

**Najeeb E. Halaby Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 12/04/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Najeeb E. Halaby  
**Interviewer:** Charles T. Morrissey  
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**Biographical Note**

Halaby served as the U.S. State Department's civil aviation advisor to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia; worked as an aide to Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal; served as the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration [FAA] from 1961 to 1965; and was the CEO of Pan American World Airways from 1969 to 1972. In this interview Halaby discusses different civil rights issues throughout John F. Kennedy's [JFK] Administration, including the process of and problems with desegregating airport terminals in accordance with *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960); the 1961 hijacking of a plane, referred to as the El Paso incident; constructing and dedicating the new John Foster Dulles Airport; federal transportation policy; different White House staff members and procedures; and running the FAA, including problems with certain political figures, among other issues.

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Najeeb E. Halaby – JFK #2  
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Second Oral History Interview

With

NAJEEB E. HALABY

December 4, 1964  
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Let's start with the balance of payments.

HALABY: All right. The main area in which the President [John F. Kennedy] expressed to me his concern about America's balance of payments position was the export of U.S. airplanes, specifically the earnings which the American industry could derive from the export of supersonic transports, and other aircraft and engines and electronics which we build for export. He recognized that this was a major exporting industry, and it had contributed between three quarters of a billion and a billion dollars a year. He kept at such matters as, "How are we doing on the DC-9?"—the compact jet offered by Douglas [Douglas Aircraft Company], and in competition with the British Aircraft

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Corporation Model 111. He, of course, recognized that the supersonic transport could, over the life of its production—we were thinking at that time 1971 to 1980—could probably earn three billion dollars worth of foreign balances. On the other hand, when you pressed this argument with him a little bit, he said, "Yes, but three billion dollars out of a total of thirty billion during that period is not a decisive factor. The airplane should be justified on a utilitarian ground rather than a financial one." He also pointed out that "some of the balance

of payments boys” were prepared to spend two or three dollars of budget to get one dollar of balance payment, which was not a very profitable ratio.

The second area was with respect to our operations overseas, and of the cost of conducting our rather limited operations. He, through the Budget Director, was quite tough in telling us we could not establish

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and maintain field staffs overseas that would spend dollars overseas. Of course, that was in line with the restrictions on the Defense expenditures overseas. Apart from that, our discussions or relations with respect to balance of payments were inconsequential.

With regard to the civil rights problem, we had a number of occasions to discuss the matter, a couple of them rather dramatic, and other times routine. We, early in the Administration, with the Department of Justice, and occasionally, with the Civil Aeronautics Board [CAB], worked at the problem of desegregating the terminals of airports in the South. Our early efforts were in New Orleans and Montgomery and Tallahassee. Two of my lawyers, Mr. Howard [Daggett H. Howard], Mr. Goodrich [Nathaniel H. Goodrich], and I, deriving our authority from the Supreme Court case, the Boynton case [*Boynton v. Virginia*, 1960] which ruled against segregation of interstate transit facilities, and from the Federal

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Airport Act, which said there should be no discrimination in the use of federally assisted airports, began feeding to the Justice Department the data for injunctions against municipal airport authorities, in which either lavatories or restaurants were segregated. We had a signal success early in the Administration, in New Orleans, and later in Montgomery, and these were encouraging. The toughest nut was Jackson, Mississippi—tough for two reasons: the feeling of racism was high there, the Negro population was not aggressive and the congressman from the district, John Bell Williams, was the chairman of the Aviation Subcommittee of the House Commerce Committee, and therefore a central figure along with Oren Harris, Mike Monroney [Almer Stillwell “Mike” Monroney], and Magnuson [Warren G. Magnuson], for the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. The President recognized that Williams was a key to all our programs and plans, and he was therefore willing to be sympathetic, but

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not completely tolerant of any opposition or undue delay.

The first climax, regarding Mississippi and segregation, so far as the FAA was concerned, came with the Civil Rights Commission, under Chairman John Hannah [John A. Hannah], decided to select FAA’s federal assistance to airports in Mississippi as an example of how the federal government should not assist states and communities practicing segregation. We had, at that very moment, though informal, unpublicized negotiations, and through using the federal grant aid as a lever, practically concluded an agreement with the Mayor of Jackson [Allen C. Thompson] to desegregate the new airport, which was being

built near the old airport. And we told the chairman of the Civil Rights Commission this. The President knew of the draft report, he had talked to Dr. Hannah on other aspects, and then it was realized by the President's Assistant, Mr. Lee C. White, that they were

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about to clobber FAA, at the very moment FAA was making real progress. So the President authorized me to call Dr. Hannah, explain this to him, and see if he would not omit the reference to the FAA in this report. Hannah refused, the report came out, our negotiations blew up, and the President, Mr. White and I were very disappointed. I think this was one of a number of occasions in which the President and his brother [Robert F. Kennedy], attempting quietly to achieve some civil rights, were, you might say, over-killed by the Civil Rights Commission and its rather highly publicized activity.

Another occasion was with regard to the affair at Oxford, Mississippi. The situation, if you will recall, was that the President had directed the Department of Justice to obtain the entrance of James Meredith [James Howard Meredith] into the University, and for that purpose had dispatched federal troops into the area. We participated in the operation

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by taking marshals down in FAA airplanes, and helping to control traffic at the tiny little University airstrip. One morning, as I was on my way to testify before the Brooks Committee investigating stewardesses in the laps of pilots, I got a call on the telephone in the car, and the President was on the line. He asked me if I had any means of preventing the flight from Jackson, Mississippi, to Oxford, Mississippi, of the Governor, Mr. Ross Barnett [Ross R. Barnett]. I told him that I had some limited means, and he said, "Well, exercise them." As a safety measure to prevent collisions between civil aircraft and the large influx of military planes we had the area over Oxford, Mississippi, airport declared a restricted air space. I then got on the phone and called my friend, the Director of the State Aeronautics Commission, and told him that if he piloted the state government's airplane, with the Governor in it, or if anyone else offered or was commanded to fly the Governor, they

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federally restricted air space. Second, I advised him that whoever went into the airport, at that moment while the tension was very high, immediately after the worst riots, that they would be met by federal troops and apprehended. The state director, whose friendship I had obtained over the previous two years, said he understood the problem, and he would try to see to it that the small plane owned by the State Aeronautics Commission was not used for this purpose. As a result of this, and perhaps other actions, the Governor did not go to Oxford and did not by his presence accentuate the riot. So the President's imagination and determination came through loud and clear to me, and we were able to take action which perhaps prevented an even worse confrontation of federal and state power.

MORRISSEY: Going back a bit, why do you suppose Dr. Hannah was reluctant to

concede on the point that you mentioned?

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HALABY: Well, I think he was impatient with the civil rights efforts up to that point. I think he felt a responsibility to the Congress, and the public, as well as the President, to hasten civil rights action. I think he was getting impatient, and I think he also felt he ought to get a report out. The publication of the report itself would relieve him of some of his frustration. Also, I think he felt it was time to do a little blasting. Whether it was indiscriminate or discriminate blasting did not seem to make much difference to him as I thought it would to a man of his experience. I guess, and I as much said so, to the Executive Director of the Civil Rights Commission, Mr. Berl Bernhard [Berl I. Bernhard], that it seemed to me that he was more interested in activity than action. Publicity seemed, at that moment, to be more important to him than actually getting a single terminal desegregated. We subsequently got the

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terminal desegregated, and I suppose he would say it was partly the result of their giving it a blast.

On another occasion, we were asked by the President and his brother if we could fly marshals. They did not want to use military aircraft, and the FAA has a fleet of aircraft. We immediately responded by flying U.S. marshals, with their equipment, into Montgomery, Alabama, in connection with civil rights demonstrations there.

I think one of the things that was remarkable about my relationship with John Kennedy was that he never just briskly said, "Do something!" He always said, "Can you do something? What do you think? What are the alternatives?" And then, in the most gentle but clear way, he told you to do it. Boy, that engendered an even more urgent feeling and even greater desire to do what he wanted you to do. It was that understatement, or under-direction, that—

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at least for me—was both wonderful and extremely effective. I think some may have taken that attitude to be less than decisive; what it meant to me was that he wanted to outline the general objective and the direction, but he didn't feel like telling you exactly how to do it. Another example—did we cover the El Paso incident?

MORRISSEY: No, we didn't. I wanted to ask you about that.

HALABY: This is not in the civil rights field, but it is in the field of law enforcement and has some of the elements of the Oxford situation. Shortly after (it seems to me it was in early or mid-1961), a Continental Airlines jet left California, and stopped in New Mexico and then in El Paso, Texas. On board the airplane were a man [Leon Bearden] and his son [Cody Bearden], who were armed, and who



commanded the pilot—through holding a gun at the head of the stewardess—to proceed from El Paso, in the jet, to Havana, Cuba. It was

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one of the first skyjacking cases, and we were advised after a call from the pilot to the control tower operator who in turn advised FAA Headquarters. Fortunately we had good communications to our El Paso tower, and within a very few moments—literally minutes—we were talking to the tower. We then transmitted word to the FBI, both locally in El Paso, and to the headquarters in Washington, and the local officials were able to get the Texas State Police into the act. So that within a few minutes, we had the following rather tense situation, which I immediately reported over the phone to the President: the father and son were holding, at bay, two of the stewardesses and through them controlling the pilot, and a number of passengers in a hot, grounded airplane at the ramp at El Paso airport. The skyjackers had stated that they would shoot the crew and the passengers if they did not take off for Havana. The pilot

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stalled them by telling them he did not have enough fuel, and the refueling continued. About this point, the President of Continental Airlines got into the act to protect his passengers and his brand new Boeing six million dollar airplane. The local police and the Texas Rangers arrived on the scene, and there were so many authorities involved that there was no clear authority. I reported the situation to the President because it involved Cuba and the lives of a number of Americans. He said, “What do you think we ought to do?” I said that I thought we shouldn’t let the airplane leave the ground. About that point, McGeorge Bundy, who was in the President’s office, came on the line, and he said to the President, very firmly, “I don’t think we should let them get away with it. We should take the awful risk of injury or death to some of the passengers to preserve law and order. If it is thought

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you can get away with this kind of thing here, it will spread all over.” The President agreed, and told me to keep him informed, but to take action to see that it did not get off the ground. I had the FBI on another phone, and told them of the President’s direction. I also told the control tower and the local authorities. About this time, the refueling had been completed, and the pilot was taxiing the airplane out for takeoff, his duty being first to the passengers. For him, a precedent had been set a couple of weeks before when an Eastern Airlines Electra bound for Tampa from Miami, with a Cuban in the cockpit with a gun, had been diverted to Havana; had dropped the passengers at Havana Airport, and taken off without any difficulty. So he had before him this success, in terms of no deaths or injuries. He was taxiing out, and as he taxied out, the local authorities and the federal

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authorities shot the tires up. The pilot reported to the skyjackers that he couldn't possibly takeoff. The father and son, who had been drinking a couple bottles of champagne, apparently got very worried at this point. In the confusion, the crew were able to get out through the front cabin door, and a border patrolman [Leonard Gilman], who was one of the passengers, was able to knock out the son with a right cross, which by the way broke the patrolman's hand. The incoming officers subdued the father, and no one was injured. I think that the point of the story for me was that here was a detailed police kind of operation; it did have international implications, and the President was intensely interested in it. He and I and Bundy had a number of calls back and forth in the course of the several hours that the vigil was maintained. He was determined—and fortified by Mac Bundy, I might add—to see that law and

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order were preserved, even at great risk. I also recall—always with pleasure—that the day afterwards I got a handwritten note to the effect that he felt that I had performed well under pressure. Of course, that was the kind of thing that he often did, and it tremendously encouraged you to do even better than you could otherwise have done.

In another area of what I would call support in the administration of the agency, I found that the President either had enough confidence in me, or could not be preoccupied with the details of an independent, less important agency, to the extent that he literally let me build my own team and run the agency. I can honestly say that I believe there was less political interference in the operation of the agency than at any time in the twenty-five year history of the FAA and its predecessor agency. At times his associates, particularly

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Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], Dick Donahue [Richard Y. Donahue] or Dick Maguire [Richard Maguire], would call over with some kind of political action requested. Only on one or two occasions did I have to say to them, "If you want me to do that, get the President to tell me to do it." In no case did he ever do so. I'm thinking of appointments and contracts, and things like that. I don't think I was ever asked by any of the White House staff to do anything that I regarded as improper, but on a number of occasions I resisted their asking me to do something that I thought was strictly within my management authority and prerogative. This was very encouraging, not only to me, but to my associates. When I decided that I wanted an Air Force Lieutenant General as my Deputy, I had but to explain to the President why, and why I didn't want some of the other seekers for the job, and he approved the nomination and sent it forward.

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He did not seem interested in details of administration. I would say that if he had a blind side, in terms of the Presidency, it was that neither he nor his Budget Director [David E. Bell] were really interested in public administration per se. I think he was very frugal with a dollar. I don't think he had any conscious desire to see any waste; in fact, he was very

disturbed when he heard of it: increase in personnel without any increase in function, too many reports, and so on. But he did not have the neat, tidy administrator's approach to either his own office or the offices of others. I sometimes felt that permitted a number of agencies to run into each other and get out of control, budgetarily and administratively, but I don't think that troubled him unless it hit the papers, or unless there was some violent disagreement. Everyone respected him so much, that I think there was an unusual degree of harmony which prevented him from

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having to step in and cool the frictions between the agencies.

In the field of transportation policy and legislation, he all but turned that over to Myer Feldman, and only occasionally did I ever see his direct hand in the matter. I feel that it was one of the areas in which the Kennedy Administration failed. The President had two great opportunities, and he had had some background which he developed while a Congressman and a Senator. One of his early without-compensation advisors, Langdon P. Marvin, had been interested in air and other forms of transportation. So he did have a background of understanding in it, but unhappily, he neither enunciated sharp policies, nor chose an executor of these broad, all-mode transportation policies who was competent, determined, and effective. He did no worse than Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], but I think it was in this area of welding together rational, integrated transportation

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system policies that we have not done well during the Kennedy-Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] era. As I say, it wasn't any better in the previous eight years, and it is a very difficult field. But you need two things: you need conscious, determined policy, and you need a tough executor of those policies. President Kennedy had neither.

In the labor-management area, there were several occasions to deal directly with the President, and Arthur Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg], his Secretary of Labor. The first one was on the day of entering office, when there were both strikes and threatened strikes by the Flight Engineers International Association against the Eastern Airlines and Western Airlines, and others. The issue was whether the third seat in the big jet transports should be occupied by a pilot with some flight engineer capabilities, or by a mechanic who had been trained as a flight engineer, and in a very few cases had pilot ability. The White House was picketed

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by the enraged Eastern Airlines Flight Engineers who felt that they were being locked out by Eastern, who intended to train pilots for the flight engineer position. At issue was the presence of a fourth man in the cockpit, and individual known colloquially as a "featherbird." I recall mentioning that to the President and having him laugh, as he seldom did at a pun. (I don't think he had too high a regard for the pun, and didn't use it very much himself.) But, a "featherbird" and a featherbed was a colloquial joke about this situation at that time. Secretary Goldberg, Secretary Wirtz [W. Willard Wirtz], and I met with flight engineers,

pilots' representatives, and company representatives. It was a very serious problem which had been developing for about four years. The President was a little impatient with the situation, because this was a strike, and right on his doorstep the first thing, and he hadn't had anything

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to do with causing it and did not feel the slightest responsibility for the situation. The result of it was, after a number of conferences, Secretary Goldberg intervened and got a temporary truce in the situation on all of the carriers except Western Airlines and Eastern Airlines. The exact details are a little vague right now, but I recall two aspects of it. First, Terrell Drinkwater [Terrell Croft Drinkwater], the head of Western Airlines promised—or at least, so Secretary Goldberg thought—to respect the President's wishes to negotiate with the flight engineers, and to resume operation. Nevertheless, he locked the flight engineers out. In fact, there was some rough stuff around the flight engineer picketing, and he—according to the President and Goldberg—flouted the White House wishes in the matter. He subsequently won his fight with the flight engineers; all the Western Airline crews are operated by flying flight engineers.

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With regard to Eastern and the other carriers, Goldberg won a temporary truce and appointed a special commission headed by Nathan Feinsinger [Nathan P. Feinsinger]. For the succeeding eight or nine months, Feinsinger, as a kind of deputy to Goldberg, worked on the problem. Several times the Eastern situation flared up, and in the end, Eastern, headed by the Republican Under Secretary of the Air Force, was uncooperative with the Labor Department. The interesting thing for me was whether the President would order me to revise the safety regulations in order to get a solution of a labor management crisis. That hung over us as a threat, because at any moment, if Goldberg and Feinsinger failed, we could have prescribed by law either that there be a mechanic flight engineer, or that all flight engineers had to have flying capability. We actually prepared such regulations, as we had a technical basis requiring flying qualifications of flight engineers.

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We sort of had these regulations in our hip pocket, and on one or two occasions we hinted that this might be the result in order to help the bargaining position. In the end, it was not necessary. The President never did any more than say, "Be ready." When TWA reached an agreement with its flight engineers—paying them a severance pay or offering them flight training—the issue was generally solved, and without much loss in time or many injuries. Later, of course, I paid a heavy price for simply participating in this because the flight engineers attacked me for even being willing to issue such a regulation, and, in fact, for not prescribing that only mechanics could occupy the flight engineers' seats. President Kennedy's regime was, by the way, characterized by the least number of man days lost in the

airline industry in its history for any three-year period. I attribute this to the success of Goldberg,

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Wirtz, and Feinsinger working out some of these problems, and to the President's great interest in it.

I found the President almost always willing to have me conduct, or have contracted out, studies that bore upon policy making. He was very pleased to have me call in a group of outsiders to come in and conduct a full review of the U.S. aviation picture. We called it Project Horizon. He was very pleased to approve my and Dr. Wiesner's [Jerome B. Wiesner] recommendation for a study of air traffic control system, present and future. He complimented me on bringing in a group of lawyers to look over our system of due process and justice to airmen whose certificates were being taken away from them. He also approved my recommendation that there be a full-scale review of international air policy.

In the course of getting that drafted and getting his approval, I had some insights

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into pressure at the President's door. In particular, it was interesting to see how Mr. Juan Trippe [Juan Terry Trippe] and Pan American World Airways brought their interests before the Presidency. For example, Mr. Trippe, who was a prominent member of the Business Advisory Council, in fact, Vice Chairman of its Board of Directors, was able from time to time to see the President. I think the President had a very warm feeling of respect for this titan, although I think once or twice he called him a pirate, as well as a titan. Mr. Trippe also had, interestingly enough, engaged the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations], through the Pilots' Union, in his effort to shape the international air policy to his liking. Finally, on occasion we felt the influence of James Landis [James M. Landis], who had been a close colleague of the President's father, Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], and who represented on occasion the interests of Pan American.

The sharpened issue was that in the

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draft of International Air Policy, we provided that there be no chosen instrument, no single international air carrier. Secondly, we suggested that not only would there continue to be competition between TWA and Pan American across the Atlantic and Europe, but that there was to be an expansionist rather than a restrictionist policy. Neither Pan Am or TWA was keen about this proposal, and in fact they had before the Civil Aeronautics Board a proposed merger of the two companies. So they did everything they could through Kenny O'Donnell, Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman], Joe Kennedy, and Jim Landis, to attempt to get this policy watered down and left vague. The President did refer it back on two or three different occasions to make changes in the wording, but I do not believe he ever caused us to sacrifice the main thrust, and it did come out saying we were not for a single chosen instrument, and

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that we were for an expansionist policy.

In the field of the arts, I, having had a mother and father who were artists and interior decorators, and having lived my first ten years in an art gallery, did have a feeling that we ought to do something about federal architecture and the design and furnishing of government buildings. Since I found the FAA had a number of facilities in the field—the new international airport [John Foster Dulles] at Chantilly to complete, and was to be offered a new building rather than the twelve buildings in which it was then located, by the GSA [General Services Administration], I saw some opportunities for real breakthroughs in this area. I told the President of my hopes, and I also told Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis], and they encouraged me. I appointed sort of an FAA design committee, with Mrs. Jane Wheeler as chairman, and William Walton, Gordon Bunshaft, Andrew Ritchie, Henry Dreyfuss, Aline Saarinen [Aline Bernstein Saarinen], and others as members. This of course,

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gave us both good guidance, and also gave us a good base with the President, who highly regarded several members, in case we had any fights with the GSA and those who wanted to go on in the usual manner. The result was that we were able to finish Dulles Airport, and to design the interior in a rather uniquely functional and beautiful fashion, I think. We were also able to get Mr. Boutin [Bernard Louis Boutin], the GSA Administrator, knowing of the President's interest, to make a number of liberalizing changes in the rulings of his subordinates so that we could get modern design in the space planning, furnishing, and the colors of the new FAA building. I had planned for the President to dedicate the building during the Christmas season of 1963, but that never took place. I did show Mrs. Kennedy some of the pictures, and she was quite pleased. Of course, he did dedicate Dulles Airport. Did we go into the naming of Dulles Airport last time?

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MORRISSEY: No, not at all.

HALABY: We did dedicate Dulles Airport, and behind the dedication, there was a rather interesting story which might be worth telling. The Congress appropriated funds for what the bill described as an additional airport at Chantilly, Virginia. The funds appropriated were approximately sixty million dollars in the beginning on the recommendation of President Eisenhower, who had approved the recommendation of General Quesada [Elwood Richard Quesada], the first administrator of FAA, and my predecessor. After a study, it was pointed out that Washington National Airport would be saturated, was not really suited for jet aircraft, and a new airport would be needed. There was much controversy over a competing site at Burke, Virginia, and the

location was finally settled at thirty-one miles from the city center at Chantilly. The land was purchased and an architectural competition was held, and

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Eero Saarinen was chosen as the architect. When I came in, the runways had been constructed, and the terminal foundation was being laid. I found out, however, that the cost had almost doubled from sixty million to ninety million. I immediately brought in the top experts from the airports at New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles and had them look at the estimated cost to complete. They advised me that it would cost at least one hundred and ten million to complete the airport. I told the President, with some shock, about this. His comment was, "Well, Quesada was a lot better starter than a finisher, and we can't cancel it now. Can't you save money?" I said I would save everything I could, but it looked to me like it was going to cost that much to finish it. He said, "Well, explain it very carefully to the Congress, what has happened, and make sure they recognize that the bad estimates were not made by us. Then, once you make an estimate, stick to it."

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It was a long, hard struggle. The airport cost fifty million more than estimated, and took eighteen months more than estimated to build. In the course of sweating out the attacks of Baltimore whose Friendship Airport would lose traffic, the charges that the cost had doubled, so on and so forth, I became convinced that President Eisenhower's action taken in sadness the week after the death of John Foster Dulles, in dedicating the airport to the late Secretary, was not appropriate. I asked the President if he felt it was all right to consider another name, such as Washington International Airport. He said, "I don't mind your studying it and trying it out." I talked to his brother Bob about it too, and he was a little more encouraging in this respect. So, on one or two occasions, I hinted publicly that we would perhaps change the name to Washington International Airport, and the old airport, Washington

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National Airport, would be called the Capital Airport. One day, after these trial balloons had become widely visible Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, called me, and said he had heard of my trial balloons, and that he wished to discourage me. He thought it was both bad manners and bad politics to tinker with the name of his predecessor on this airport. I at first discounted this, thinking that if I were Secretary of State I would tend to defend the name of my predecessor. But I at that time didn't realize the nature of the opposition. I talked to the President and Mrs. Kennedy on another occasion, and told them the progress being made on the airport, and said that I felt it was going to be possible to rename it, but not until the dedication time. About this time, I learned that the Dulles family was curious about the name of the airport, and since I knew Allen Dulles [Allen W. Dulles], I decided to call him

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and propose a lunch with him and his sister-in-law, Mrs. John Foster Dulles [Janet Pomeroy Dulles], and describe what I had in mind. So I took them to lunch at the Mayflower and explained that this was the Washington Airport; that we already had the Friendship Airport in competition with Washington, and that it would be confusing. I also said that it was going to cost more, be late, and may not be used greatly. Perhaps it would be better to call the *terminal* the John Foster Dulles Terminal. So I presented my thought that Washington International Airport with the John Foster Dulles Terminal which would be dedicated to him, and the Capital Airport. Allen Dulles seemed to take to the idea, but Mrs. Dulles was coldly silent. A few days later, in fact a few nights later, about eleven in the evening, I got a call from the President which went something like this: "Jeeb, have you renamed that airport yet?" I said, "No sir, not yet, but we are coming along."

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He said, "You haven't renamed it?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, don't. Everett Dirksen [Everett M. Dirksen] is here, and he tells me the family is very upset, and I just think we had better leave that alone." I said, "Well, Mr. President, I thought I was doing what you wanted me to do, and I have gone down the trail quite a bit. I talked to Senators and Congressmen, and they are all in favor of it." "Well, no, we just won't do it. Just leave it the way it is." So I kind of swallowed my cud and tucked my tail in, and gave up that idea. Apparently Mr. Rusk was right.

One other occasion like this was when we were in a big fight over the preservation of an airport up in Long Island called Mitchell Field; a great argument about turning it into a shopping center, or keeping it as an airport for small planes and drawing the traffic away from LaGuardia. I had taken a public position in favor of

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keeping it as an airport. My predecessor, General Quesada, had come up at the request of Mrs. Cissy Patterson Guggenheim [Alicia Patterson Guggenheim], the editor of the Long Island newspaper, *Newsday*, who was bitterly opposed to keeping it as an airport on account of the noise and other things. I had kept the President informed, but he had never given me a go or stay decision on it. But one lunch time he called me, and he said, "Jeeb, what are you doing up there in Long Island?" He said, "Mrs. Guggenheim is here, and she tells me it doesn't make any sense for us to fight for that airport. Don't you think you can relax on that?" I said, "Well, Mr. President, I think we ought to try to save it, but if you feel otherwise, we can relax on it." He said, "Well, I think you should."

So I guess those two incidents reflect only that where the President met opposition from powerful people, and the goal wasn't too valuable or consequential, he occasionally

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sort of pulled the rug out from under you. Those were the only two times he ever did it to me, and in each case it was not of major consequence.



MORRISSEY: Any additional comments about John Kennedy's operating style as an administrator?

HALABY: Well, the feeling you had about the White House which would be symptomatic of his operating style, was that at first there are just all kinds of guys running around and bumping into each other without much order or organization. In fact, the guy over there who seemed to have the most orderly sense of organization and management was Fred Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton]. I gather that because he wanted to do things in a fairly formalized, organized manner, he was eased out, although it may have been because he was really more valuable in the Department of State Legislative Liaison. In any case, I think it was true of all the staffers that the President brought in that they played everything

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intuitively, and that not one of them had an orderly, systematic approach. I'd say probably that the nearest, outside of the military aides who did it out of habit, to being organized and systematic was probably Mac Bundy. At the same time, after these fellows got their jurisdiction problems straightened out—and they did, I think, after about two years—it worked remarkably well, though intuitively. I think the least organized of them all was Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], who's office was an absolute madhouse and a mess. Maybe that is part of being the chief press officer.

Somehow it worked. Not because it was organized and managed by a Sherman Adams, or even a Clark Clifford [Clark M. Clifford], but I think because largely of the fact that the men working for him did not want to create any unnecessary problems for him, did not want to indulge in their personal piques and preferences. If there was any single thing that made it

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work, it was that. Of course, the most important thing was his enormous self-discipline, his retentiveness, his willingness to go into all kinds of detail, and his working twenty-four hours a day at the job. I felt that in about the fourth year he was going to have to select some guy, whether it was Bundy or someone else, who was going to get more nearly like a Chief of Staff than anything he had had. I feel the same way about President Johnson. And of course the two previous Presidents, Eisenhower and Truman [Harry S. Truman], did have more of an organized, stratified staff, and did have in Sherman Adams and Clark Clifford, the kind of Chief of Staff that we often hoped for in John Kennedy. But after about the end of the second year, you pretty well knew who to go to—Mike Feldman, Mac Bundy, occasionally Lee White on substantive things, Kenny O'Donnell on appointments—I don't mean personnel appointments, that

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was Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan]—but to get in to see the President, to set up a meeting, or to get on a flight with him. That must have been one of the funniest jobs of all O'Donnell had: keeping people who wanted to go on flights with John Kennedy from getting on the plane. He was an excellent protector. There was never a moment's question but what he was doing what was best for the President, frequently brusquely and unpopularly. There was an extraordinary feeling between him and the President. The President seemed to know that he was there like a very faithful German Sheppard....

[END OF SIDE ONE]

I think O'Donnell had a real intuitive sense about the President's mood, and who he would like to see and for how long, and who he wouldn't like to see. I also think he, at times, wanted to protect the President a little bit more than the President wanted to be protected. But he was a key factotum.

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It was always interesting to me that the President kept at least three doors open in the office. One was a door out into the garden; the second was to Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln]; and the third was to Kenny O'Donnell. It was possible to come in either through Mrs. Lincoln or Kenny O'Donnell, and at times, but rarely, I think people came in simultaneously. I think that used to enrage Kenny, but Mrs. Lincoln was such a vital part of the presidential body that, particularly the family, visits or telephone calls which she sensed he would want to take, came through sort of regardless of O'Donnell. I don't know how much confusion this caused the President, but I think he liked to have a little creative confusion around him. I never tried to come in through Mrs. Lincoln, but it was tempting to try to come around that way if O'Donnell was obdurate.

MORRISSEY: In regard to your comments about the lack of a good transportation policy during the

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Kennedy Administration, could you spell this out a little more specifically about your own expectations of what you think he might have done, and who might have headed these projects for him?

HALABY: Well, to take just a moment. I think it is generally accepted that our transportation network just grows; there is no overall national planning. Only in a few areas is there regional planning, and in a few more there is some metropolitan planning. I'm talking now about the total transportation—worldwide, continental, regional, local, and urban transportation. The highway men are a special group with a strong lobby, both in the state houses, in the cement and asphalt corporations, and in the contractors, who make a specialty of road constructions. There is a group within the

federal government and within each state government. The Bureau of Public Roads is in the Department of Commerce. Then the seaway men are a

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different breed. They talk subsidies, both construction and operating handouts, and different kinds of vessels and activities. They are well entrenched and pretty well healed, and they don't want anything to do with the highway men. Then there are the railway men, and they are a completely different group, with a different trade association and different lobby, and a different kind of approach and a different kind of problem. There are even barge men, an inland waterways group. Then there are the truckers, and they are quite a potent force. And finally, the airway men, the aviation people. There is no coordinated, integrated system of transportation. It is completely random, and what you might call almost too free enterprise, despite all the regulations of all the individual segments. CAB regulates the routes, rights, and rates of the airlines. The ICC of the rails, truckers, and interstate buses. The Maritime Commission regulates the sea transportation.

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So the President, when he came in, found this kind of chaotic, truncated transportation planning. He could have, at that point, set up a position of either Secretary of Transportation, or a Secretary of Commerce who was a real transportation man, or even an Under Secretary of Commerce for Transportation who was a modern, aggressive, transportation planner with an overall view of the economist, and so on. Instead, he simply, appointed a man, a wonderful guy who was a roommate of his brother's at Harvard and a friend of Senator Magnuson, to be the Under Secretary of Commerce for Transportation, and months and months passed before there was even an attempt to develop national transportation policy. Finally one was hammered out in the adversary process by interdepartmental committees, rather than through operations, research, analysis, and good policy formulating techniques as used in Defense, FAA, and

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a few other agencies. That very short message was sent up to the Hill about two years after the President came in. But even after it went up, there was nobody to fight it through the Congress, or to implement it when it came back; it is just one of the functions of the Secretary of Commerce. Also, it may be that he was more conscious about the transportation program than I thought. He may have been, as the President has to be, of the view that it was too much of a fight to take on at that time, in the midst of all his other struggles. If he consciously concluded that, I would have no cavil. But on the other hand, if he neither attended to the policy, nor had somebody attend to it for him, then I do feel that it was an omission.

**MORRISSEY:** In regard to the desegregation of airports, is there any particular reason why the three cities you chose to desegregate first were New Orleans,

Montgomery, and Tallahassee?

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HALABY: No. I think in each case—I'm not sure—we had either evidence or complaint by an individual or a group. As I remember, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] made the campaign in New Orleans. We immediately, on learning of it, tried to help them, and Justice was very vigorous in pursuing it.

MORRISSEY: People who are interested in the relationship between agencies and congressional figures on the Hill would be intrigued by the fact that John Bell Williams represented the district in which lies the Jackson airport, the airport you wanted to desegregate. Did this create any distinctive problems for you in dealing with the segregation problem in Jackson?

HALABY: Yes. And elsewhere, too. Naturally, any new agency or department head, if he is wise, gets together early in his career with his principal committee chairmen. For me, that meant John Bell Williams and Oren Harris of the Commerce Committee in the

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House, Albert Thomas and George Mahon [George H. Mahon], on the Appropriations Committee, and Senators Magnuson and Monroney of the Senate Commerce Committee, as well as the Senate Appropriations Committee. Of all these, the one who was most anti-civil rights was John Bell Williams. Since I felt a strong desire to assist the Negroes to achieve equal opportunity, and this was one area in which I could move, I did so. I told the President that I was going to get in trouble with John Bell Williams, and he said, "Well, it is up to you. You will have to live with him; I'm not going to take up your battles for you with John Bell Williams." I also talked to Oren Harris. He was passive, however, because coming from Arkansas, he was certainly not going to help me with my problems on civil rights with John Bell Williams.

My problems were largely ones of sniping at committee hearings, letter

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writing, and since he does have a wonderful Southern wit, particularly after several drinks, and is quite a humorous fellow, a number of barbs were thrown at me at public dinners and luncheons and what not. He can be quite vindictive, but often he would say, "I know you don't really believe in this—it is that bastard Bobby." Bobby was the *bête noire* of the racists. Although I never deliberately hid behind Bobby's skirts, Williams hardly ever let me get out in front. On two or three occasions I told him that I did it not only because it was Administration policy, but because I believed in it. He never complained to the President, knowing that the Kennedy clan, as he called them, would not give him much time of day. We

did see that he was included in the signing ceremony for the Federal Airport Act which he helped pass. We had to get him overruled in committee when he wanted to put restrictive provisions in the Act so that

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we could not require antidiscrimination clauses in contracts and the like. I can't say that except for personal barbs, that it ever really hurt me or the agency. If Oren Harris had not been there—if Williams had been chairman of the full committee—then I think it could have hurt a great deal. Every time it looked as if we were going to get into real trouble, I marshaled a group of Sam Friedel, Torbert Macdonald [Torbert H. Macdonald], John Blatnik [John A. Blatnik], and others of liberal persuasion on the Commerce Committee, and they helped override Williams in a particular area. Harris would usually stay neutral, but in the end would come with the Administration.

MORRISSEY: Were you concerned with the ins and outs of passing the Federal Airports Act?

HALABY: Yes. I had the principal chore. A funny thing I ought to mention—the legislative liaison boys, O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], Desautels [Claude J. Desautels], Manatos [Mike N. Manatos], never gave us

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much help at all. They left us to paddle our own canoes in the Congressional waters. I think this is probably right. In fact, if you looked at the *Washington Post* box score, the only bill we have ever had in four years that made the box score was the Federal Airport Act. We did not have major, earthshaking legislative problems.

I think one thing ought to be mentioned though, and that is we started the kind of economy program here in the FAA late in 1962 that President Johnson started insisting on for the whole government in December, 1963. The President never really pushed us hard on economy in government, but we did on our own. He was rather pleased to be able to mention some of the savings we were making, but he had never really pushed us very hard. Not that he was a big spender, but he was not a tight administrator, either. One of our actions was to close eight air route traffic control centers. These are

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centers from which airplanes are guided as they traverse an area and into which the United States was divided into twenty-nine center areas—now twenty-one. I got his approval for doing this. I warned him that there would be political repercussions. He said he understood, and I told him we were going to go and see each Congressman and Senator who was affected. We got a lot of argument, particularly from fellows like Stuart Symington [Stuart Symington, II] and Ralph Yarborough [Ralph W. Yarborough], but in the end they saw not only that we were determined to do it, but that it was a saving. However, when we closed the

center in San Antonio, Texas, about three months after Congressman Henry Gonzalez [Henry B. Gonzalez] had been elected from that district on a ticket of getting more federal money for San Antonio. The area is largely supported by federal funds expended at Kelly and Brooks Field, and Lyndon Johnson had, unknown to me, campaigned in the streets with this first

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Mexican-American to be elected to Congress. When I made a visit to San Antonio shortly afterward and was quoted as having said that the Congressman “was a freshman acting like a freshman” when I learned that he had demanded that I be investigated by the GAO, Gonzalez became very angry. He first went to Walter Jenkins [Walter W. Jenkins], the Vice Presidential Assistant, and told him “Halaby had to go,” that I had insulted him; then to the Vice President. I had a long talk with Lyndon Johnson, telling him how I regretted being trapped by the opposition in Texas. Gonzalez then wrote a letter to the President, a very vituperative letter, in which he said that I was tampering with safety and playing with the lives of Americans, and that I had been rude to him and so on. The President called me one day and said, “What on earth did you do to Henry Gonzalez?” I told him the whole story; how the Republican Mayor there had picked up an offhand remark

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I made that he was “acting like a freshman Congressman,” and gotten it on the front page. He chuckled and said, “Well Henry has a very hot temper.” That was all I heard. Then about another three or four weeks passed, and he wrote the President another letter. Since his vote was very important on a number of issues, I began to worry a bit. The President sent one of his congressional liaison men up to talk to Gonzalez and found that he was absolutely irreconcilable about this. So, the next time I saw the President, I asked him what I should do about it, and he just said, “Forget it. It will pass.” There was no doubt in my mind that he would support me, and he did.

MORRISSEY: Returning to the Airport Act, any additional comments you can offer about what you got versus what you wanted to get, and the problems of passage generally?

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HALABY: Well, the main problem was that we made a strong record that the Administrator of the FAA could condition the grants in such a way that there could be no discrimination of any nature. Second, that the grants could be conditioned on the local airport authorities—taking measures such as improving outlying airports, maintaining outlying airports, and generally promoting aviation as well as just grabbing out of the federal till. All of the pressure groups, the Airport Operators Council, the Air Transport Association, and some of the individual cities and states were against giving us this authority. Of course, they found a willing ally in John Bell Williams. We had

quite a fight over these clauses in the bill, and finally the bill was passed and in the conference they were worked out so that we got just about what we wanted.

Another complication with Mr. Williams was that he had a new airport in Jackson

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that he wanted to get completed, so we had a little bit of muscle on him there. Although we never even mentioned withholding the money, he knew we always could. That tended to ameliorate his vehemence.

MORRISSEY: One final question. How would you characterize relationship between this agency and the CAB during your tenure?

HALABY: The relationship between FAA and CAB has pursued this course: in 1958, Congress passed the Federal Aviation Act, and thereby took functions out of the Department of Commerce, and out of the CAB, and out of the Defense Department, and created a new, independent agency. They took the rulemaking power and the rule enforcing power from the CAB. They left the routes, rights, and rates regulation in the CAB, and to the disappointment of many, they left a duplicate accident-investigating function in the CAB. The Act authorizes the CAB to find the probable cause of accidents. At the same

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time it directs that the FAA participate in the accident investigation, and the legislative history showed very clearly that the FAA would have to investigate simultaneously at all times because they had the responsibility for making the system work the minute after the accident. Therefore, they couldn't wait six months until the CAB deliberated coming out with a report. The first two years the relationship between the FAA and the CAB were characterized by constant bickering privately, and by several major controversies in public—one of them in a grisly way at an accident scene between the chairman of the CAB, Judge Durfee [James Randall Durfee], and my predecessor, General Quesada. With the change of administrations, it was obvious that there was going to be a new chairman of the CAB. I was consulted by the President's staff and by the President as to who should be appointed. I recommended that they reappoint Boyd [Alan S. Boyd], a Florida

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Democrat appointed by President Eisenhower, as a member for six years, and that he be made chairman. The President did so. From the very beginning Boyd and I have been on the most cordial, cooperative terms. I don't think we have ever let our friendship compromise statutory obligations, but whenever we have had a difference, we have thrashed it out in an open and candid way, and then either he or I have announced the result. We have settled these matters that way. They still have their independent investigation and their probable cause finding. My people think it is absolutely wrong and wasteful, and a terrible thing. I tell

them we will live with it until it is proved that it is not the right way to do it. There have been no public controversies between the CAB and the FAA during this period. Once or twice magazine articles have attempted to drum one up. There have been a number of private disagreements, but Boyd and I have remained very

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close friends. I have great respect and confidence in him. I supported him very strongly when he came up for reappointment. We do everything we can to help them, and vice versa. We have a periodic luncheon meeting, and breakfast at least once every week. Our staffs are working closer together than ever before. We formed a joint accident investigation school. All of this happened under President Kennedy, and I think largely for two reasons. One, he gave me a kind of mandate to work out amicable and cooperative relationships; and two, the personal relationships between me and Boyd have been excellent.

MORRISSEY: Anything else?

HALABY: Oh, I'm sure there are hundreds of little things that I'll think of and wish I could commit to your record, but right now I guess I'll probably say what most of the people you have interviewed are saying. That John F. Kennedy had a sense of history

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and I'm glad that you all are contributing to the stream of historical research and to the record. And finally, I miss him very much.

MORRISSEY: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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