, then Ted's role in proposing

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programs and writing speeches became clear.

I might add, in that 1960 period that it seemed to me that's when Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] and Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] joined the campaign, and then it appeared to me that Ted was being pushed to the side. The thing about it was that I guess I didn't really sense it till, oh, the Convention and then through the campaign and I guess really not how important at least I felt Ted was to the whole operation till the Senator became President. And then the writing, really became such a focal point, and I began to look back. Then I began to understand a little bit more.

And I also remember the only thing, the only even mild criticism that I ever heard the President ever make of Ted was in those early days about the delegates. I forget precisely the conversations, except it was about the need for more organizational people, and he said, "We've got to send somebody out there, but somebody besides Ted, because Ted's so cold with some of these people." He said, "I've had some complaints on that from others." And I think that was the only thing he ever said, and that was in the early days. At that time I wasn't aware of how close actually they'd gotten.

HOLBORN: What comments do you have of Kennedy as a public speaker during those years? Can you recall any particular instances where you think he made a particularly effective speech or was it a capacity which had not yet fully developed?

SIDEY: I thought he was pretty bad in the Committee [Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field] hearings, in the rackets hearings. He used to come in just every now and then. He'd sit up there, and he'd question the witnesses occasionally. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't particularly good. I mean, I always felt Bob was much better and I wondered why he didn't just leave it to Bob. And his Senate speeches were so unimpressive that I can't even remember them. Not that there weren't some good ones, but the presentation....

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I remember my first impression of Kennedy on TV was in West Virginia when he answered the religious issue.

HOLBORN: Sunday that the statewide program was on.

SIDEY: Yes, the Sunday before, and that was the first time I had really kind of sat up and took notice of him as a good, straightforward.... And when I gather there was a debate, too, wasn't there, between him and Hubert.

HOLBORN: Yes.

SIDEY: That wasn't much, really. It was interesting, but it didn't enlighten much. And then I think the next thing, of course, the Convention, that little



speech that night was a good one, and then his formal acceptance speech, you know, the one in the arena there.

HOLBORN: The Coliseum.

SIDEY: The Coliseum, yes. I remember when I really felt the thing was going was when we flew up -- the first trip in the campaign -- we flew up to Portland, Maine. Jackie was with us, and she went part way. She didn't go all the way, and that was her last trip. She dropped out.

HOLBORN: That was a well, sort of a canape before the...

SIDEY: That's right. Kind of a little prelude there. And we went up there. I remember that night, and all the chemistry was right. It was just a great night. There was a little nip in the air. It was on a football field and he really kind of got the feel of it. It was great.

There was also -- now I should say that about that time there was an appearance in Arlington, wasn't it? He went over...

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HOLBORN: It was Alexandria, I think.

SIDEY: To Alexandria. And that was another good one. There were two good ones. And I think he began to get the feel of it then, too.

HOLBORN: Did you hear him at his press club speech?

SIDEY: On the presidency, yes, I did. Did that come before then?

HOLBORN: That was in January, yes.

SIDEY: Yes, that's right. That's right. The thing about that, of course, was just the -- I guess I wasn't impressed with him as a speaker. It was a good speech though, a good layout of the presidency, his views of that. Yes, there was a lot of substance in that and, you know, a lot of thought in that. I did listen to it, but I wasn't overwhelmed as a speaker at that time.

HOLBORN: Well, I'll just return to -- you spoke about the night before he left for Los Angeles; I want you to recall what you can of that trip out -- I guess you were on the same plane -- through the Convention, what was particularly memorable about it, particular insights that you have of that week.

SIDEY: Well, yes. All this thing tends to blur a little, but I do remember that night,

particularly, you know, when he sat there and took his shirt off in the apartment and we talked about it. He thought...

HOLBORN: There was never a note of doubt.

SIDEY: No. He thought -- this was in the International Inn, and Jackie was fiddling around the bedroom, and he just sat there. It was about 10 o'clock; it was fairly late. I just stayed about 20 minutes, and we laughed a bit. There was never any bit of doubt, and he said no, he thought he had it. He never went so far as to

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say, you know, it's in the bag or anything like that. He said no -- that same old reserve business, you know. He'd say, "I think we've got it. We'll see," this sort of thing, but there wasn't an element of doubt.

And the next morning we had that American Airlines commercial flight out, and it had something wrong, some little bolt -- the vibrator or something. We had a two hour or so delay or an hour delay, and I remember he went into a little anteroom there and waited. And a couple of us reporters, Toni Bradlee, wife of Ben Bradlee, we went in there and sat and chatted with him. And again it wasn't much political talk. It was just general chit chat about what there was to do out there, you know, and that sort of thing. He took a couple of phone calls while we were there.

And then the flight out was really kind of uneventful. He roamed around a little, and he stopped, and he had Toni Bradlee come up and sit by him. She might have some good insight, really, and those hours. She was there for about a half an hour or so with him. I chatted with him just a little bit, and I can't remember a thing, really, from that trip out. It was really quite uneventful. There were regular customers on the airplane, of course, a regular commercial flight.

I do remember, though, that when he got there -- Dave Lawrence [David L. Lawrence] didn't fly with him; Dave Lawrence came after he did. But I remember the key to the convention was Dave Lawrence, and I remember there was some great byplay there in which Kennedy -- John Bailey met him, and they took him right to Lawrence's suite before he even went to his own. That's as I recall it now. And I remember that I was unaware of this until I was looking for him and suddenly ran into Bob Kennedy, who'd been up there. And I was walking down a hall with Bob, and he told me that they had gone in with David Lawrence. I said, "How's it look?" And he says, "Well, I think we've got him." In other words, Lawrence had said, well, he do what his delegation wanted, and they knew that they wanted... and I remember Bob Kennedy saying "That's the ball game." That was Friday afternoon, late Friday afternoon.

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HOLBORN: Saturday afternoon, it would be. Yes, yes.

SIDEY: It may have been. I mixed up when we flew. I guess Friday we went up to New York, and then Saturday we flew out. yes. But I remember Bob Kennedy saying, "Well, that's the ball game." That was, in essence, that really was. Now that week was just a frantic week in which we hovered around that sweet all the time.

HOLBORN: Did you live in the Biltmore?

SIDEY: Yes, right above the Kennedy's suite although Kennedy lived out there in that dreadful Mauritania that was pink, you know, with.... He sneaked out and went swimming all those times. My recollections really are all pretty secondhand because we were out in the hall so damn much in that jam, you know. Occasionally we got into talk to him just a little bit now and then, but he was really isolated.

I remember one time just walking down the corridor of the hotel and running into him. He was coming in fairly early, a big grin on his face. This was before the balloting. The frantic time, though, I remember when we raced around for him to speak at the delegations, the California delegation, you know, and then out to the Mauritania. He himself went out to eat with his father and that sort of thing.

I guess the most dramatic time of all was that night when he got the nomination we were all gathered around the Mauritania -- a great crush of newsmen, you know, trampling down the bushes. And then that little side play later where his TV went bad, you know, and he ran down to Gargan's apartment, this old actor William Gargan, I guess his name was, and borrowed his TV. Well, there were just all kinds of problems. Chuck Roche [Charles D. Roche] was in there with him; he was helping Pierre out at that time.

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Then I remember that frantic ride. He went to the convention hall at 70 miles an hour, and in the great crush we couldn't get in. The cops barred some of us, and I remember I did slip in and saw him in this little model home, an incredible moment, saw him in this little cottage outside. I remember seeing he and Bob go off by themselves -- this was the first time they'd met since they'd won it -- and walked off into this corner and Bob with his head bowed as he usually did. And I remember Bobby hitting his -- the only show of emotion was hitting his open palm of his left hand with the fist of his right hand repeatedly as they talked in a kind of smile on John Kennedy's face: the ultimate satisfaction. The thing went so smoothly, and they were within a few votes of what they said they were going to be, and the whole thing, you know, was just....

Well, I remember the cops and the spotlights flying -- I remember seeing Teddy White [Theodore H. White]; he made it inside in some strange way -- and the frantic race then (none of us had credentials.) I remember running through the arena trying to get down on the floor before he came and just suddenly running into Bill Perry [William M. Perry] of the Senate Periodical Gallery, who thrust a floor badge on me. there was no way to -- we were blocked. We tried to get in with him, and everything broke down, and he was in a room, and we weren't with him. But I did get down on the floor and climbed right up below him.

And I suppose that was another great moment when he came down, came out with his family that night, and finally all this work had paid off, and paid off right on schedule, just.... You know, it was only a beginning, really, the whole business, but the point of it is he'd gotten the nomination. Great night.

HOLBORN: Did you attend the Johnson-Kennedy debate?

SIDEY: Oh yes, that's one -- that's good. I'm glad you reminded me. Yes, I did. I was right up behind Johnson and Kennedy in that whole thing.

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HOLBORN: Do you think that Kennedy knew how he was going to handle that before he stepped in, or was that instinctive?

SIDEY: No, I think totally spontaneous. The story that I patched together was, the story I got -- to put it in its most honest terms -- was that Senator Kennedy did not plan to go down, and then Lyndon went on TV, you know, on the challenge. As the crowd gathered down there, Fritz Hollings [Ernest F. Hollings], then, was the one who called up Senator Kennedy and said " You know? You better get down there. if you don't" -- he used quite an obscene phrase -- " Johnson's really going to give it to you." This was just a few minutes before the time was due, so then they decided -- Kennedy was about 5 minutes late, as I recall, and I don't think he had an idea how to do it.

He and Bob sat on the stage together. and I remember seeing Kennedy's trousers shook. I thought he was shaking. I reported it to my office that way, but I guess it was a nervous twitch. He just shook his leg when he got nervous energy there, but I remember seeing that part leg fluttering there as he waited for Johnson. and we all thought that Johnson had done superbly well. We wondered how Kennedy could top it, and he did, contrary to Victor Lasky's report. Kennedy just cut him to ribbons and with a few quick thrusts of humor. But I do recall the excitement there and the wonder whether Kennedy was going to come down. I remember that kind of sly look that the brothers, Bob and Jack, gave each other when Senator Kennedy sat down after having thoroughly demolished Johnson's argument, you know.

HOLBORN: He had the sense that he knew he'd...

SIDEY: Yes, obviously he was well pleased, and they kind of grinned. Bob had whispered a couple things to him as he waited. It was building to quite ahead at the time, you know.

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HOLBORN: Did he ever say anything to you before or during the convention about Adlai Stevenson?

SIDEY: No. No, he did before. Well, actually he commented about Stevenson's after we got up to Hyannis Port. I thought that rather an uncomplimentary thing after spending -- he spent 4 hours with him, I believe. They were mapping the campaign, and he said something to the effect that he was convinced it was for the good of the country and that Adlai hadn't gotten the nomination because of his kind of indecisiveness: he didn't know what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go, you know. did they want Adlai to second the nomination or nominate him or what?

HOLBORN: I think either of them, but perfectly to nominate him.

SIDEY: Yes, one of those. I forget, but there was a problem there in which Adlai didn't answer for a long time. but I just wasn't in on that.

HOLBORN: Well now, subsequent that evening of his nomination, when did you first get any wind of the negotiations with Lyndon Johnson for the vice presidency?

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SIDEY: Well, the next morning. I guess it was about -- was there a day in there?

HOLBORN: No. It was immediately the next morning.

SIDEY: Yes. The next day, the next morning I just wandered through the *Time* magazine headquarters, and one of the guys said there's a story that Lyndon may take it. I didn't have any ideas. I thought it was Stu Symington. I went right to Kennedy's headquarters, and sure enough there was all this bustle. We didn't know what made it, with Bobby going up and down the halls and Clark Clifford and all the people around the Kennedy place. and then finally acknowledgment that Lyndon was going to take it: rather staggering, you know. It kind of shook us all up.

But there are some of us, now, for instance, before the campaigns, and our flights that summer -- you know, we've gone several places campaigning. I remember once Chalmers Roberts and I were talking with him on the *Caroline* about JKohnson, and we put the question right straight to him, you know: "Would you accept Lyndon?" and the president said, "In a minute." He said, "Yes, he'd carry the South and that's where we need the strength, and he's a good man. But," he said, "he won't accept it." So he was quite convinced; this was back there.

HOLBORN: Do you think that was the man he really had in mind that evening at the International Inn?

SIDEY: What evening is that, now?

HOLBORN: The meeting you discussed the night before....

SIDEY: Oh. Well, I think Symington must have been that man, but I'll never know. I assume it was Symington. I'm sure Bobby Kennedy knows who that was. But anyway, it made sense. Then, you know, once the die was cast, why, then we could see that it made sense.

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HOLBORN: Well, what do you think are his real motives in coming back to Johnson, then: the states he could carry or the quality who brings the presidency?

SIDEY: Yes, I think it was mostly political. I think, number one, he felt Johnson had as much ability if not more. It was a kind of happy combination when he thought about it in that it gave Kennedy the political strength where he needed it.

HOLBORN: Now going back to that last day of the convention, as you saw it on that day, that Friday or Saturday when the convention ended, did you see him then as the likely president or did you still feel that he had an uphill...

SIDEY: No, no, I always felt that he was going to win it, you know, was going to go on and when the presidency. I don't know what -- it wasn't hinged on anything scientific or anything even very reasonable, as far as my emotions go, because I didn't really know much about politics and this was my first campaign of any extent. I just had the feeling again; I, if anything, felt quite buoyed up because convention had gone so well. Subsequently, the next day, I went to see Bob Kennedy, and we got a whole playback about that, how they kept track during the -- they were only five votes off, I think, when the thing was all counted up, only had miscalculated that many, you know, and if you switches here and there, that unbelievable performance.

And then I remember the day we all climbed aboard the jet and flew back to Hyannis then -- or Boston, I guess it was -- to Boston, and I remember that landing. I remember Phil Potter, I guess it was, saying, you know, that it was near here where Patrick J., or whoever the great grandfather was, had come over on the boat, why, here is his great grandson or his grandson, I forget; it was great grandson, I guess -- had come back with his Party's nomination. and we landed there briefly. He gave a speech there, as I recall, too, and then we went on to...

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HOLBORN: Did he talk to any of you on the plane?

SIDEY: Not too much. As I recall, he rested a bit, and they were in a lot of conferences and that sort of thing. Bob Kennedy read a book. They were

just dead tired, just beat, you know, absolutely tuckered out, I recall. There were some Kennedy kids on the plane. it was that sort of thing.

I don't recall any subsequent discussions with him, really the personal contact then got to kind of a minimum because he was besieged with all these people. At Hyannis we used to see him out along the lawn there, you see. and then we started to campaign, and there was so much just in covering the movement, we didn't have as many chances to talk with him alone, at least I didn't. At this time I'd see him, you know, and there'd be little bits and pieces, or little flashes now and then, you know, along the campaign trail. When I did the cover story on him, I had lunch with him once and I had talked with him briefly the night before the third debate, I guess. Was it in New York, the third debate, or was that the second one, the second debate?

HOLBORN:       The second was here. The third one was where they were separated, one in Los Angeles and the other in New York.

SIDEY:           I guess that's right; yes, that's right. I was trying to think. The second one was here, yes. I saw him briefly after that second debate in Washington, come to think about it. I'd just done a cover story on Bob Kennedy, and he came up to me and said, "That was a great story. why don't you do one like that on me?" he says, "You're always doing those good things for Bobby but never me."

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I remember the last cover story before the election that I did on him. I remember his mood; he got up from a nap and, you know, all of his confidence. It was kind of an awesome scene, again, up there in that penthouse, you know, at night with that huge city spread off and here's this one little figure that's trying to become President of the United States. He stood there and looked out the window at that, and he chatted a bit.

Previous to that I'd had one lunch with him. There, where Lee Radziwill and Jackie and Stash [Stanislas Radziwill] had been at the table, and, you know, it had been a hopeless interview in which he said, "Now let's not talk business any."

And, of course, through the course of the campaign, you know, there were great moments. I remember the night in Ann Arbor when we got there so late.

[BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE II]

SIDEY:           The next time I saw the President, really, where there was any interest was down in Palm Beach. That was just following the Vienna meeting with Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev], and I was doing a piece for *Life* on that. I had dinner with him and Chuck Spalding [Charles F. Spalding] and a couple of the secretaries that night at the Wrightsman's [Charles B. Wrightsman] house, and we talked about it a great deal. And I must say that my feeling that I expressed about seeing him on the airplane, that he felt it had gone good was reinforced then after he had a night's sleep and felt pretty good. He was on crutches. They had had to finally announce his back ailment. It was

the first time I'd seen him, you know, that way, but he did seem to have quite a bit of confidence and he was concerned about it, you know. There was no question about it, but it was not, in his terms, a disaster. It wasn't a shattering experience at all. It was very sobering as he told the nation, you know, when he went on TV. There was no question about that.

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But anyway, when we were down there we chatted a bit about it at dinner that night, and I went home rather early and came back the next morning, and we talked about some of the specific things. He had an excellent memory about the things -- which are included in my book -- about his relations with Khrushchev, and he seemed utterly fascinated with the man, you know. He remembered all the little things he did; he remembered his hands for instance, what his hands looked like. And he told about the time when he, Kennedy, had put out a match for his cigar or he tried to and the match had gone over behind Khrushchev's chair and Khrushchev had immediately said, "Ah, an incendiary, not a capitalist," or something like that. That too I put in the book, but my impression was that the President every minute of this time must have been watching the man.

Anyway, we spent quite a morning out there in which the president reviewed and tried to remember the things about Khrushchev. And of course the main thing that was on his mind is that final confrontation when they were around the table, a final lunch, where Kennedy had pointed at a little model of the Constitution that he had given a cruise ship and said, "You know, in the days of this ship, why, the shots only went half a mile and a few hundred people were killed or wounded and a generation could recover easily from a war, but in our time, you know, it will take scores of years or civilization might be destroyed." This final thing when Khrushchev insisted he was going to go ahead and sign the East German treaty and Kennedy then said, "in that case, it's going to be a cold winter," I think this also refuted

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later stories that came out that said Kennedy had not even been aware at that time of how many people would be killed in case of nuclear war. I find that to be absolutely untrue because that was the whole thing on his mind and these talks as he talked to me afterwards, and this is just a few days after he got back.

He seemed in excellent spirits. He seemed quite confident. He said once during that interview, you know, one of the things that was invaluable was to sit down and to now be able to work in reality, to really understand Khrushchev and know what he was all about. I think his morale was pretty good, as I remember it from that. It was a long pull up now. There was a lot of trouble yet to come, and he understood that. He said that the Berlin problem was going to be tough all summer long; he said that on that morning. As I recall it would have been a June morning. We went over there in early June, so it was still in June that we were down there.

The next time that I really remember, the next meeting that was of any real importance with Kennedy was when I went swimming with him in the pool just the day



before or, actually, a few days before he gave the Berlin speech. I remember then, too, his own coolness, or his lack of emotion or, I mean, being upset by it. He was very determined. we went in there, and he said, "Come along let's go swimming." I protested. I said, "I don't have a suit, Mr. President," and he said, "Oh, you don't need one in this pool." He went down the steps very slowly. Now at this time he was supposed to have been off crutches by this time, and one of the things I was surprised at was how stiff his back still was. And that we walked over there without crutches, when he got through with the swim he did get on crutches again. I was surprised. I hadn't realized that he was still on crutches then. He went on up to his room.

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I can't recall, I guess it was this time, too, that I did go up with him, and we did have some lunch then, and he had hot treatment, hot packs, put on his back then on the bed. He took a nap then. But I do recall this interview, again, was about -- he was getting ready for the speech, and it was also a speech in which he was going to announce an increase in our forces. And he was absolutely sure about it; there was no question. And I remember the only question was the tax raise at that point, whether there would be a tax increase to help pay for this. He felt at that time there would be, but later his economists advised against it, and he didn't ask for it. But I do remember, though, his state of mind, and it was absolutely determined. He said, there was just no question that we were there to stay and it was up to Khrushchev. He said, "Berlin is decided. it's now up to Khrushchev what we do on that."

He swam quite a bit, walked around in the warm water, and paddled up and down; had a good stroke, as I remember, a good strong stroke; and got out and went up on crutches. The house was deserted, as I recall. There was no one there at that time.

HOLBORN:       The family was up in Cape Cod, probably.

SIDEY:           I think the family was then up in Cape Cod. As a matter of fact, he seemed a little lonely at this time; he seemed to want somebody around, as he frequently did.

Then the next time I remember was a similar pool experience after the steel crisis with Roger Blough. And we went swimming and he talked about that at great length. I remember he was still quite upset about it. He was upset mostly that he felt Roger Blough had done him in, it had been a personal front, that Roger Blough had violated a confidence. He'd sat down at the conference table -- this was the thing that seemed to weigh most on his mind, that he'd sat down at the conference table in good faith, and though he'd never told Kennedy that he wasn't going to raise prices, the implication was so strong, the very reason for having the meeting, that he felt he'd been violated.

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You know, once in the early days of his Administration when I talked with him he said that one of the amazing things to him was that there were so many people who seem to

want him to fail, but yet in this day and age if he failed that was a failure of the country and maybe civilization; there might not be another President, he said. So he just couldn't understand the people that would be so violent against him. There were overtones of this feeling in his talks with Roger Blough: Why businessmen would be so violently opposed to him, why they didn't want to sit down and try to work out what was best at the time was so delicate and very crucial, you know, that America maintains her strength around the world. This sort of thing baffled him. I remember at this time there was a book *On Moral Courage* laying by his night table there; and the author's McKenzie or somebody like that; I don't know what the book.... I was struck by that, as if you were examining his own thoughts about this very problem.

He had one interesting line, too, as we walked to the pool. I remember him saying, "You know that business" -- they were his partners, unwilling partners, he said, in effect; but nevertheless, businessmen were his partners. Without them he couldn't succeed at it. I sensed in this, really, you know, a little of Joe Kennedy. It's really kind of a sympathy with the guys, more so than he even expressed in his public statement, a sympathy with the businessman who fought his way up, you know, and had had to withstand all this. In a way he, through his father, had kind of a regard for these men, really, though he didn't understand them.

HOLBORN: They didn't have -- but he wasn't terribly comfortable with them.

SIDEY: No, not a bit, not a bit, you know. And as he said, they were unwilling partners. I guess it was kind of, you know, he recognized the importance of it, because he repeated it time after time. "I understand that if business is bad then I can't do any good, it affects me." and I think that sounds, just kind of seems like Joe Kennedy a little bit.

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But I had no illusions that he ever understood, you know -- I never had a feeling he had an understanding what it was like to earn money. In fact, once I'd asked him, way back before the election, the famous line where I said, "Mr. President, do you like Hubert Humphrey -- do you remember the Depression?" And he'd said, "No, I have no memory of it at all, really, except what I read in history books." He said, "My experience was the war; that's what I remember. but the Depression had no effect on me." And I remember he was always asking me, you know, "you going to make any dough," or "what does somebody like so and so make," or "Does Henry Luce pay you well?" there was always that kind of fascination with money.

I guess one of the classic examples of that was when we were at Bob Kerr's ranch, and he got wrapped up in finding out how a cowboy lived, you know, who made \$200 a month. And the manager of the ranch kept explaining to him how they gave him his milk in his electricity and all that sort of thing. The President never really understood that nor did he understand the struggle. I felt that was probably his greatest weakness, as far as...

HOLBORN: At this time were you already working on your book or decided to write

your book?

SIDEY: No, this was in early...

HOLBORN: '62, that was.

SIDEY: '62. Well, yes, you're right; this was spring of '62. I had decided on it, but I really wasn't at work on it. It was going to be -- we were going to have it that fall, and I hadn't really gone to work on it yet.

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One of the other memorable meetings was, again, in the fall of '61, to retrace a bit here. I remember I talked to him about the nuclear test ban and I remember that that time -- this particularly amused me later on -- but I remember talking to him and how his conclusion that it was an inevitable we were going to have to test after the Russians has set off their bombs, and he felt it was just utterly kind of hopeless that there would be any agreement. He'd been discouraged on every avenue in his efforts to deal with them, and he said, "we're going to alert them and tell them to go ahead and prepare our scientists to prepare for the tests." And he said it was almost inevitable that we were going to have to test by next spring. I remember all through that winter and spring all the journalists writing about the agonizing decision, but there really was no decision. He'd made it, in essence, bearing some breakthrough with the Russians. He tried constantly, but there weren't any, and as a result we did test just on schedule, as he had said. And he even made a little speech about it later and kind of laid that out.

HOLBORN: On a different order of importance, didn't he also in 1961 during one of your meetings that summer tell you about his feelings about Chester Bowles and changes...

SIDEY: That was true, that was true. that was in one of the pool meetings. He'd been really kind of irritated, my impression was, with Bowles from the very start. When Bowles first announced the fact in the campaign that he was quitting Congress to do this, I talked with Kennedy about that, and he didn't say anything bad. He just kind of shook his head one day up in the Senate office building, and it led me to believe that he didn't like this; and he didn't want to feel obligated to anybody.

And then I remember when Scotty Reston [James B. Reston] had a big column of prospective ambassadors, which later proved to be about 50% right. This was down in Palm Beach before he took office. I remember the president thought Bowles had leaked that, you know. He was very upset about that, and he called up Bowles, though he didn't accuse him. He told me he raised hell about whoever would do such a thing like that, figuring that it would get back to whoever had done it, if Bowles hadn't.

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Then on the subsequent difficulties with Bowles -- and they were problems piling up in the State Department that we knew nothing about, unanswered queries, and then Bowles' statements that he preferred to do other things, and then the effort, the kind of a board of effort there, to move him. The President talked to me and said, of course there was a great outcry from the Liberals and the leaked stories. And he had no illusion about it. He felt it either came from Bowles or Bowles supporters, and I remember he had had lunch with Bowles and suggested, you know, that he do something else: I forget exactly; an ambassadorship, I guess. Then there was immediately the outcry, and what it did in my estimation was just solidify his determination to move him, because he ended that conversation -- we were in the pool, and he was standing there, and he just looked up and said very casually "Bowles will go," or "He'll go." I forget just exactly how he put that; I guess he just said, "He'll go." there was such finality in that that I never had a doubt. It took a little while, but....

HOLBORN: That year, too, you also worked on this article on the President's reading habits, didn't you, trying to establish some doctrine...

SIDEY: Yes, that's right, and this is kind of a humorous comment on how the gospel is set up on these things. You know, we had gotten into the matter of him reading. Actually the man who suggested that story was Henry Luce. He'd been at a dinner, sat beside Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and she had mentioned that the President had just finished -- it was Leech's book; the one about McKinley, *In the Days of McKinley*, a big thick volume....

HOLBORN: Yes, Margaret Leech.

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SIDEY: Leech, Margaret Leech's book, yes. Big, huge volume. And how he'd finish it, you know, in a couple of nights. And Luce had talked to her more, and he said, "Oh, she explained how much he read." So he came to me and said we ought to check into that.

So I went to you, Fred, and we got a list of all the things he'd read, but we still wanted to establish how fast he read. We called up the Reading Institute where he was supposed to have taken the course, but nobody could really remember about him reading in that. And I called up, and they suggested that he probably read about 700 or 800 words a minute, which was twice normal which is about 400 words a minute.

Well, the president didn't like that. He thought he read faster than that, not being a bit modest about it, so we made some rough calculations. He read a couple of memos, and it came out about a... Oh, yes, John Kenneth Galbraith had also testified that JFK had a 26 page memo and it had taken him just about 10 minutes because he noted it on the clock, and we figured out how many words. Well, it came out about a thousand words a minute. Well,

the President still felt that that was a little slow, so what I did was to round that figure out to 1200.

We put that in the article, and then I noticed for months and years after that this became the real gospel on his reading speed. And actually, as I watched him then because I was interested, I've seen him in difficult passages go much lower than that, I'm convinced, but yet in other reading matter go much faster than that and come back with intelligent questions about it. But anyway, that's how that figure got established. I guess that about does it in terms of the notable, private encounters. There were many little ones along the way.

HOLBORN:       When did you first broach him to your book?

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SIDEY:           Well, that was in the winter of 1962, and the thought of it was to do a book on a year of crisis. In other words, I began to look back at this year which had been just crisis after crisis after crisis, so I wrote a letter originally just to Pierre, and all I got was just a verbal, "Okay, the President's all in favor of it." However, he said at the time, he said, "The President wants you to know that he will not open any secret files to you. You can interview people, and they'll try to help you in that way but there will be no documents that will be opened up." So it was on that way that I proceeded.

And there wasn't much said for quite a while till the spring, I guess, of 1962, around when, I guess, the first whiff of the Lasky [Victor Lasky] book or, you know, when criticism began to solidify in 1962 and the President suddenly got alarmed about his image. And I got a special query from Pierre: "The President wants to know how you're coming." In other words he was quite anxious about it. that was in the summer or fall of 1962, I believe, and I assured him he said, yes, go ahead.

Well then, actually over the course of that time, I had a couple of special interviews with him, one up in Newport and then one in the office. The first one at Newport he read some of it, and he made no suggestions except he wanted more serious material in about Laos, in other words, his decisions about Laos. And he talked a little bit more about that, about how he was ready to go in there, and other words, and some sort of limited way, And he talked also about the reluctance of any military men to get in there. He talked about how he had had MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur] down when all this trouble came up at one point, and they'd lunched with Republican leaders, and General MacArthur had said he wouldn't commit a single American on the mainland, into Asia there, unless you're prepared to go all the way, you know. He talked about that; that was the major point there. Later on, the only other thing, he went through a lot of the book to check it on quotes. The only thing he ever suggested...

HOLBORN:       Did he ask to see the whole book?

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SIDEY:           No, he did not. He just... I selected the parts where his direct quotes -- I

made the pledge to him that any direct quotes, privileged, you know, would be checked back with him. He asked that I put in more substance about the DeGaulle meetings, and he gave me some material then about what he and DeGaulle had talked about. He wanted more in there. He was worried that that sounded too much like just kind of a celebration in Paris, and he wanted a little more DeGaulle material in there, which is in the book. It was really the first authentic rundown on actually what DeGaulle and he talked about. But he liked it at that time.

HOLBORN: How about on the Bay of Pigs? Did he suggest anything?

SIDEY: No.... Well, yes, that's right, he had some objections to that. He didn't ask me to take out anything. He just said now there were certain things he wanted in; for instance, there was great talk about how much Bill Fulbright [J. William Fulbright] was against this, the Bay of Pigs business. Well, he said even Fulbright, you know, wasn't as adamant against it as people have said, because he said, for instance, after one of the meetings on it where Fulbright had expounded his theories against it (which have been mostly philosophical objections), why, Fulbright had come up to him and said, "Well there's more to this than meets the eye," indicating, you know, that this had gone further and the thing had gone on. And he didn't get the impression that Fulbright was so much against it as everybody said he was afterwards.

I remember once standing in the office -- we were talking about the Bay of Pigs again, and he was pacing in the middle of the rug. And he said, "If I were writing your book, the question that ought to be answered is how could the Joint Chiefs of Staff, myself, all the Soviet experts, everybody who reviewed this, how could we all look at all these plans for the military and expect them to work?" He said, "That's the question there is no answer to." In other words, everybody was involved. He said, "I take the responsibility, but the point of it was that it was just such a staggering miscalculation all down the line. there was nobody in that whole

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group that suddenly really said, 'Let's stop', or 'This can't work.'” He said he never heard from Bowles, and if Arthur Schlesinger had misgivings he didn't hear from him, and the Fulbright objections as he remembers them were simply on the philosophical basis.

He also -- to the charge that he canceled all the air power at the last minute or that the CIA called him up at 4:00 a.m. or very early Monday morning and wanted an airstrike put in -- he said there was no call that early morning. He said later in the day they wanted to reinstate, but it was too late then, the boats had already gone in. He said there never was any question in his mind about committing U.S. air power. That was established from the beginning, and he never changed his mind on that, kept right on through the Bay of Pigs that way. Some of these things he asked to be put in the book.

Then the only thing that he really asked to be changed was I had a final sentence in which I've been standing in his office and we'd been talking, and I said, "I know it's an obvious question, but I really haven't heard you say it: are you going to run in 64?" And he

said, "Of course I am." I had that as the last sentence in the book, and when he read that, why, he simply said, "You'd better let me make that announcement." He asked that I change that, and those were the only words in the book, the whole thing, that he asked that we change.

But again I must emphasize that in my whole relationship he was always very conscious that I was a reporter. This was the beauty of it. I never felt that he really told me anything that couldn't have been published. Oh, a few little things, personalized about various people in that. But he recognized that I was a newsman, and actually it was kind of a respectful thing that he did. He didn't give me anything that he expected me to have to hold.

One other interesting little thing was that when I took the picture on the cover of the book, I had made an appointment. He didn't believe I could take the picture -- I used to shoot pictures for *Life* -- and he thought it was a lousy idea, you know: we're going to have pictures and text by Hugh Sidey. Well, I convinced him that I just had an idea. And I happen to go over there the morning, that Saturday morning, right after this whole

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business had come out on Diefenbaker [John C. Diefenbaker], having this memo which had been leaked to the papers that...

HOLBORN: With supposed notations on it.

SIDEY: Supposed notation. I remember he was very irritated, the President was, that morning, and he said, "Come on now, what do you want?" He was very gruff about it in his office. He said, "Let's go over. Where do you want a picture?" I wanted it from Harry Truman's balcony. he said, "Come on," And then as he went out the door he said to Mrs Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln], "Tell one of our photographers to come over here in case Sidey doesn't have any film in his camera."

And as we got out there and walked along the arcade, I remember the first thing he said, "Now I want you to get this damn thing about Diefenbaker correct. I've been in this business long enough to know better than that." He said, "There are a lot of stupid mistakes I make, but that isn't one of them. I didn't do anything." And then he kind of chuckled, and he said, "Besides, at that time I didn't know what kind of a Diefenbaker was." The clear implication was that he felt he was an SOB, but he had not learned it at that time. He'd gone there in some innocence, but this is totally out of the way, and he wanted to get it straightened out. And then he also said, "Someday --it can't be told now, but someday you'll know just all the difficulties we've had in dealing with this man. We've more than been patient in this whole matter." He was quite upset. I remember when I took the pictures on the balcony then and only about 15 seconds he said, "Okay, One more. Let's go." That was it, and he walked out.

HOLBORN: Did he say anything to you about the book after it's publication?

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SIDEY: Yes. he did. I got a nice letter from him after it, and he said it was a good book and that... I remember once I came in -- he always was really anxious about it, you know, and after the tax speech -- I guess that was a 1963, in the late summer of 1963.

HOLBORN: '62.

SIDEY: No, the tax bill speech when he went before the people.

HOLBORN: Oh, oh, yes, the special one in the summer of 1963, yes.

SIDEY: The special message, yes. I've been in there listening to it, and he called me up like that, and he said, "How's the book going?" And I'd give him a report. I remember one time I was in the office and he said, "How's the book going?" I said, "Well, it's doing all right, but it's not doing as well as Lasky's." He said, "Well, I kind of expected that. I've read Laskey's book with interest, and I must say, it is an interesting book." That was his comment on it.

But he liked it very much. He said, "I think it's a good book." I remember once his saying, "My family is very enthusiastic about it. My sister Jean read it and thought it was a great story." He was very kind about it, yes. And, you know, I think he had his own doubts but some places here and there, but he never expressed them to me. He did like it, as near as I could tell, and thought it was reasonably accurate, to the extent that he knew all the details.

HOLBORN: What was the last person on meeting that you had with him?

SIDEY: Boy, you know, that's one I can't really remember. The last one may have really been that case after the tax speech when he called me up then. I saw him, and I saw him kind of casually off and on through September and October as he was campaigning, but I think that was the last bit. It had been a couple of months

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since I'd really seen him. It had been a while, you know, since I'd seen him, and I'd put in a request to Pierre, and it just hadn't come through, that's all.

HOLBORN: Did you find him generally much less accessible in the last year, I mean...

SIDEY: Yes, I think so. In the last year I think he withdrew a lot. There were occasions, I remember, and the first year I used to get a call from him. I remember when they put me on the freeze -- that was in April, I believe, of 1961 -- I remember I got a call at home one night about 8:00 in which he read me out about a story. I remember once we had a good story on the budget -- the next year -- when he



got interested in the budget, and I was going through the lobby, and there was suddenly a call. The President said, "That was a good story you had on the budget," and I hadn't even read the magazine yet. I didn't know what the budget story was, so he explained the whole thing to me, what the story was about. I hadn't been aware of it. I used to get calls like that occasionally, not often, but....

Really I think, now that I remember it, the last meeting that we had with him, that I had with him, was when those *Time* businessmen who were going to go to Moscow were to come around and see him before they saw Khrushchev. I guess that was just very shortly before his death. He called me over to the office just before he went in there with them and said -- it was very brief -- "What do they want? Who are they?"m I just explained very briefly, and he said, "Okay, let's go," and we walked in the door. Then he just sat down and chatted with them, and that was the last...

HOLBORN: Was it the Cabinet room or....

SIDEY: It was in the Fish Room.

HOLBORN: The Fish Room.

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SIDEY: There again the guy was a considerate -- we had Jim Linen [James A. Linen], we had all the top Executives of the company, and he was thoughtful enough to have me as White House correspondent. He called me into his office, and then I walked in with him, you know, just a little something here, you know, the working man.

HOLBORN: Well, As long as we're talking about top executives, let's talk about the top executive for a moment. What were you able to observe about the relationship of Mr Kennedy and Mr Luce for the time that he was President?

SIDEY: Well, it goes clear back to the time when he was -- Luce has always been fascinated with him, and I think Luce was always more sympathetic to him than Nixon. He felt he was more of his kind of guy. He was cerebral, and he was aggressive. He liked Joe Kennedy. Luce has had a great affection for these guys that have made this country, you know, the real shakers and the doers and that. That's why we've had the people that are on the cover of *Time* personalities. And as you know, Henry Luce spent the night that Jack Kennedy gave his acceptance speech in the Coliseum with Joe Kennedy. I guess they were in Luce's apartment, or Joe Kennedy came over there. And then all through the campaign, of course, the President, President Kennedy, felt to some extent that Luce helped him more than any other publisher to get the presidency because he was on the cover of *Life* a couple of times and on *Time* a couple of times, and constantly there were good stories about him.

The Really first kind of friction between them arose over the so-called piece that Billy Graham [William F. Graham] was going to have in the campaign. It was a pro-Nixon piece, A little bit anti-Catholic, and they suddenly called up Kennedy and gave him 48 hours to answer it. I guess he had Niebuhr [Reinhold Niebuhr] lined up to do it, but Kennedy, as I understand, called Luce, and I don't know the details of that conversation. All I know is the Billy Graham piece came out as a real neutral thing, it was changed. That was the direct result of the thing.

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After he got the nomination, Kennedy went up to the *Time* editors to have lunch with them. He always considered the audience of *Time* to be very essential, a very well read and important audience. He got, of course, very angry at Luce, then, as time went on, and there was some criticism. But nevertheless, it was a very fascinating and kind of intriguing relationship in which they both played the game. Luce was still fascinated by the guy, and Kennedy was, too. Kennedy always used to ask me about Luce whenever I'd come in. "How's he doing?" He and Mrs. Luce, you know -- Mrs. Luce used to write him letters all the time. but he always wanted to know how it was going, what did Luce think about it?

I guess the classic confrontation was in 1963, and it was in one of those doldrums, I guess. It was in the late summer, sometime in there, when Luce came down and was going to ask -- no, it was early summer, I guess; spring -- Luce came down to ask Kennedy to come to the 40th anniversary of *Time*. There was just to be a short meeting, and it went on for more than an hour, and Kennedy just chewed him out. I remember them walking out the door, and Kennedy was still working on Luce. I remember he said, "What's the state of the world like?" Luce said, "Well, I've got to admit the state of the world is pretty good." Kennedy said, "Yes, but in your magazine you just say it's lousy, that's all," and Luce kind of stopped and said, "You're right; you're right. We've been maybe...." And then I remember they put me in a terrible spot. I remember Kennedy turned to me and said, "There's an impartial man" -- I happen to be standing there -- and said, "Now let him tell you as an impartial observer. Does the average man on the street in the city think that *Time* magazine has been fair to me?" I thought for a while, and I said the President was right, the average man in the city would think that *Time* had been unfair to him, but you also have to consider that this was a Democratic City and they would probably be prejudiced. I remember Luce Immediately brightened up and said, "Ah, yes, Phoenix now, where I go. Phoenix and New York, they think we've been very kind to you."

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Well, anyway, the aftermath of that was that Luce went back and said, "I think I need a drink." We went back to the hotel, and Luce was quite shaken up by this. We had been very negative about everything, you know, and Luce went back and felt that we perhaps had been unfair, that we had dwell too much on the small things -- the swimming pool parties and that sort of thing -- and gave a negative impression when in fact this portion, which came after the

blockade in the world was quite calm and Khrushchev had been shaken, the state of the world was pretty good. And we proceeded to say so a little more.

This was the nature of their relationship. It was a good, tough, hard relationship which I gather both men appreciated. I remember once the President told me, he said, "I like Luce. He reminds me of my father. He's entitled to have his magazine and say what he wants because he made it, he did. It's all his, you know." There was a kind of fundamental respect in that way.

I remember he got somewhat irritated at Mrs. Luce's criticism. Mrs. Luce came down and had lunch, and I went out and had lunch with Ted Clifton [Chester V. Clifton], the President's military aid. He said, "Well, don't worry. You don't have to go back until 2:30 to get them." When we got there at 2:30 the President was standing on Pennsylvania Avenue with Mrs. Luce. He had cut the lunch short because she had been quite harsh about his Cuban policies: not following up the blockade and demanding The troop removal. I remember the president came up to me and said, joking of course, but not really joking, "She was too much for me, Hugh semicolon I'm going to turn her over to you." What had happened was he taken her down to the door, and I hadn't been there yet with the car, and he walked out to Pennsylvania Avenue with her.

But he was always fascinated by the whole structure. He knew the editors by name, knew which ones were the ones that put the magazines to bed. He followed the magazine very closely and used to get sore at magazines that he felt criticized him too much.

I guess the classic explosion came -- and this was very early; would have been in 1961 or 1962 -- anyway, *Time* magazine had an issue which said wherever you look on the newsstands you see Kennedy's. On *the Ladies Home Journal* there had been a picture of somebody who looked just like Jackie,

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and all the movie magazines had pictures of Jackie and Caroline on them, and the President's picture had been on the cover of *Gentlemen's Quarterly*.

HOLBORN: Oh, yes. This was '61.

SIDEY: This was '61. Now, *Gentlemen's Quarterly* had made an announcement that he had especially posed for this, and *Time* magazine picked this up. As a matter of fact, it was the day, I do believe, that -- well, I know precisely what day it was: it was the day that John Glenn orbited the earth. I don't believe -- that must have been 1962.

HOLBORN: No, that was 1962 then when he orbited.

SIDEY: Yes, because it was the day that he went. It was a joyous day. I remember we went out in the Rose Garden, and Kennedy had come out in the sun, and he made this wonderful announcement. I went back in the White House and sat down on the leather couch. and Ken O'Donnell came to the door and had an

ominous gesture, said, "Come on in. He wants to see you." I didn't really know. I knew he was probably a little upset about this, but it was really kind of a nice piece. It wasn't too bad, and I said, "What is it?" Kennedy said, "You've done it again." And I said, "Done what?" I really didn't know.

So I walked in his office, and Sorensen and Salinger and a couple other aides were standing in the room. Kennedy was standing behind his desk reading the magazine, and I had a silly grin on my face, a big grin, because everybody was feeling so happy. I remember he picked up *Time* magazine and started right in and said, "Where did you get the story?" And I still had a grin, and I said, "I don't know, Mr. President," still grinning, kind of joking about it. And he threw the magazine on the desk, and he said, "Now, I'm not kidding. I'm getting God damn sick and tired of it."

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Now, this is the worst I'd ever seen him, how mad he was. He was really angry, and suddenly I realized how really sore he was. He came out from around the desk, and he walked up and down in front of me, and he told me, he said, "This is all a lie. This isn't true. I never posed for any magazine, never posed for a picture." I mustered up some courage, and I said, "Well, Mr. President, if it's wrong, we will correct it." I said I just wasn't aware; I don't know the facts of it. He said, "Well, it is wrong, because I never posed for any picture." He said, "Anybody that'd read this would think I was crazy. Any President who would pose for a *Gentlemen's Quarterly* would be out of his mind." He said, "People remember other people for one thing." He said, "I remember Arthur Godfrey only because he buzzed the tower." He said, "What are you going to do? People are going to remember me because I posed on the cover of *Gentlemen's Quarterly*." He said, "It's just not true. it didn't happen."

Well, I noticed that Salinger and some of the others were kind of plastered around the edges in the office in this great outburst. Nobody said a word, and I stammered a few things more, and we got to talking, and he slowly simmered down about it. He went on about what *Time* was trying to do to him, you know: this is the worst kind of publicity, and why didn't I check with him on these things; it was a very easy matter to check with him, and why hadn't I done it: well, it simmered down a little.

Just at that time I remember Tazewell Shepard, his military aid, came dashing in the room and said, "Mr. President, Mr. President, Colonel Glenn is on the line." Colonel Glenn had just gotten on the destroyer, and they had just gotten him on the line. And I remember he turned to me, the President did, and said, "All right, Sidey, stand there and see if you can't get this right," whereupon he went on the phone and immediately changed his mood and with a happy boisterous voice said, "Hello, Colonel Glenn, we're glad to see you," and went on with that conversation. Then immediately after he hung up with that he turned right back, came around the desk, came back to me and went into this thing again and talked quite a while about it.

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Well, the upshot of this is, and my own defense is that his picture was taken for *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, the President was unaware that it was taken, that the photographer was run in on another mission with a bunch of other photographers and Pierre was aware of it but had not told the President about it, that he posed for it. Nobody spoke up, however, in my defense, and the thing just kind of simmered down and we kind of forgot it, but that was without a doubt the loudest and most direct, really, conflict between *Time*, or at least myself in the President, in this time. I don't think it ever got quite that violent with Luce, but there were some times. The President did not go to the 40th anniversary dinner with Luce. I remember there were a lot of negotiations on that. After the blow up the President...

HOLBORN: Well, didn't involve possible other heads of state, too?

SIDEY: That's right. Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer] was invited; Macmillan [Harold Macmillan] was invited; And there was a chance that some of them might come. And I think had Kennedy gone the others would have. I think that probably Kennedy would have liked to have gone, but what he did, he called me over and asked me in these negotiations about what he should do. And he said that the people said that he was a sap if he had gone; number one, he had gone they would have said he was trying to curry favor from *Time* magazine, and he didn't want to be put in that position. And so he sat down and wrote Luce a long-hand letter in which he expressed his regrets. But he felt at that time that *Time* was too much against him and not to go was to appear to be trying to...

HOLBORN: Did he encouraged the Vice President to go, or was that an entirely independent negotiation?

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SIDEY: I don't know whether he did or not. I think he did. I think he was all for that. I don't know whether he actually suggested that the Vice President should go or whether he should not, but I do know that he himself then decided that he just couldn't come. There were other attempts, letters were sent in everything, but no, he made his decision. He stuck with it, yes.

HOLBORN: Well, before we finish up with the end, there's a couple more professional questions which we've touched on a little earlier. The advantage of hindsight -- speaking for yourself, you saw no great advantages in the type of press conference which we held at the State Department auditorium during those three years. Taking the techniques that Mr. Johnson has experimented with or any others, from the point of view of the working pressman at the White House, the regular, what might have been better? Were the end of the year backgrounders -- that'd be the two that he held in Palm Beach -- helpful devices? Would this kind of thing have been better adapted to the White House itself or what other methods might have been used?

SIDEY: Well, I'm not sure there's any real good solution to this. My feeling is that the backgrounder was good had the group been more confined, and I think that, under those terms, they just should have sat down and just selected who he wanted and done it with them and taken the criticism from the others. It's impossible to please everybody in this business; it's just utterly impossible. And the thing of it was towards the end there he was withdrawing more and more and there were only certain, very few, people he was seeing. It was kind of inevitable, and the backgrounder at the end of the year was a good thing. It just got too big, and it got too much recrimination from those who weren't invited. I think he should have just selected some of the regular men that covered him, those he wanted, and just sat down, just sent them an invitation and excluded the others and gone with the criticism. But I know of no other format.

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HOLBORN: You mean he might have handled the regular White House press corps the way he did the editors that he used to invite in, that is, over the lunch table, so to speak.

SIDEY: That's right. Just have a lunch or a dinner or just have a little session with them at the year end, and just exclude everybody else, that's all, and then let everybody who wants to come to the big press conference. That would have been about as happy and arrangement as you could have had. Again, it didn't matter to me except that I wasn't seeing him as regularly and I felt that I was slowly being moved out into the realm of the other reporters, you see. It hadn't been important to me because I've gotten to see him, but it was important to see the President to get his thinking, just his mood, his feeling and his long-range views on things; that was important.

Professionally speaking that way, there's just no total solution to that problem. Johnson seems to be working all right for his purposes, but I'm not sure that -- you know there are people that are sore about that. It's impossible. But I thought Kennedy would if he had just taken a few of those that slaved all the time to cover him in a little more, why, it would have been just fine.

His press relations were good. He understood pretty well, really, as much as anybody could in that job. He always maintained his dignity. For instance, the current problems with Johnson about personal dignity in that! Kennedy was never, never caught in that. I remember once he told me that when a thing was for background, he always spoke as if it was on the record. He always figured that it was impossible to have anything for background. He understood all these pitfalls quite well. As I recall, he really never got caught in anything to any serious degree. One of the year-enders was, you know, supposed to be background but Arthur Krock immediately exposed that. I remember we were always proud of JFK wherever he went, you know, when he appeared in France, in Germany, Berlin.

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HOLBORN: In terms of your own personal emotions, what do you think were the two

or three Peak performances of the President, things you could observe. That's not necessarily policies, but sort of the two or three key episodes, key events?

SIDEY: Well, as I look back, the one that sticks, of course, is that Berlin speech in his last year, this summer, that whole day in Berlin, along the Wall, and the crowds, and that, it was just unbelievable. And then I remember in the first year when he went to Paris, when he appeared with DeGaulle, particularly the night at Versailles, the palace, when he and Jackie came out, how extremely proud we were of this couple. That was great.

I remember, too, one thing that appealed to me a great deal was when we began to pull out of that slump of the first year after all the crises, we went -- I believe it was in the fall -- we went to Seattle at the University of Washington, and he gave a speech that was really positive on what military strength we had and how we'd endured. And I remember that was quite a good moment because there was optimism, there was hope, you know.

HOLBORN: The Russians had their difficulties.

SIDEY: That's right. And I gather -- I don't know who wrote that speech, but it was the first time that he had really taken that approach from the black events of the summer and that was a real moment. I remember the look of the stage in that, and how kind of buoyed up we all felt. Then I remember one of those little moments, that Armistice Day. I was really moved when he went out on November 11th, and it was a beautiful Armistice Day, and he gave a short little speech at the grave of the Unknown Soldier. I don't even know what he talked about.... Well, I guess he gave the speech in the amphitheater. He didn't do anything, but he talked about Bruce Catton, you know: how men -- why they died for things, that there really was no firm answer, you know, except the greater cause, you know, that Civilization would go on.

And of course the moments, the great moments -- the Cuban blockade speech, when he gave the speech about that, I remember how extremely tense he was. I remember that

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night: I was sitting there, and we were getting ready for the speech.

HOLBORN: You we're in the pool?

SIDEY: I was inside the office. I remember I felt somebody tapped me on the shoulders -- it was a mess, you know, everybody jammed in there -- and it was the President, very polite and, "Excuse me," he said, "May I get through?" Kind of ironical, you know, that night. I guess that speech was classic. There were many, many highlights in this way, but I suppose as you look back, the moment in Berlin was about as intense and dramatic as any in the whole spectacle of the thing.

Of course for sheer emotion the Dallas day is just... No reporter realized, really, even though we went through the motions of it, writing it, what had happened. You could hardly believe it. The thing that struck me was a swiftness of events, you know, to have stood there, first in Houston that morning and then in Dallas. I remember -- as I put it in the book -- there was a kind of little short hand code. I don't know if other reporters had it, but I had it. When the President would catch your eye and he always had just the slightest little smile on his face, you always felt, "Well, I know what he was thinking," like he was thinking "Look at these big crowds around me. I want you to be sure and write this." Or if something was funny, why you know, there was just a little wry smile on his face.

I remember catching his eye that morning in Texas when he was out in front of the Houston Hotel there. I remember -- was it Fort Worth? It was Houston, I guess.

HOLBORN: That would have been Fort Worth that morning...

SIDEY: That morning it was Fort Worth, yes. I beg your pardon. And then we flew on to Dallas. But at Fort Worth we stayed all night, and we were in Fort Worth. And I remember that look of his, you know. From 12:30, you know, that joyous occasion in the sunshine; the fact that we could go from that to approximately -- what time; 8:30 that night -- essentially 8 hours, 8 or 9 hours, and to have my life and the life of the world and the life of the country and the life of the family and everybody concerned change so drastically was just beyond

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comprehension.

I remember driving in with Pete Lisagor from the Press plane and walking around the grounds of the White House that night and the staggering quickness of this thing.... Beyond comprehension. I just didn't grasp it, still don't in many ways. There were great moments of that day that I forget entirely. The initial grief, you know, the grief of losing a man and a friend and a President and that then gave way, of course, to the grief of what might have been. You look back; you can pair it with what came along. I guess even now today it's still kind of escapes me how this could have happened and how it did so quickly.

I guess from the very start I had a feeling something was wrong. I heard the shots. I was in the first press bus, and I heard those, and there was that stirring inside, you know. They were sounds that could have been backfires but you weren't quite sure. And then you saw the hysterical scene, the people on the ground and all, and then you knew something was wrong. And then the wild ride, first to the trade mart and then on to the hospital, you know, and.... One of the things that still strikes me: this country of ours, it's so well organized with all its manner of safety and precaution, still in a moment like this relies on human beings, and the fact of the matter was that the human beings were on the thin edge of disorganization. This great machinery, the government of ours, was really pretty shattered. I shouldn't say that, because I'm sure SAC [Strategic Air Command] was alerted and there was no problem in that, except that the extent to which it relies on one man to run it was just brought home to me, in that Secret Service men weren't quite sure what to do and it was confusion at the



hospital and reporters got inside and some were outside and people didn't know where to go. For these moments, for an hour or so, the thing just reduced itself to share human terms with all the elements of error and doubt and everything. I guess this is kind of shattering. The coolness of the moment, too, was something that we never got used to.

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Once this kind of skipped heartbeat of the government caught itself again, the thing just went on. there had to be the oath of office; life went on. And somehow you just wanted to stop. You didn't want to do anything; you didn't want to write; you didn't want to do anything. It was so kind of grubby -- not grubby but it was so inconsequential, the place and the time in the whole thing. I could never get used to that, being told by the priest that the President was dead on a curb on a kind of homely building in Dallas, Texas, of all places, on a hot day. There weren't even Many people around, and there was still traffic on the street. I compared it with after being in Berlin and all the great moments, you know, and here in many ways the biggest story yet and it was just absolutely mundane surrounding circumstances, all of that. I never could get used to that; I probably never will. it just was not believable, that's all.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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