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Biographical Note

Donovan (1912-2003) was a journalist, including a Washington bureau chief for the *New York Herald Tribune*, and was the author of the 1961 bestseller, *PT 109: John F. Kennedy in World War Two*. In this interview, he discusses the process of writing his book, the casting of the PT 109 film, and his memory of the assassination, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Robert J. Donovan

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Robert J. Donovan

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Meeting John F. Kennedy [JFK] for the first time
2, 11	Coverage of the 1960 presidential campaign
7	Comparing press coverage of JFK and Richard Nixon
10	Issues with religion during campaign
12	Donovan's reaction on election night
13	Coverage of the Democratic National Convention
15	Visiting JFK after the election
16	JFK's appointment of Robert F. Kennedy as attorney general
17	Researching for his book, <i>PT 109: John F. Kennedy in World War Two</i>
26	Reactions to the first draft
32	Casting and filming the movie, <i>PT 109</i>
37	Reactions to Joan and Clay Blair's book, <i>Search for JFK</i>
41	JFK's reaction to the movie, <i>PT 109</i>
43	JFK cancels his subscription to the <i>New York Herald Tribune</i>
47	Issues with reporting confidential news
53	The rise of television and its effect on journalism and politics
57	Relationship with Robert Kennedy
59	Remembering the day of the assassination
64	President Kennedy's legacy

Oral History Interview
with

Robert J. Donovan
June 8, 1983
Falls Church, Virginia

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: Uh, why don't we begin with your earliest contacts with JFK [John F. Kennedy]. When did you first meet him? When he was in Congress presumably?

DONOVAN: Well, I only, you see, I saw President Kennedy when he was in the House of Representatives, but mostly—that's where I met him—but mostly at things like White House correspondents' dinners and so forth. I began to know him, personally, when he was a senator and getting under the presidential picture, and then I used to go to see him and travel some with him. And then, of course, when he was president [laughter], every day.

STERN: Right. Did you, were you with the '56 convention [Democratic National Convention] when he almost....

DONOVAN: No. I was not. I was not at the '56 convention.

STERN: When did it become clear to you in the fifties that he was running for president, I mean talking about the, before he announced...

DONOVAN: Well, from talk and speculation around Washington. And there were so many pictures, early on, photographs, of

[-1-]

him and Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] going around the country and meeting people. That's what I mostly remember.

STERN: Yeah. And what about some of those major high points in his senate career, did you have any, for example his speech on Algeria and that sort of thing. Did you cover any of those things?

DONOVAN: No. I was covering the White House then.

STERN: Just the White House then. Okay, uh, well, let's, why don't we get up to the point where he announced for the presidency...

DONOVAN: Yeah. I was there that day.

STERN: ...that was 1960, if you want to talk about your reaction to that, maybe any anecdotes that you might have?

DONOVAN: No. Except that it was, it was a fine performance. Uh, it was a very convincing performance and what I remembered about it, most people didn't take Kennedy very seriously early on. It just seemed unlikely and, uh, this man had so, such self confidence and so much particular authority about his plans, his campaign, that you knew that, uh, he thought very seriously that he was going to be the nominee of that party.

STERN: Did you think he would be at that point?

DONOVAN: I can't remember. But I know that as I used to go to see him after that and he would sit in his, in a rocking chair in his office, he used to tell me why he

[-2-]

was going to get the nomination. And he must have told that to everybody. He would not have told it to me personally. And, I think, in those days it was a strategy of his to try and convince people that he was a serious candidate. I can't remember exactly what he would say, but he would show why he would be strong in the primaries and, uh, his organization, and, uh, the, uh, uh, the different states that he had a chance of carrying. I don't recall his stressing so much the Catholic vote in those, in those speeches to me. I suppose he did. The best campaign, one of the greatest performances I ever saw President Kennedy make was before the Houston Ministerial Association.

STERN: Right. Okay. We'll get to that. What about some of the people who were working with him, people like Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen], did you have any contact with them, and, uh....

DONOVAN: In those early days, not so much, mostly Pierre [Pierre E. G. Salinger]. It wasn't all that difficult to get to see the president then, to see Senator Kennedy. He was always accessible to the press and, so I didn't have to go through a lot of rigmarole. In fact you could often call him up. His personal secretary arranged to see you. Uh, sometimes I used to go up with Fletcher Knebel, an old friend of mine, an old colleague. And I remember one of those days, Fletcher suddenly brought up the question of Addison's disease. And, in fact, I wasn't on to this Addison's disease business and, on the basis of what the president told us, Knebel wrote, I think, a

[-3-]

very good story on it. I held back. I was reluctant to put that story in the *Herald Tribune* [*New York Herald Tribune*], just on the basis of that interview. I didn't know enough about Addison's disease and, to do it wrong would put a lot of mischief in the campaign and, so I never had the occasion to and I probably should have. I didn't write a story about Addison's disease. But it soon became such a common piece of discussion.

STERN: This question of access to him. Many journalists have talked about that, the fact that he was very accessible. Uh, did you ever feel that, because he was so accessible, that in some ways he might be, uh, manipulating you?

DONOVAN: Well, anyone who had been around the town for as long as I had would know, would understand that possibility. Uh, in other words—let me back up a little bit—I once did a book on Eisenhower [Dwight David Eisenhower]. And uh, I didn't want to talk to Eisenhower, I didn't want to have go up and talk.... I had good information, I had his own records, and, ah, I thought that if Eisenhower talks to me then I'm going to feel obliged to say what Eisenhower said in this book. And that's not the kind of book I want. But I was very pleased not to talk to Eisenhower. But uh, President Kennedy never put me in a position, whatever might have come, he never put me in a position where I felt that he was mortgaging me. I never felt that.

[-4-]

STERN: How about during the primaries. Did you cover Wisconsin, West Virginia?

DONOVAN: No, I did not. I didn't.

STERN: Okay, uh-huh. And what about the convention?

DONOVAN: Of course, of course the convention.

STERN: Okay. How about the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] nomination, that must have been of some interest?

DONOVAN: It was, and I don't know whether I can add a thing to it. We were all floored by it.

STERN: You were?

DONOVAN: Yes, we were.

STERN: You couldn't believe it?

DONOVAN: Couldn't believe it. I rather thought that Symington [W. Stuart Symington] was going to do it. Boy, the minute it happened, I, I thought it was the, the genius of it. I went on Lyndon Johnson's famous whistle stop campaign through the south and it came to me all the clearer the enormous help he was giving President Kennedy, enormous. And down in South Carolina, facing up to the Catholic issue? I'm probably telling you what you already know but...

STERN: No, this is fascinating.

DONOVAN: ...I remember Johnson speaking at the, I think, the state fair in South Carolina, on a hot fall day in which he, Lyndon working up with great emotions about how Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.] was in the navy and along came a dangerous mission that involved life, and so forth.

[-5-]

And, uh, they didn't ask Joe Kennedy to go out there because he was a Catholic, what the hell, he was just one of another American, and that boy went out there, and, oh, he had the crowd crying over Joe Kennedy. And all were saying it wasn't because he was a Catholic, and they didn't keep in mind that he was a Catholic. He just faced, Johnson faced the Catholic issue all through the south.

STERN: Yes, he did.

DONOVAN: And very effectively, in his own emotional way.

STERN: Yeah, I mean if you look at the result, yeah, I think you have to conclude that Johnson made the difference. It was so close.

DONOVAN: That's why I thought, I don't have any more inside information on why Kennedy, why and how Kennedy made that choice. But it was a stroke of

genius.

STERN: Did you observe, uh, any of that, uh, there was at least briefly some real resistance from Michigan and some of the other states, uh, the labor people were really upset about it. Did you see any of that?

DONOVAN: Nothing that I remember, I remember the story, and what you say is true. But I don't have any recollection of it. I was going to leave on that convention therefore I was, I wasn't wandering around as much as the other reporters were.

STERN: Uh-huh. O.K. and you say you were with Johnson on this special.... Did you do any traveling with Kennedy

[-6-]

during the campaigns?

DONOVAN: Oh, Yes.

STERN: Where did you go with the president?

DONOVAN: Well I was with him, I alternated almost week by week between Kennedy and Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], so I was with Kennedy at least half the campaign, California, Texas, everywhere. And I often swapped in the middle of the country, too. I was just on the road for a long time and I thought that Kennedy did a wonderful....

STERN: How, how as a journalist were you being as objective as you can. Would you compare and contrast those two campaigns? The way they were run, how the candidates dealt with the press, the whole sense of it as it....

DONOVAN: Well, the way the candidate dealt with the press runs, to my way of thinking, all in favor of Kennedy. Uh, in my own experience some of the Nixon people were very bitter at the *Herald Tribune* coverage. Now the *Herald Tribune*, I was the bureau chief of the leading Republican paper and uh there were people around Nixon who were just raising Cain with me about our coverage and uh, complaining that we were unfair to Nixon. Uh, that we were exaggerating Kennedy's popularity and underplaying Nixon. But the curious thing is

[-7-]

I never got a murmur of that from New York, and uh the managing editor, a reader or anyone else. And you'd have these situations like this: I remember one story the *Herald Tribune*

lead the paper with a very good, exciting story about Kennedy and Wall Street. And uh, he tied up traffic all over the lower part of Manhattan, a tremendous reception in New York...

STERN: I remember that.

DONOVAN: ... Nixon, pursuing that foolish 50 state campaign was out at some whistle stop in the mountain states and got some little routine story. Well, that was the kind of thing that would set the Nixon people off in a fury, giving Kennedy the big play and Nixon not. You know a candidate makes his own news. But, uh Kennedy was always much easier for a newspaper man to be with than Nixon was. I never disliked Nixon, really ever. Personally I didn't dislike him. And I saw an awful lot of Nixon especially when he was vice president. But he was very awkward with reporters and uh, gave you a feeling that he didn't trust you...

STERN: Uh-huh.

DONOVAN: ... that you were trying to do something to him. You couldn't have an easy relationship with Nixon, at least I couldn't. I know very few reporters who ever met him (inaudible) unless you were just so far (inaudible) ideologically. So therefore Nixon wasn't any fun to be around at all. In fact as bureau chief, I had to make the assignments on covering a candidate, and what I was confronted with—everyone

[-8-]

was demanding to cover Kennedy, and no one wanted to cover Nixon. (inaudible) He practically wouldn't go with me. Everyone wanted to cover Kennedy. That's where the excitement was. It was rather a good gauge as a matter of fact.

STERN: It was sort of a self-proclaimed prophecy. By acting the way he did, he created the very reaction in the press that he said he observed in the first place.

DONOVAN: But what, how, who a reporter wants to cover gives you some idea of where reporters judge the excitement and the color and who the player is, and that's where it was. And as I say, I was with Kennedy in Houston for that speech before that Baptist ministerial council, or some such name.

STERN: Houston Ministerial Association.

DONOVAN: And that came at the end of an extremely long day for Kennedy, I think he started out in El Paso.

STERN: He'd been at the Alamo.

DONOVAN: We were coming from California, I believe, the West. And it was just at the end of a very long day. And uh he walked in that night.... Even before that he went to a dinner for Senator Thomas or Congressman Thomas [Albert Thomas] or something of Houston, he went into that meeting at the end of an already, long exhausting day. And his performance there, before a cool and skeptical audience made it even, in some components a hostile audience, was absolutely superb. One of the greatest political performances I've seen in a long time of coverage.

[-9-]

STERN: He got quite an ovation at the end.

DONOVAN: And of course what the Kennedy people so shrewdly did was to take that and show it over and over again to local television or wherever they would show it.

STERN: Right, right, right.

DONOVAN: But that was a fine performance.

STERN: Was it your sense at that point that uh that he had pretty much neutralized the religious issue or did you feel that it would still play a major role in the final outcome?

DONOVAN: I didn't think that. By that point I did not think that Kennedy was going to lose the election on the religious issue. I did not. I thought that Kennedy, all along, I thought that Irwin [Don Irwin] nearly fell over dead when I told him at Cadillac Square in Detroit, where Kennedy opened his campaign.

STERN: That's correct.

DONOVAN: Uh, I remember telling Irwin I thought Kennedy would win the election and Irwin thought I had taken a leave of my senses. Uh but I thought all along after the Convention that Kennedy would win. I didn't know the Democrat.... I went with Kennedy on a very first campaign trip he did, uh, after they.... We went up through Maine. And I thought his speeches up there, they weren't major speeches, but I just thought they were terrific speeches, full of fire and....

STERN: It's interesting, by the way, I talked with Benson,

[-10-]

one of his people from Maine, and the religious issue was a question up

there. Southern Maine, as a matter of fact, some of the people who worked for him in Maine say that the major reason he lost the state was the interior part the state was heavily against him for religious reasons.

DONOVAN: That's so.

STERN: It was a very strong, powerful issue in Maine. People tended not to think of it being an issue up there, but Nixon probably would have carried Maine anyway.

DONOVAN: Pretty hard.

STERN: Yeah, uh, anything else from the campaign specifically do you remember that might be, any anecdote that is revealing of him. What do you remember about Nixon?

DONOVAN: You know let me tell you a funny story about Kennedy. I uh, I had covered every single mile of the Truman [Harry S Truman] whistle stop campaign. Truman. If anyone alive knew whistle stopping, I should have known it. But we stopped at a place called Rosewood or Rosemont, or Rose something in California that morning—Kennedy spoke from the rear platform of the train. He was whistle stopping down from California. And I thought that I would get back with the crowd a little bit, and uh, try to hear what people were saying, and see what people were saying. All of a sudden with all my experience I got trapped in that crowd and the train started to pull out. In California, and it was Kennedy who saw me...

STERN: [Laughter]

[-11-]

DONOVAN: ...and got the train stopped. I remember that very well.

STERN: What was the crowd saying? Do you remember?

DONOVAN: No, I can't remember.

STERN: By the time the campaign, by the time the campaign reached the last week or so, did you still think Kennedy was going to win? Were you...

DONOVAN: Yes, I did.

STERN: Were you shocked by how close it was?

DONOVAN: Well, shocked because I was writing election night (inaudible) and we

couldn't write it. [Laughter] That was shock enough. And then the *Herald Tribune* finally went with Kennedy winning, and we all wouldn't get caught in another *Chicago Tribune* situation, but as it turned out we looked good because we had all the Kennedy victory stuff in and the Kennedy layout and everything. Other papers didn't have it, but I had a terrible pre-dawn, a terrible dawn. Um, we went earlier than most papers on that, and we didn't really have anything to base it on.

STERN: Well I mean it was....

DONOVAN: He had an early lead and it was just being whittled and whittled away.

STERN: That's right. Essentially, in terms of the popular vote, it was a tie...

DONOVAN: And I thought that the *Herald Tribune*—I was influenced by the fact in '48 the *Herald Tribune* was too

[-12-]

conservative. At least the *Times* [*New York Times*] led with Truman leading. We lead with an essay about the election.

STERN: One other point back at the convention, did you uh, uh, the whole Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] thing back at the convention, how serious did that appear at the time? Did you think...

DONOVAN: Not so. Not so. Not because of those primaries I didn't think so. It looked like kind of a sad gesture. No one thought that that was a turning point. And I had admired Stevenson so much, so much in the earlier years, but I just thought it was a movement that was out of steam.

STERN: Did you feel later on, that that was essentially why he did not become secretary of state?

DONOVAN: Well, I had no first-hand knowledge. I thought, you know, from what I knew, I thought that Kennedy would be happier with someone different from Adlai Stevenson. Not just because of that...

STERN: Someone with another constituency.

DONOVAN: I think so. But uh, my clear recollection of that convention, and I have vivid memories of it, is that uh, that there was never a question, that Kennedy came to California to win.

STERN: And yet of course if you look....

DONOVAN: And that was the way our stories read.

STERN: ... and yet he didn't go over the top until Wyoming

[-13-]

which was the last state on the list. So it was deceptively close. I mean, if he had fallen short by 30 or 40 or 50 votes, it could have easily gone to a second ballot, and after that who knows?

DONOVAN: What was the vote by the time Wyoming came? Do you remember?

STERN: Wyoming gave him 761.

DONOVAN: To what?

STERN: Johnson had only 400 or something like that.

DONOVAN: Yeah.

STERN: And then of course they all began to switch.

DONOVAN: Yes, I remember that.

STERN: But the fact is, it did take until Wyoming until he went over the top.

DONOVAN: I'd forgotten that. Yeah. Johnson would not have been nominated then.

STERN: Did you intend, by the way that the joint appearance was in the Texas....

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah. I have no, I have no special recollection. But it was wonderful, and Kennedy was so deft, so skillful, wonderful wit. That that was one of the real highlights.

STERN: When was the first time you saw him after the election? Can you remember that? Of course I know Johnson talked to you.

DONOVAN: Well, I didn't talk to him a lot. I guess the first

[-14-]

time I saw him then was the first campaign trip to Maine.

STERN: No, after the election.

DONOVAN: Oh, after the election. I beg your pardon. Oh I went to Palm Beach.

STERN: Oh, you did.

DONOVAN: I went to Palm Beach with him. Oh, I'll tell you a good story. Uh, we were sitting.... He invited us with our wives to come out. And I remember sitting, my late wife, Gerry [Gerry Donovan] and I had both been widowed before we got married, but my wife and I were sitting at the pool, with our legs in the pool, outside the pool. He came out with (inaudible) shoes, almost dazzling in the sunlight (inaudible). And then you had to call him senator. And I said, "Senator, you know, I've been thinking about something today. Even if you're reelected, you'd only be 51 when you're ex-president." I said, "What in the world are you going to do as an ex-president who's 51?" He said, "I've always wanted to be a rich bum."

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: I thought he was going to tell me he'd be a college professor. But that was a great remark. That's all he said. We did see him considerably down there, we saw him when he brought Clark Clifford down to run, the transition, smart move. Uh, and as you know, that was the beginning of the formal transition.

STERN: Yeah.

[-15-]

DONOVAN: Yes it was.

STERN: How about any of the, did you have any, as somebody covering him, did you have any uh, special insights in getting any major appointments that were made or watching them develop, McNamara [Robert S. McNamara], people like that, Rusk [Dean Rusk]?

DONOVAN: All right. Let me back up a minute. I don't think that Kennedy, now the first formal, the first of the formal transition was Truman to Eisenhower. Truman set up uh, a team and he asked Eisenhower to appoint the team. And he appointed Dodge [Joseph M. Dodge] and Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge].

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: So it wouldn't be true to say that uh, JFK's was the first formal transition.

STERN: No. That's right. Uh, you even had something of a collaboration between

Hoover [Herbert Hoover] and FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt]. But it's not very formal. [Laughter]

DONOVAN: Uh....

STERN: But that's another....

DONOVAN: Now the appointments....

STERN: Were there any great surprises for example, that you can recall? How about Bobby's [Robert F. Kennedy] appointment? How did the *Tribune* react to that?

DONOVAN: Bobby's.... I'm sure, I'm sure not favorably. I think that, I think that there was a general wave of

[-16-]

disfavor about that appointment. I felt, myself, that the President made a mistake.

STERN: Did you tell him that?

DONOVAN: No.

STERN: No.

DONOVAN: I thought the President made a mistake. I thought it seemed like overreaching, and too much Kennedy, and of course as it turned out, it worked very well. I say it now. But uh, I did not think it was a good thing for the President. But like anything, we got accustomed to it so fast. And the funniest statement I've ever heard a president make was that speech. I didn't hear it, but it was before the Alfalfa Club here. He appointed Bobby to give him some legal experience. That was one of the funniest statements I ever heard from a president. Kennedy was so good at, at uh, scattering opposition.

STERN: Let's talk a bit about the genesis of your book, uh, which I gather happened early in 1961—the PT109 book.

DONOVAN: That book, people talk about it, say it was a Kennedy book, PT109. (inaudible) I think the paperback went over a million.

STERN: Did it?

DONOVAN: I think it did. There were about four editions of it. It was a (inaudible) But here's exactly what happened. There was a great rush on to try to get Kennedy books because Kennedy was such a popular item.

[-17-]

STERN: I'm sure.

DONOVAN: And uh, the *Readers' Digest* decided to re-run John Hersey's piece called "Survivor" or "Survival," I can't remember which. Which he did in the *New Yorker*.

STERN: (inaudible)

DONOVAN: Back in the days when *Readers' Digest* was, had a contract with the *New Yorker*, where they could pick up from the *New Yorker*. They lost that afterwards, but they uh, they decided in January of '61 to re-run the Hersey piece. One night Edward Kuhn, the editor, the trade book editor of McGraw-Hill [McGraw-Hill Publishing Co.] and Robert Cousins, the managing editor, or one of the editors of McGraw-Hill, were riding out to their homes in Chappaquaw on a commuter line, batting their brains out about a book on Kennedy. "Where can we get a book on Kennedy? Everyone wants a book on Kennedy." And they happened to see in the *World Telegram, New York World Telegram*, a little ad with a Hersey piece *Readers' Digest* had inserted. And Ed Kuhn told me afterwards, he said "Hey, what about this, what about this?" Ordinarily, they would have gone to someone who knew a lot about the war in the Pacific, or naval warfare, that kind of thing. But they talked about it on the train, but Ed said, "No, you've got to have this done by someone who can get to Kennedy quick." And uh, I had done a book for McGraw-Hill so I had already done a book for McGraw-Hill. So they knew me and Ed Kuhn called—called me at the *Herald Tribune* bureau—and said "Listen, how about a little

[-18-]

book, (inaudible) how about a little book on Kennedy's wartime experiences on that PT boat?" And, I said, "Well, I don't know, why not." We thought we'd go around and interview the survivors that Hersey didn't want to (inaudible) and I'm sure I could talk to Kennedy. He'd talk to me. It might not be a bad idea at all. I wouldn't want to do a political book now on Kennedy, but an adventure story about a president, here I am bureau chief of a Republican paper, it wouldn't do me any harm at all. And I said, "Well, let me try it. I better go to Pierre on this." So I go to see Pierre. And Pierre picked up his ears right away on it and said, uh, "Let me talk to the President about it." Well, within a week I was in the President's office, and he said, "Oh, don't do this. You're just wasting your time. There's nothing more to that story." He said, "You know we've had millions of those Hersey things printed, all around. And uh, and there is no more to the story; you're beating a dead horse." I almost gave in on it. I said uh, "Mr. President, we're in a time now, we're in a time now where there is a book on

almost every phase of a president's career, however small though it might be. And as the years pass, the magazine piece will be harder to find, disappear, and there probably really ought to be a book about your experiences on it, on what would be the Kennedy shelf." Well, he seemed persuaded by that, and Tim Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.] came in the office, and he said, "Look," the President said to him, he said, "You give Bob everything you can give him, everything we've got, anything the Navy can give him."

[-19-]

And then he said to me, "And if you still think you've got a book, come and see me and we'll talk about it." Well of course (inaudible) Navy had nothing, and I almost did give up on it. The crew were scattered all over the United States, the thirteen or fourteen, scattered all over. Every one of them remembered things differently. What I only wanted first was, oh you couldn't get any thread of the story from talking to them. The Navy had nothing. I... The Navy couldn't even find me maps with the names of the islands on it. How do you write a book on a shipwreck if you don't even have the name of an island? And there literally was nothing, and uh, then the idea dawned, the fact that (inaudible). Why not go to the Pacific, go out there yourself. And the trip was just extraordinary. The *Saturday Evening Post* then bought the serial license to it. And uh, *Saturday Evening Post* photographer, Elliot Erwitt, and I flew out. We went first to Australia, and I looked up the coast watcher in Sydney, and miracle of miracles, he had this log of messages from those days. And that for the first time gave me a chronology of what happened when, and, where. My first chronology. Before going out there, I tried like mad to charter a boat to get around those islands. And we finally got one from Guadalcanal, and I also had written to Seventh Day Adventist Missionaries out there to see if they might know whether any of the natives who had rescued Kennedy were still alive. After Australia we flew up to the Solomon Islands. We arrived in New Georgia, and there was this beautiful boat, and there were seven natives who had at the time had been boys who had rescued Kennedy. So I had the uh, I had all the messages that.... Our boat was big enough, a (inaudible)

[-20-]

so-called, large enough so that all seven could come with us and they spent a week with me. And they reenacted the whole thing, where the islands were, where they saw foot prints, what island Kennedy went to first, which one was the second, which one was third. There was in the Solomons an island named (inaudible) of all places an old British colonial office. And they had maps, and from those maps I got the names of the islands. So I had all that part of the story. Then I went to Tokyo. If you're going to do a story on a shipwreck, you've got to have the suspense of ships approaching in the night. And ship from one to the other. And the McGraw-Hill bureau working in Tokyo, working through the Japanese Navy had got the current names and addresses of everyone who had been on that destroyer that night, that ran Kennedy down. Well, I'd still be looking for them if I had to go around the island, they were farmers and little factory workers, all over Japan. What we hit upon was giving a reunion for them in Tokyo, and paying any wages they would miss by coming, and paying their expenses,

which didn't amount to that much, and so I got about thirty or thirty-five of these people, coming into Tokyo. We all met in the Imperial Hotel, and I rented practically a whole restaurant in some part of Tokyo, and we went across Tokyo in a fleet of cabs. But I hadn't counted them. Whether these people hadn't seen each other since the war, and it was a glorious reunion, and they were drinking beer so fast, but none of them

[-21-]

would be (inaudible) before long....

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: ... and I had to go, so we all sat at our, way you sit in Japan, oh, that crouch-kneeling. And I had to work my way out of the circle, interviewing them like mad before they all got bombed. [Laughter] And of course it just makes the story funnier, but the funniest thing was, as they drank more and more beer, they were beer drinkers, they got more and more sentimental, and it wound up that they were all bowing and apologizing to me that uh, they ran President Kennedy down and they had wished he had run them down. [Laughter] The hardest part of the Tokyo visit was on the question of, and it was a burning question in those days after Kennedy became president, whether the Japanese destroyer had deliberately sunk PT109 or whether it was an accident. The senior officer of the flotilla insisted, after the Inauguration, uh, that he had ordered the ship turned away from them.

STERN: I found, incidentally, the letters that you got from Captain (inaudible).

DONOVAN: Oh, you know that story.

STERN: Oh, no, it's fascinating (inaudible).

DONOVAN: But, but a senior officer told, he was on the destroyer, on the (inaudible). But the actual, the captain, the skipper of that ship, Captain (inaudible) insisted that he gave the order to turn the wheel, to run the PT boat down. I had the two of them in the Imperial Hotel. They were supposed to

[-22-]

have come an hour apart, and one came to soon. I had one in one room and one in the other, running back and forth. I was frantic they would see each other, and both turn on me, and it was just an afternoon of frenzy and diplomacy.

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: But I was nowhere further along, so I got the idea of getting an affidavit

from the helmsman, the man who actually held the wheel. We got to him, we got an affidavit. We had to go back, (inaudible) had to go back into the countryside with him. And the helmsman gave us an affidavit that on the orders of the skipper he had turned and crashed the boat, which would have been (inaudible)....

STERN: (inaudible) said anything (inaudible) went back to 1958 when, he had been writing, saying when Kennedy was still a senator saying that he had not done it on purpose.

DONOVAN: You know when President Kennedy heard that I was going to the Solomon Islands he thought I had lost my mind, he really thought I was crazy. Uh, when I came back with all those pictures of those islands he had been on, and so forth and so on. And the uh, the uh, natives, he was speechless, absolutely speechless. But when I came back and I didn't have—because the *Saturday Evening Post* was running a five part piece, ending with a double issue at Thanksgiving, I was locked into an absolute deadline, absolute. And I had little time and uh, the Berlin, that was the summer of the uh, Berlin Blockade and Kennedy was terribly busy, just terribly busy. But he invited me

[-23-]

to come to lunch, and he said we'd talk about it at lunch. Uh, when I got there I just, I just couldn't keep him off the subject of Berlin. And, he uh, and I would keep saying—am I talking too long?

STERN: No, no.

DONOVAN: I'd keep saying, uh, "Well look, tell me a little bit about what went on that night." And uh, he said, "Oh"—I don't know what kind of language you want me to use here.

STERN: Oh, I think whatever language occurred.

DONOVAN: Yeah. He said, he said, "Oh that operation was more fucked up than Cuba." Well if I had ever written, that—that was right at the height of all the Cuba stuff—if I'd ever written that story (inaudible). And uh...

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: ... he said, "How do we win wars anyhow?" You know.

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: You know "With the army and navy, how do we ever win wars?" But uh, let me give you a little side story on that. Uh, there was a real, if you

remember, there was a real war scare on at that time over Berlin.

STERN: Sure.

DONOVAN: There truly was a war scare.

STERN: Sure there was.

DONOVAN: And uh, when I left the White House that day, after Kennedy had invited me personally to lunch, and we

[-24-]

talked a little bit about the PT109. But I had a hard time keeping it off Berlin. But he was just so absorbed with Berlin, and he told me everything. And I got back to the office, and I thought, my God, like what did I do, never mind PT109, I am working for the *Herald Tribune*, what can I do with it. What can I do with it? Do I write it. I owe it to the *Tribune* to write this, I had this information. He told me what the Joint Chiefs had said and everything. And uh, on the other hand, if I'd violate a confidence like this at a personal luncheon he'd invited me to the White House to talk about something else I'm going to be (inaudible) to this man forever and a day. He won't do anything for me 'til I finish with this book. And I thought about it for a while. And I thought, damn it, I'm a reporter. I'm going to write it. I know it, and I'm going to write it. And I called John Denson in New York. I said, I didn't mention (inaudible) I said, "John"—he was a very excited (inaudible). I said, "John, I just had lunch with the President." (inaudible) And I said, uh, "He has just told me everything." "What!" We came out the next morning with an eight column down on Kennedy's thinking what the Joint Chiefs of Staff (inaudible). I couldn't think of anything to say. I had to say on the telephone.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: I didn't know what to say. I could say, well now....(inaudible)

STERN: (inaudible) nothing (inaudible)

DONOVAN: No. I think Kennedy was perfectly satisfied (inaudible).

[-25-]

STERN: Your access to him was not affected?

DONOVAN: Oh, no, no. He could have blown me out of water on it. One thing he promised me. I said, "Look, I know you're tired of talking about this, but would you read, would you read some of this for me?" He said, "Yes, I'll

read it for you." Ordinarily if I write about a politician, I wouldn't want him to read what I wrote, but then this was a different matter because uh, it was his wartime adventure. No one else had seen it. So I thought that this might stimulate his memory of it.

STERN: Right. So you sent him installments?

DONOVAN: So the time came along, well, this was still in manuscript. The time came along and I had about sixty or seventy pages, and uh, I called Pierre and I said, "Pierre, I'm in a terrible deadline thing. The time is going and the summer's almost gone, going along—middle of August now—I said the President said he'd read this for me. Uh, what can you do for me, can you help me with it? And he said, "Bob" he said, "the best thing," he said, "the President is going up to Hyannis Port this weekend." He said, "Bring those transcripts over, and I'll take them to Hyannis Port. And if he'll read it at all, that's where it will be read. It will never get read around this place the way things are going." So I took Pierre over my only clean copy of this manuscript, uh, no one else had seen it before. It had never been read by anybody. So off Kennedy goes to Hyannis Port, and uh, the weekend comes and goes, and no word from the White House, and Monday goes and Tuesday, and I thought,

[-26-]

oh, he didn't read it. And about quarter to six the telephone rang, in my office in the *Herald Tribune*, one of those hollow sounding calls that I guess off the bat that it was the secret service, you know when the secret service calls. And to my amazement, the man, said, he said uh, "Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] wants, this is Hyannis Port, Ambassador Kennedy wants talk to you. I had known Ambassador Kennedy a little bit, uh, my sister had been one of the secretaries at one time in New York. And uh, on comes this booming voice, and I said, "Well, yes Mr. Ambassador." He said uh, "This is the worst book I ever read." My first reaction to that was no one ever sees the first version (inaudible). He said, "This book is about my own son, and I'm bored to death." And he said uh, "What do have all these islands in here for?" And uh, I said, "Islands? Where do you think this action took place," and he cut me off, and said, "What you got all these Japs in here for?" And I said, "What do you think I got the Japs in here for?" And I was getting pretty mad at this point. And uh, he said uh, "Leave that stuff out". And I had only paid about twenty million dollars to get up an expedition to go out there. And uh, he said "Why didn't you write it like Hersey? He said, "He's a good writer." He said, uh, "Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] didn't like it either." Well, my vision of Teddy then was the little chap with short pants—it was before I'd gotten to know Teddy and liked him very well—and I felt like saying, well, screw Teddy. And then he said, "And Jackie doesn't like it either." He said, "But never mind what

[-27-]

Jackie thinks."

STERN: Is that what he said....

DONOVAN: So he said to me then, he said, "This part about PT59, Kennedy had a second boat..."

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: ... this part about PT59 will be duck-soup for the movie. Well at that point I had, I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I don't give a damn about the movie. What I'm interested in is a good book," and he cut me right off. He said, "Oh, you don't give a damn about the movie. Everyone in the country's got a lot of money but the newspaper man, and you don't give a damn about the movies." And that ended the conversation. Uh, the next step in this thing—I want to go step by step—the next step was I took the galley, the actual galley proofs to President Kennedy in hopes that he'd go through them. And he said, "Bring them in here". And I went into his desk...

STERN: No. It will stop.

DONOVAN: ... went into his desk, and if you don't think that that rapid reading course works, you're wrong. He took those long galley proofs and he started to read them, his eyes kind of flickered, but they didn't move from side to side. He read down. He took those long galleys and he started to turn them, and uh, I said, he's not reading them. All of a sudden he'd point to a little foot-note. He said, "No, no. That's not when I saw my brother Joe. I saw him at another

[-28-]

time." Then uh, he'd turn a page. He said, "Oh no". He said uh, "I didn't come to the Pentagon from North Carolina. I was at the Pentagon, they shagged my ass down to North Carolina because I was going out with a blonde in the Swedish Embassy, and they thought I was a spy thing."

STERN: That's the Hoover [J. Edgar Hoover] thing, didn't he make the cracks about Hoover....

DONOVAN: That's all that he said to me.

STERN: Yeah.

DONOVAN: "Shagged my ass down there. So I was at the Pentagon first, then North Carolina." I had it in reverse. And uh, then he said, "So and so, no he's from the South." Well, I was sitting there, and he read that book, turning long galley pages.

STERN: You don't think he had read it before?

DONOVAN: Oh, no. No he couldn't have. He couldn't possibly have. These were the first galleys I had. It was the most incredible reading thing I've ever seen. He just turned those pages. And it was just when I was thinking he was just kidding me on it, he'd (inaudible) some little thing. He did a lot of writings on the page, and I lost them. The Kennedy Library has been asking me for years, and I lost them. Uh, he made comments on some of the crew members. I lost them in moving, I guess. Uh, so that happened. Then I'll just tell you one final story. The book came out, well the *Saturday Evening Post* was running it, serializing it, and they decided to run the

[-29-]

first cover picture in their history. They had always had drawings on the cover. They decided to do the first cover picture in their history and they did that wonderful picture that's hanging in Dave Powers' [David F. Powers] office, you know, the printing with the little PT boat alongside of him?

STERN: Oh, yeah.

DONOVAN: Marvelous picture. Pierre Salinger actually told the President it was the best photo ever made of him. Wonderful picture. The way that was set up....

[END OF TAPE]

...and a toy PT109 on a chair, at head level, and asked the President to sit down and let him take it. Well, the President said, "I don't know about this one." He said, "Bob, you sit there. You sit there, you do what I'm supposed to do and then let me look through the camera." It was outside in the Rose Garden, using the White House as a background.

STERN: Uh-huh.

DONOVAN: It was on the colonnade, that's where the picture was taken. So I sat down in a chair, and Kennedy looked through the camera at me to see how it would look. He said, "Well, all right," he said, "let me go and comb my hair." He went and combed his hair, and then he came back out and sat down, and Elliot Erwitt snapped that wonderful picture. And that was the first cover picture in the history of the *Saturday Evening Post*. That PT109 that Fall was everywhere. It was on the cover of *Stern*, it was on a cover of *Epica* in Italy, it was

[-30-]

on the cover of uh, what's the magazine in France? Uh, I know what it is. It was on the cover

of the London, on the *Sunday Observer* [*London Sunday Observer*]. It was just everywhere, it got a tremendous ride. The *Saturday Evening Post* gave a magnificent display of colored photographs. Their circulation went up for the first time in years over it. It went up steeply. I didn't.... They adapted it from the book. I didn't write in the *Saturday Evening Post*. So that Thanksgiving, when my older daughter was at Mt. Holyoke [Mt. Holyoke College], we decided to take the kids up and spend Thanksgiving and Christmas, Thanksgiving, in New York. And just as we were walking in to the uh, Barbizon Hotel, the telephone rings, and I grab it, and it was President Kennedy calling from uh, Hyannis Port. Oh, he wanted to talk about the book, and he loved it and he was excited by it. Uh, and as he said in that little letter in front, he learned more about this episode from my researchers than he knew what was happening at the time. But anyhow, when he was telling me how much he liked it, I said, Well, what did your father think of it?" He said, "Well, here, ask him". So on comes Joe again. "Bob" he says, he said uh, he said, "It's a great book." He said, "See, you did it just the way I told you to do." [Laughter] That's just what he said. He said, "You followed just the pace I gave you." He didn't mention the pace, but Joe Kennedy was always there to grab the credit whenever there was anything to do.

STERN: [Laughter] How about the genesis of the movie? Was he

[-31-]

involved in that at all?

DONOVAN: He was in ways that I never quite understood. To this day, I don't.

STERN: Salinger claims he made some important contacts to try to get what was the company that....

DONOVAN: Oh, I can tell you some more stories about that. (inaudible) is one story. When McGraw-Hill.... Let me go back a little bit. When we decided to write this story, McGraw-Hill, the *New York Times*—I don't know if they still do—they used to run little pamphlets, little announcements of books that are coming or that signed up. And they said, McGraw is going to do a book on President Kennedy and wartime experiences. A few days later than that, after that. (Inaudible) people carried a bulletin from Hollywood, a little piece from Hollywood, saying that Warner Brothers was, for the first time in history, going to make a movie of a President while still in office. They made a terrible mistake by not asking Kennedy about this first. And uh, we tried to get in on the movie, we tried to, we made an assumption with Warner Brothers that they would buy our book, because we had made the prior announcement. But Warner Brothers was thinking on very different terms, I can tell you. And uh, President Kennedy was very uneasy about that announcement because there was, in the old days, a little program called Navy Log, and uh—about a half an hour showing of different episodes, and there was some, there was one of those episodes was PT109. And Kennedy, after it was discovered, that the person who played him

[-32-]

was a rather peculiar fellow, and he didn't like it at all. And suddenly he had visions of being portrayed in all the movie theaters in the United States by someone he didn't uh, want to portray him. And that's as I understand it, was when Joe Kennedy moved into this thing, with his Hollywood connection, to make sure that Jack had the say on who portrayed him in the movie or the President would put up a fight against having this movie made, and uh, so before I knew it Kennedy, Joe Kennedy, was in the thick of this whole contract negotiations. But uh, what he did, who he did it with, I never knew, the contract was just presented to us and uh, there you have it. So he was, at least to that extent, involved in the contract. He never talked to me, I didn't know until long afterwards the extent to which he had been involved in the negotiations.

STERN: There are some letters at the Library...

DONOVAN: Oh, is that so?

STERN: ...mostly from George Stevens Jr., who was in the USIA [United States Information Agency], and he said that, let's see, March 1, 1962, this was a letter from George Stevens Jr., of course the son of the famous George Stevens of Hollywood, very concerned about problems with Raoul Walsh and Jack Warner, saying that he thought they might ruin the movie and that uh, that uh, the book had already sold 40,000 copies and said that...

DONOVAN: Well the book didn't come out till December.

STERN: ...this is '62.

[-33-]

DONOVAN: Oh, '62.

STERN: ...yeah, March '62. He said that more people will see this film than Leopoldville, than that (inaudible). And then he said, quote, and "thinking people everywhere will believe that PT109 represents, to some degree, the thinking of the President. It is made by one of America's leading film makers and it will carry with it the opportunity for excellence," unquote. And there was a lot of bickering there about who would play Kennedy.

DONOVAN: Oh, I can tell you a little bit about, that I can tell you. That I can tell you. But, anyhow, President Kennedy finally made it clear, although he never told me this, but it was obvious, he made it clear, that if they were going to make a movie of him they would have to base it on this book because he had read the book,

knew about my work, knew the book was authentic, and therefore the book would make an authentic basis for this uh, for the movie. I'm sure Kennedy said the book had to be based on the movie, since he had cooperated in the accuracy of the book. Well, there was in that contract a clause saying that I, the contract did not become operative, as I recall, until I delivered to Warner Brothers a letter in which Kennedy approved the name of the person who played him. Uh, when they were getting ready to set this thing up, whenever it was, '62 or...

STERN: '62.

DONOVAN: ...we were down in Florida. Bryan Foy, the last of

[-34-]

the seven little Foy's had by that time become the director or the producer, or whatever it is...

STERN: Director.

DONOVAN: ...the director of the movie [Note: Bryan Foy was the producer of the film]. And uh, he asked me if I could come to Florida and talk to him about it. So I was actually going down to Palm Beach for the President anyhow, and uh, he was down there at the time, so I did go to Miami, and they asked me if I would see the President when I went back to Palm Beach and ask him if they couldn't get some help from the Navy, using destroyers and that kind of thing. And they also said that the time would come when they had to, they had to have an actor and got to get the President's approval. So I... And they wanted to know if I'd ask him if he had a suggestion. So I went back to Palm Beach and uh, got to see him right away, and uh, first I mentioned the thing about Navy cooperation, and he turned to Pierre and said, "Pierre, make sure that the Navy will give Warner Brothers, on this movie, any cooperation that we would give to any movie, but not one bit more." And then I said, "Well, do you have a preference of who would play the role of Lieutenant Kennedy?" He said, non committal, he said, "Well Jackie would like to see Warren Beatty play the role". And that's all I said. And then we parted. So I went back to the phone and I called up Bryan Foy in Miami and said that uh, "Well President Kennedy said that Jackie would like to have Warren Beatty play the role." Well, that caused a sensation, an absolute sensation. So Bryan Foy goes out to Hollywood, and

[-35-]

apparently roofs came off of everything, we're going to get Warren Beatty to play Jack Kennedy. I got a call about a week later—I was back in Chevy Chase by then—I got a call. It was Bryan Foy talking so fast I couldn't understand him. Well, the upshot was he had to come and see me right away. "God," he said, "why, hell, he must have just made a jet plane." He was, I think he was in that house by that night, or certainly the next night. And all my kids were young, and they were all hanging over the banister, waiting for this big producer from

Hollywood. And uh, sure enough Bryan Foy stormed in the door, talking, in the house talking, and uh, he said, "So Kennedy wants to get Beatty to play the role." And we had a great big entrance archway between the library and the dining room, and he said, "You see that archway," he said, "I couldn't get Warren Beatty through that archway". And I said, "Well, why not?" And he said, "His head's too big." He said, "The only way Warren Beatty will play Kennedy is if Kennedy is a pacifist and won't go to the South Pacific."

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: How Robertson [Clifford Parker Robertson III] came into the act, I never knew. I never knew how, and I never remember delivering a letter of approval. He's just in it. I don't know how it came about.

STERN: That's very fascinating.

DONOVAN: Yeah.

STERN: Have you read the uh, the uh, *Search for JFK* by the

[-36-]

Blairs [Joan and Clay Blair, Jr.]?

DONOVAN: You know I didn't. I was sick of the subject by then. What I read about it kind of ticked me off.

STERN: I was just wondering how you reacted to their visionism on....

DONOVAN: I'll tell you how I reacted to it. My first reaction is that Clay Blair must never have been in the army. He gets into all the rigmarole about regulations at night on a PT boat or something. Anyone who was ever in the infantry in a war, as I was in the Second World War, and is sent out on a patrol at night, knows about how much regulations mean about anything. I mean you get out down that road, and it's a whole new world. That's the way, I mean you take over then, you take over the uh, the uh, the regulations don't take over. And he, you know he made it seem that some people were asleep on the deck. It's a motor boat. I mean what difference was it if you're not going at the wheel, what difference is it whether you're asleep or awake, you're right there sleeping on a deck. It's a motor boat. And uh, he made it seem as though it was an aircraft carrier or something, and they were out there. I went out in Blackett Straight in the middle of the night and thought I was never was going to find my way, I thought I'd never see land again. It was the darkest place I had ever been on, and Kennedy, you couldn't, they were travelling without light, they had no radio, they had no radar, they were running, the people aboard told me, going on easily on one engine because uh, to keep down

[-37-]

the wake that can be seen from afar or above by planes and so forth, and uh, there was a string of boats across Blackett Straight. None in touch with the other. Uh, so what do you.... I can't remember the point that Blair made but it was....

STERN: Well the central argument is that JFK was less a hero than he was careless. That he had sort of blundered into it. That he was careless in allowing the situation to happen and then he extracted himself from it with some distinction....

DONOVAN: Good Christ! What situation from happening? There were destroyers coming; they knew there were destroyers coming back, but they had no, they had no equipment for detecting these destroyers. Uh, I don't want to argue Kennedy's point of view particularly...

STERN: No...

DONOVAN: ...and I wasn't there....

STERN: ...I was just curious about your reaction to his, you know....

DONOVAN: ...but he's making more of a point of that too. I think that Kennedy.... I talked to the men. I talked to Pat McMahon [Patrick McMahon] and others, and if anyone knows whether.... Two things: One, Kennedy never made out that he was a hero, never told me, ever told me. I don't think that Kennedy thought he was a hero. Maybe it was made out in his name in campaigns as though, but I don't think Kennedy thought of himself as a hero. But Pat McMahon thought of him as a hero.

[-38-]

And the crew definitely thought of him as a hero. Because his acts really were heroic. Unquestionably he saved the life of Pat McMahon, by towing him in a burned condition, that he was with. Apropos the Blair book, and I haven't read it, so I don't mean to jump all over it, but when I read it at the time I thought, "Well, if this isn't small potatoes." Uh, these PT boats were a joke. They absolutely were a joke, especially in that kind of warfare. They sank far more American tonnage than they sank enemy tonnage. That's why they were a joke. You can't treat them like aircraft carriers. None of them did any good. A whole Japanese fleet goes through and nothing happens, and all these boats out there and no one does anything. You know, they're shooting all over the place. They can't see them even. When I was well along in the manuscript of this book I had to say to myself that I'm taking other people's word for all this, uh, that I am writing a book here about events that I did not see and did not personally experience. And I am the Washington bureau chief of the *New York Herald Tribune*, and I don't want some disaster to happen with it that I might be made out to look like a fool,

although I do have the records of the coast watcher and I have checked everywhere I could check, but I thought and thought and thought and suddenly an idea occurred to me. The chief of the naval operations was then Admiral Ali Burke [Arleigh A. Burke].

STERN: Burke, right.

DONOVAN: Ali Burke—I inherited him from the previous bureau

[-39-]

chief—and he was one of the best sources of news I had in Washington, although it had never before occurred to me to talk to him about the Kennedy thing. And low and behold I then remembered that Ali Burke had been out the same night with his famous destroyer in what was called the slot, a body of water further over, and knew a good deal about what was going on there. Furthermore, I knew very, very well, first-hand, personally, that Ali Burke could not stand the Kennedys, nor they him. And I thought, boy, this is going to be a little doosie. So I went to him, and I always called him Admiral. I never called him Ali. I went to him. I called up and said, "I got to see Admiral Burke right away." And I said, "Admiral, I haven't told you this, but I am involved in writing a book about President Kennedy and that experience when he was run down in Blackett Strait." I said, "Can you give me any guidance on that? Can you enlighten me? Can you tell me anything I ought to know about going with a book like this?" And he turned around and thought for a minute and came back and said, "On that, Kennedy was all right." I'll take that to Blair any day. If Ali Burke didn't think Kennedy was right I'd have known it. And I'm sure Ali Burke gave a lot of thought to what happened that night in Blackett Strait.

STERN: It's very interesting because he really was a needle in there and caused them a lot of trouble on all kinds of things.

DONOVAN Yeah. Right. But Ali Burke gave me a clean bill of health on that book.

[-40-]

STERN: That's fascinating.

DONOVAN: And that ought to be on the record, I'm awfully glad I thought to add that.

STERN: That's fascinating.

DONOVAN: I didn't mean to jump on Blair's book because I didn't read it, but what I did read about it—and I think Blair's a very good reporter also—but what I did read about it sounded almost small potatoes, that's all. Maybe I should read it.

STERN: Did you like the movie? What was the reaction...

DONOVAN: I didn't. The answer to that is I didn't think it was a good movie. Uh, they tried to make it the Battle of Midway. They did, and it would have been so much better if they had kept it in perspective, the drama that it really was. Nothing.... See, I had been out in the Solomons and so forth and nothing looked anything like the Solomons. They built it all up too much. The Solomons was just, even when I was there, was very primitive and there weren't all these big installations around and so forth. Oh, it was all right, but I didn't think it was a good movie. I was disappointed.

STERN: Do you know if Kennedy was?

DONOVAN: Oh, I don't think so. I think he liked it. I'll tell you a funny story. He invited.... When he got a copy of the film he invited my wife and me and the kids to come and see it. And my older daughter was up at Mount Holyoke and the two younger ones were still here at Sidwell

[-41-]

Friends [Sidwell Friends School]. So he invited us over, and we all went over to the White House that night, and it was a beautiful spring evening, summer evening. And uh, he said, "Come, let's sit out for a while." And we went up on the Truman balcony, and there was (inaudible) and my kids were (inaudible) with the butler bringing out the rocker to put there for Kennedy, and we all sat there talking. And John John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.], this high, came over and started throwing his toys over the balcony, and the secret service men downstairs would catch them, and then they'd be routed up again and John John.... This kept going on and John John and my children were utterly fascinated with that. Well, anyhow, they had the showing that night—this was in '63—it must have been.

STERN: Yeah. This must be it. There was a letter, you wrote a letter.... Wait a minute. Yeah, you wrote a letter thanking the President for the wonderful evening that you and your wife and kids had, May 22, 1963.

DONOVAN: Yeah. So uh, Bobby.... We sat right behind Bobby and Teddy that night. It was in that showing room; this was all very small. And when it was over and we were applauding, Teddy turned to Bobby and said, "I wish this would come out next year."

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: And that's the end of PT.

STERN: That's fascinating. O.K. Well lets go back to you covering the White House as a bureau chief for uh, uh,

[-42-]

the *Herald Tribune*. Uh, how did you get along with Salinger? Did you think his press briefings for the bureau chiefs were useful?

DONOVAN: I thought Salinger.... I, you know being bureau chief, I did not myself then cover the *Herald*, cover the White House regularly. David Wise was covering it brilliantly for a time. But, I always thought, to me Pierre was very useful. I thought Pierre was very bright and intelligent. And I always had a feeling that he knew the President's mind and thinking. And uh, I thought Pierre was good.

STERN: O.K. And what about access. Did you find that, was access relatively easy?

DONOVAN: Oh, remarkably easy. There was nothing like it before, never anything.

STERN: How about after? Was it the best access you ever had period?

DONOVAN: Yes, although Johnson.... (inaudible) did too much to Johnson. But personally I didn't see Johnson too much, personally. Uh, but I did see President Kennedy on a number of times, either by myself or with my colleague Roscoe Drummond, who had a column in the paper. You know after the President cancelled the *Herald Tribune*....

STERN: Yeah, I'd like to talk to you about that.

DONOVAN: Well, why don't, I'll take this in order.

STERN: Ok.

DONOVAN: The *Herald Tribune* cancellation took me totally by

[-43-]

surprise, and uh, I think I got a call from New York, early in the morning about it. And uh, I called Pierre, and I'll have to say that Pierre didn't level with me at all on this. He gave me to understand that oh, there's just some mix up or something. Maybe Pierre hoped to.... My supposition later was that maybe Pierre hoped to overcome this, and I think Pierre, if it was humanly possible should have prevented this, because it didn't do the President any good. And in fact, the *Herald Tribune* circulation jumped 25,000 a day. Uh, it picked up circulation.

STERN: That's interesting.

DONOVAN: My understanding of that story and from talking to everybody, although I

didn't talk to the President personally, but I'm satisfied that the story was this. When did he cancel the Tribune?

STERN: Uh, it was in uh, where is it? It was in '62.

DONOVAN: Around what time of the year?

STERN: Spring of '62 I believe.

DONOVAN: Spring or summer. Around that time, the Billie Sol Estes scandal had broken in Texas, called it a scandal. And John Denson, the excitable, anti-Kennedy editor of the *Herald Tribune* uh, wanted to give it a big wing for anti-Kennedy reasons, and Kennedy was under no illusions about that. And he plucked Earl Mazo out of the bureau, and sent Earl down there and kept riding Earl so hard for copy that Mazo never really had a chance to I don't think anything, but keep covering

[-44-]

what was going on in front of him. And Denson was playing it big, Billie Sol, Billie Sol. And I think the President got pretty sore about it, and uh, he used to kind of joke to me about Denson, but I didn't respond to it. I just uh, took the position of the President....Let me tell you another story. Well, this.... To come back to that, the President was (inaudible) Billy Sol Estes (inaudible). All during that period there was going on in the Hill [Capitol Hill] what were called the Stockpiling Hearings. They were (inaudible) on the stockpiling and the President came to think of that as being a Republican scandal. I didn't know this to be true, I never knew the President's view on this. In fact the whole stockpiling thing was over my head. It seemed like a bore. And his point was that a lot of people, including John Hay Whitney's friend, a big corporation, had made a lot of money out of selling stuff for the stockpile. (inaudible) going on for a long time, and they had been dead and dull and technical. And uh, the paper hadn't played them very much. And I don't recall any paper playing them an awful lot. They were technical and, but they were getting better. Somehow, for some reason or other there was (inaudible) in Texas and someone in Europe and what not. We were terribly short-handed in the bureau and uh, since the wires can cover a story and get as well as a reporter from a bureau I had just left them to the wire service to cover it. And then it got into this hearing, apparently suddenly it got into this phase that Kennedy thought would show the Republicans a little scandal on their own hands to offset Billy Sol. What happened was, what

[-45-]

set this whole thing off, as best I could learn, the first edition of the *Herald Tribune* came down with a big story on Billie Sol Estes and not one bloody word on the stockpiling. The wire service story did get into a later edition which President Kennedy did not see. I felt badly about it afterwards, because if the bureau had covered it, the desk would have been under that

much more pressure to be sure that got in the first edition—it was a wire service story—and as a matter of fact, part of the time it had been played on the financial page. There wasn't any interesting story in New York at all. And Kennedy sees the *Herald Tribune* with Billie Sol and no stockpiling, at a time when there was testimony about a lot of industrialists making money on it. And he just thought the *Herald Tribune* was out to get him. And uh, that was that, and he cancelled. There wasn't a word of truth to the President's interpretation of him. If Denson wanted to keep that out of the paper, it would have been kept out of the late city edition too, you can be sure.

STERN: Right.

DONOVAN: But uh, it was just one of those slips that came along. After, after this happened, and there was a big to do over Kennedy cancelling the *Herald Tribune*. I began to wonder whether my own relations with President Kennedy was badly impaired by it. So I thought I better hit this straight on, and I called Pierre and said that I would like very much to talk with the President if he ever felt like talking to me. And sure enough, in a day or two, Pierre called and said to come over at

[-46-]

five o'clock, the President will talk to you. So I went in and I spent an hour with Kennedy that day. There was a big vote on a farm bill, and he was disappointed in that, and we talked about everything, and the subject of the *Herald Tribune* never came up, and I wasn't going to bring it up. That wasn't why I was there. I just wanted to know if I could still see him. And he was.... We had a great time. And as I was leaving, he took me to the door, and as I was leaving, he said, uh, "How's the *Herald Tribune* these days." And I said, "Fine." And he said, "Good," and that's all there was to it.

STERN: [Laughter]

DONOVAN: You asked me when I first saw Kennedy after the convention. I do remember one funny aspect of it was that uh, Roscoe Drummond and I asked to see him and President Kennedy's staff, Senator Kennedy, invited us to breakfast at his little house in Georgetown.

STERN: On N Street?

DONOVAN: On N Street. So we went over. Roscoe and I went over, in a cab I guess, and rang the bell, and Kennedy himself opened the door, which I thought was interesting. Much of the breakfast was talking about his concern over where they were getting money for the campaign. He was just, this was right after the convention, he was just full of it, how we were going to finance this campaign and Roscoe and I actually laughed, even though there was not much point to it. He said, "Where am I going to get five million dollars?" We both laughed at that. Of course we understood what he

meant. But, I

[-47-]

do, that's when I saw him after the convention, and that was what was on his mind, the campaign financing. I'll tell you one more interesting story, and then I'll stop. Uh, one night when Kennedy had been in office about one week, there was a Gridiron Dinner, a dinner just for members to talk about the next, the upcoming show, ideas for it and so forth. And the dinner broke up, I would say, about ten thirty, And I was sitting next to Arthur Sylvester, who was a very good friend of mine, and then at that time had been uh, press secretary to McNamara.

STERN: Secretary of State for Public Affairs.

DONOVAN: Right, defense, he was in defense, wasn't he?

STERN: Sylvester, yes. Correct.

DONOVAN: Arthur....

STERN: Oh, I'm sorry. Did I say state?

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

DONOVAN: He was a good friend of mine, and I thought he was a very bright man. I admired him immensely. And we were getting up to go and Arthur said, "You're not going home are you, Bob?" And I said, "Certainly I'm going home. Where do you think I'm going?" It was ten thirty or so. And that's all he said. And, uh, I wouldn't tell the story if Arthur weren't dead, and so, we kind of started out toward the door, and he said, "Are you really going home?" And I said, "Yes Arthur, where else would I be going?" Then he laughed at me, you know, and uh, once more in the corridor by the coat room he asked me. I

[-48-]

said, "I'm going home." I said, "What is this business about whether I'm going home. Where do you think I'm going?" He said, "Oh I don't know. I thought you were leaving and I just thought you might be around the White House around one o'clock in the morning." I said, "God, what are you telling me?" I said, "My gosh, you're telling me there's something coming at the White House at one o'clock this morning." I went right back to the bureau, and I opened it up at the bureau. I think we were shut down, we were shut down by that time. I went over, and I opened up the bureau myself, and uh, I called Dave Wise [David Wise]. I

got him at home. I said, "Dave, I'm acting on a tip. I'm told, I have reason to believe the White House is going to have an announcement at one o'clock in the morning." I said, "Can you check that at all?" And uh, he said, "Well, let me try." He called me back. He said, "Oh brother, oh brother." He said, "I called Pierre and I said, 'Pierre, are you going to have an announcement at one o'clock this morning,' and he said Salinger threw a fit. "Don't you dare say that to anybody. Oh, oh, who told you that" He carried on. I thought, oh, my God. Kennedy hadn't been in office a week. So I thought, well, what it is, Dave? And Dave said, "I'll try to find out. He said, "Salinger won't tell me." And I said, "Well, we've got to get some more help in here, and I called Warren Rogers [Warren J. Rogers, Jr.], who was in the Pentagon then. And Warren called around a little bit, and he was getting nowhere and all of a sudden, as so often happens in the press, it's happened in my own experience, a reporter sits

[-49-]

down and thinks about things. What can happen at one o'clock? And Warren Rogers said to himself, they could be announcing the release of the RVM47. And acting on that hunch I went there myself to do an investigation because I'd guess something that (inaudible). Warren found out that it was true, that the White House was going to have.... Meanwhile I got in touch with a managing editor in New York, asked him to slow down the press runs, because a big story was coming at the White House, we were sure at one o'clock, and to go slow. And he therefore slowed the runs for me, slowed the run so that they'd have the much bigger late city edition for this story, and we'd be all ready to go on it. We'd no hope to get an exclusive. But then all of a sudden we had. We had it. We told Pierre Salinger we had it, and uh, this must have been at midnight, so there wouldn't have been much of a thing anyhow, I guess. So we were really gearing up on that one, and uh, the telephone rang, and it was Pierre. He said, "Well I've been talking to the President about this." This is how different journalism is even then from what it is now, imagine someone talking like this? He said, "The President wants me to tell you this," he said. "He has arranged for the release of the RVM pilot. They're to be released at one a.m. with no prior publicity." He said, "If the *Herald Tribune* gets this anywhere out on its wire,"—see, we had a news wire—"in Paris or anyplace the President said that those pilots may not be freed." And he said, "He hopes you won't do it." Well, that was a tough call, but the fact that the pilot, that they might not let the plane

[-50-]

take off, seemed rather excessive for breaking a story. It seemed like an awful high price to pay for breaking a story. After all, this wasn't an end of the world story, but it was a damned good one. So I called (inaudible). I had to repeat it to him, and he said, "What do you think?" And I said, "I think we shouldn't do it. If, we'll just regret it like hell if we do anything that prevents the release of those flyers. What are we going to gain there?" So we didn't. Well, the President was so pleased, and he wrote a letter to John Hay Whitney, who of course knew nothing about this at all! He had no idea. He wrote a letter to John Whitney, and may even have made it public. I think he did. I also think he may have even mentioned it at a press conference, I'm not sure about that, but thanking John for the tremendously responsible

attitude he had taken, you know, on this. And that it may have saved the freedom of these fellows. John was so pleased to get this epistle from Kennedy. But we had that story.

STERN: And it would be very different today?

DONOVAN: I tell you I think I would do it again. I think I would. I'm certain.

STERN: Did you have any role at all in uh, did you talk to Kennedy at all during the crisis over the Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey] nomination? That was a source of some, you know, for the judgeship.

DONOVAN: Yeah, no.

STERN: No. Ok.

[-51-]

DONOVAN: I can't remember the things I used to talk to Kennedy about.

STERN: What about uh, what about his uh, well, the things that are now public knowledge about Cuba, the assassination, business against Castro [Fidel Castro], Operation Mongoose and all the rest of that? Did any of the journalists in Washington have a clue, I mean suspect any of that?

DONOVAN: Not that I know of. I didn't. I didn't. You mean the attempt to assassinate Castro, no I didn't. Absolutely amazed me. Uh....

STERN: Did you take any major trips with him?

DONOVAN: Oh yes.

STERN: Did you go to Berlin, for example?

DONOVAN: Well, no. That's when I was in the Solomon Islands.

STERN: Oh, that's right. That's right.

DONOVAN: No, no. The Solomon islands was during the Vienna thing. No I tell you, I wanted Don Irwin to make that trip. I didn't go, I didn't go on that trip and I didn't want to go on the Berlin trip. And I afterwards regretted both.

Well, I couldn't have gone on the Vienna trip because that's when I was on the Solomon Islands. Uh, no I traveled with him a lot. I went down to Palm Beach some.

STERN: Any of the world trips though? Did you go to Paris or...

DONOVAN: Yes, yes. But I have no particular recollection. Um.... I traveled with other presidents much more.

[-52-]

Kennedy wasn't in office long enough to make many of those big trips. I mean Eisenhower did.... But I was in Dallas.

STERN: Well, we'll get to that at the end. What about uh, I was just curious in a more general way, you know Halberstam's [David Halberstam] book, the one about (inaudible).

DONOVAN: Yes.

STERN: What's it called again? *Powers That Be*.

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah.

STERN: He has a chapter in which he talks about the Kennedy administration, and you can see the shift away from the importance of the print journalists uh, and the rise of television. Was that something you were aware of?

DONOVAN: Sure, sure.

STERN: First, do you think it was true, and was that something you could really see happening?

DONOVAN: Well, of course you knew it was happening because...

STERN: He had that marvelous....

DONOVAN: ...that's when television began hitting its stride in a very big way, and it affected the newspaper business very, very deeply.

STERN: Yeah, in what way for example?

DONOVAN: Well, it revolutionized it. We had to go to a different kind of reporting. And many a good reporter who didn't make the switch fell by the wayside. I not only went through it once, but then I went out and became bureau

[-53-]

chief for the *Los Angeles Times*, which I was at the time of the assassination, and I went

through it all over again there. There was a revolution of our business. We had to do things differently.

STERN: Could you be a little more specific, because when, for example, students who are say twenty years old read this transcript they'll want to know what do you mean. What kind of things did you have to do differently?

DONOVAN: Well, it no longer was considered enough for reading correspondence in the paper to just write who, what, where, when and why—the old style we'd used for so long. You know, let me back up a little bit. During the yellow journalism phase, earlier in the century, there was, there came a great revolution against yellow journalism.

STERN: Sure.

DONOVAN: And papers like the *New York Herald Tribune* and the *New York Times*, great newspapers, turned to the ideal of very straight forward, factual reporting. That became the ideal, and for good and sound reasons. Uh, but with television it became extremely difficult to live by that old standard. Let me give you an example that was so clear to me when I went with the *Los Angeles Times*. President Kennedy would hold a press conference at say, eleven o'clock in the morning. O.K. In California, people having breakfast saw that press conference at breakfast. Now the next morning are you going to deliver on their doorstep, for that breakfast, the same thing

[-54-]

that they saw at breakfast yesterday? And uh, television, in other words was so far ahead of us because of its immediacy, that uh, a newspaper was offering its readers nothing, if it just offered what they'd seen on television the day before. So it very soon became clear the newspapers had to adopt, and you'll see it all over today, and the *Herald Tribune* was in the forefront of it, under Denson, because he had been managing editor, he had been editor of *Newsweek*. Newspapers at that period began adopting more the magazine style of writing: take out broad things, investigation, special coverage, different ways of handling stories if possible. Not always, but if possible. Uh, more analysis, more leeway for a reporter to inject his own judgment into a thing, not blatantly, but nevertheless. Once you get into analyzing, then your own mind and your own reactions come into it.

STERN: Sure.

DONOVAN: And so there was a clear-cut revolution that began hitting its stride in the Kennedy thing. Its gone on and on to this day. And papers have gone down all over the place, especially afternoon papers, because of television. And so it was obvious that television was enormously important. President Kennedy wouldn't call Scotty Reston [James B. Reston] and me in to give us a big year-end summary. He'd call in

Cronkite [Walter Cronkite] and other people. So he could be seen and argue his own case, uh, on television.

STERN: Sure.

[-55-]

DONOVAN: It was as obvious as the day is long. And uh, a number, a wave of very fine reporters went from journalism into television 'cause of the (inaudible). I mean there was a whole era of uh, television people. David Brinkley. David Brinkley was a smashing success as a newspaper editor. Jack Chancellor [John W. Chancellor], all these people would have been real stars in newspaper journalism in the old days. But the lure of a great deal of money took them to television and influence. And so the whole newspaper picture changed here. There's no question it changed all over the world. That's what I'm talking about.

STERN: And clearly the Kennedy administration was a key....

DONOVAN: Well, it hit the wave, that's right. Eisenhower, Eisenhower was on television a lot, but he didn't use it quite the same way, and he wasn't quite the performer for television that Kennedy was. So television just burst into prominence under Kennedy.

STERN: Do you think, for example, his press conferences were a....

DONOVAN: Yeah. First live and in color and everything else. Ike was the first in television to have press conferences on television, but they weren't live. Oh, Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] and Eisenhower carried the thing forward a long way, but Kennedy, it came....In fact, I used to object to the Kennedy press conferences because they were, they had become matinees. I can remember nuns sitting there

[-56-]

applauding at our press conference. I mean he transferred it to the State Department auditorium. You might as well put it in the Keith (inaudible). They were different from what they were under Truman and....

STERN: Well, the intimacy was lost.

DONOVAN: Of course that wasn't altogether the President's fault, because the numbers of journalists became so big that the old intimacy was bound to go. Roosevelt would have been forced into the same thing. And Truman was, Truman was the one who took it out of the White House and into the old (inaudible).

STERN: Do you have anything that you think is pertinent about his relationship during the administration to RFK? Did you ever see any very striking?

(END OF TAPE)

DONOVAN: I made a point, and I'm sure I'm not the only one, but I made a point of seeing a lot of Bobby in my life and Bobby was always the ultimate, you knew that Bobby was clued in on everything. He was very circumspect about talking to you, other than just giving you a hint or an idea. But if you could get to Bobby in a pinch, and I could, you could be safe from being wrong, for example. It was just so obvious that Bobby and Jack were....

STERN: Did you continue to have a good relationship with Bobby during the Senate, when he was a senator?

DONOVAN: Yes I did. Yes I did. I wouldn't see so much of him then.

STERN: Did you cover the '68 campaign?

[-57-]

DONOVAN: Oh, yes. I was with Bobby in Los Angeles, although I had actually....I was actually in, had gone back to the office before the shot was fired.

STERN: This is something maybe we should talk about on another occasion.

DONOVAN: There isn't much I can tell you.

STERN: I don't mean just Los Angeles, I mean the '68 campaign, Bobby's campaign.

DONOVAN: I covered Bobby's campaign (inaudible).

STERN: Well, on the same....And what about Johnson, there's a fascinating thing. I mean Johnson is vice-president and his seeming disappearance, the fact that he had no influence left in the Senate, with uh, he seemed to sort of fade into the background.

DONOVAN: Well, it's something that you expected would happen.

STERN: He didn't expect it though. I mean he was supposed to have made that statement, "Power is where power goes." And of course there was that incredible thing with the Democratic caucus in January of '61. I mean the Democratic caucus actually voted by a substantial majority to allow him, not Mike Mansfield

[Michael J. Mansfield] to preside over the caucus as vice president. But he withdrew from it because seventeen voted against it.

DONOVAN: Johnson, though, was visible enough, as I remember with his trips abroad and his camel drivers and all the rest. He was visible uh, but vice president, there

[-58-]

isn't much news in vice president. I can't remember much about Johnson's vice-presidency, to tell you the truth.

STERN: Did you ever hear, or give any credence to the rumors that he might be dumped in '64, or that sort of thing?

DONOVAN: I heard it, but didn't give any credence to it. The Republican, Nixon, was a great spreader of that rumor.

STERN: Oh, was he?

DONOVAN: Yes he was. Yes, he was. In fact, this is interesting, the morning of the assassination, Governor Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.] had a press conference in the hotel in Fort Worth, and a reporter said that Nixon had been in Dallas or Forth Worth the night before...

STERN: Which is true.

DONOVAN: ...and had predicted that Johnson would be dumped from the ticket. And Connolly responded with his usual sarcasm to that. So even, dumped from the ticket, and in three hours he's president. Eight, nine in the morning, I'd say. Between four or five hours after there had been a discussion at Connolly's press conference that Lyndon would be dumped as vice president, Lyndon's president. Nothing so much could ever convince you of the uncertainty of life than that day.

STERN: If you would, would you talk about a bit about that.

DONOVAN: I was at the gate at the airport in Dallas when Jack and Jackie got off the plane. I never saw two people who looked more magnetic, who had more, who had wealth and power and youth and promise, a seemingly life of endless joy

[-59-]

ahead of them, and in a trace it was all gone. All gone.

STERN: Where were you in the motorcade? How did you experience that whole thing?

DONOVAN: Let me just say one more thing about that. Jackie got off the plane with those blood red roses in her arm. I had filed a little box to Los Angeles the night before, and of course it wasn't used, saying that everywhere that Jackie had gone on that earlier day, she had been given the yellow rose of Texas. But the point of my box was that they had had a blight or something and the yellow roses of Texas had actually come from California. So I myself was surprised to see Jackie stepping off the plane, I mean I wasn't surprised to see her stepping off the plane with these blood red roses, this big thing, and I noticed them in her arm and the next time I saw those roses, they were lying in the back seat of the car at Parkland Hospital. They were still lying there when we got there.

STERN: Where were you in the motorcade? How many cars back?

DONOVAN: Well, I was in the, I think, first press bus, or second, I think I was in the second press bus.

STERN: Did you hear the shots?

DONOVAN: I did not, but some people on the bus seemed too. I thought they were being absurd about it. Well, first, the first inkling that there might have been any trouble, that impressed me at all, was that the President's car was not in the motorcade. Then the motorcade moved on past the Texas depository [Texas Book Depository], and down under the

[-60-]

underpass. And as we were, and this episode is in the Warren Commission Report, as we came through the underpass, a motorcycle, a three-wheel motorcycle—the kind with a box behind—came zooming in between us and the curb, and rammed right up the railroad embankment, as far as the policeman could take us, up the steep hill. Then the policeman jumped off and drew a revolver, went running down the track with a revolver and that was of course the first time I knew the President had been hit.

STERN: And where did you go then? Did you go directly to the hospital or did you....

DONOVAN: No, we did not, we went to the Trade Mart [Dallas Trade Mart].

STERN: And there you still didn't really know what had happened.

DONOVAN: Well, I'll tell you what. I never believed, I had seen so many false alarms in motorcades. People said, "Look everybody's running." Well I had been so many times in a motorcade when people would take one view of the President, then rush across and see him again when he turned the corner. I saw it again and again. I saw it so many times in a motorcade. And, uh, I've heard so many false stories, rumors, go through motorcades. When it turns out the terrible act involving the President, it's a motorcycle cop that's fallen over. There's so much of that, uh, that I didn't believe anything. I didn't believe it until I saw the cop go over the bank, then I thought there was trouble. When we got to the uh, when we got to the

[-61-]

Merchandise, the Trade Mart, the motorcade had broken up enough so that our bus was a little uncertain as to where to go. And we went someplace and people started jumping out of other buses and saying, "The President's car isn't here. The President's car isn't here." And I said, "Well of course not, you know the motorcade is mixed up, it's where it's supposed to be. We're here." There was a press room set up on the top floor of the Trade Mart. When we went in the splendid looking audience was already, I think, beginning lunch in this large room on the first floor. And we went to the uh, press room on escalators, it went up through girders, it was one of those modern buildings. And it was such a surrealistic experience soaring up through these girders and this luncheon downstairs and this rumor around that something happened to the President, but no one knew. And we went into the press room, and there was no such information there and David Broder [David S. Broder], who was then a reporter for the *Washington Star* picked up the phone and called the *Washington Star*, which was approaching a midday edition. And David said, "You better hold that paper as long as you can. I think that something's happened down here." Finding nothing upstairs at all in the press room, we went down stairs, and I saw a cop who was talking to people. And I said to him, "Do you know where President Kennedy is?" And his words are memorable. I have them written down in a notebook. He said uh, "President Kennedy has been shot and may be dead."

STERN: Did you believe him?

[-62-]

DONOVAN: Yes I did. And I said, "Where is he?" And he said uh, "Parkland Hospital." And there were some television guys there who were making a dash for it. And I said, "Can I come with you?" And they said, "Come on. Come on." My gosh they went up the highway the wrong way, at breakneck speed. It was a terrifying drive. The other side on the coin is that policemen seeing this car coming up the wrong way thought we were an official car and kept waving us through. We were waved right up alongside of Kennedy's car and there were the red roses.

STERN: How did you get back to Washington that night? Do you....

DONOVAN: I didn't. I stayed and worked, I wrote in Dallas. I decided to...

STERN: You just stayed and....

DONOVAN: Most of the reporters on the trip came back and....The press plane went back that night.

STERN: Yeah.

DONOVAN: So I missed all that scene in Washington, and I stayed in Dallas overnight.

STERN: Did you see Johnson at any time later that day, or didn't you see him until he was back in Washington?

DONOVAN: No. I didn't see him until the funeral.

STERN: So you have no knowledge at all what went on on the plane heading back. That whole....

DONOVAN: No, no. But it was covered by the pool actually.

STERN: Well, is there anything you'd like to add? There is

[-63-]

one sort of general question I'd like to ask. And that is that given the fact that in November it will be the twentieth anniversary of the end of the Kennedy administration, twenty years. As you look back on it now with the perspective of two decades, do you think differently about Kennedy and his administration than you did then? Do you find that your view has been altered in any major way by the passage of time? Do you think more of or less of him?

DONOVAN: Oh, I think....I've always thought highly of John Kennedy, and I still think highly of him. Uh, it was disappointing, and is disappointing that he had such a difficult time getting his program through. And I do accept the analysis of historians that uh, that his leadership wasn't as strong as it should have been, and that it was an uncertain leadership at home. I'm thinking of domestic things. But I also remember the times in which President Kennedy served, as far as Congress goes. Let me tell you something, in the last seven years of Franklin Roosevelt's administration, he never was able to get through one major piece of domestic foreign policy legislation. A very strong coalition had been formed in Congress, as you know, against liberal legislation. Harry Truman got two major pieces of foreign policy legislation through Congress. Two in eight years. And uh, we were in that anti-reformist period. And uh, I think that's a factor, I think

that's an element of Kennedy's lack of success in getting programs through. Uh, I think by his death, Kennedy bought some

[-64-]

of the successes that Lyndon Johnson later scored. I'm sure for all Lyndon should get credit for. Remember the civil rights bill was a Kennedy bill, and uh, there was without question a great sense of guilt in Congress that Johnson was able to play upon, and his great skill in maneuvering that legislature.

STERN: Wilbur Cohen [Wilbur J. Cohen] said to me that 95% of the social legislation of the Johnson administration originated in the Kennedy administration.

DONOVAN: Well, if you....See how things go back though. If you would look at Kennedy's civil rights bill and then read Truman's special message to Congress on civil rights in 1947, you would see it all there. This was an agenda that Democratic presidents had been working with for a long time. I thought Kennedy had a very astute view of the world. And I thought Kennedy was very alive to what was going on. I thought that uh.... Let me tell you an experience I had. I was in Japan in the summer of 1963, summer before the assassination, and we were in a park somewhere, in one of the cities there, I think it was Kyoto, in a park. And a lot of Japanese school children gathered around us, and uh, and they started chattering away, and an interpreter said, "They want to know where you come from." And I said, "We're from Washington." "Oh, Kennedy," they're saying, "Kennedy." "Kennedy." Everyone knew Kennedy. Kennedy.

When Eisenhower was president, Kennedy once told me, he could have been elected and elected and elected. Kennedy couldn't have won against him. But you couldn't have been at

[-65-]

that Kennedy convention without knowing that there was coming up in this country a large number of people for whom Eisenhower wasn't enough, and what Eisenhower stood for.

There was a generation coming on that was straining for a Kennedy. And uh, so I think Kennedy was an important president in spite of all. And I think the greatest tragedy is that he was cut down just when he was hitting his stride.

STERN: Anything else about that?

DONOVAN: No.

STERN: O.K. Great.

[-66-]

Robert J. Donovan Oral History Transcript
Name List

B

Beatty, Warren, 35, 36
Blair, Clay Jr., 37-41
Blair, Joan, 37-41
Brinkley, David, 56
Broder, David S., 62
Burke, Arleigh A., 39, 40

C

Castro, Fidel, 52
Chancellor, John W., 56
Clifford, Clark, 15
Cohen, Wilbur J., 65
Connally, John B. Jr., 59
Cousins, Robert, 18
Cronkite, Walter, 55

D

Denson, John Lee, 25, 44-46, 55
Dodge, Joseph M., 16
Donovan, Gerry, 15
Drummond, Roscoe, 43, 47

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D. 4, 16, 53, 56, 65, 66
Erwitt, Elliot, 20, 30
Estes, Billie Sol, 44-46

F

Foy, Bryan, 34-36

H

Hagerty, James C., 56
Halberstam, David, 53
Hersey, John, 18, 19, 27
Hoover, Herbert, 16
Hoover, J. Edgar, 29

I

Irwin, Don, 10, 52

J

Johnson, Lyndon B., 5, 6, 14, 43, 58, 59, 63, 65

K

Kennedy, Edward M., 27, 42
Kennedy, Jacqueline B., 2, 27, 28, 35, 59, 60
Kennedy, John F., 1-66
Kennedy, John F. Jr., 42
Kennedy, Joseph P., Sr., 27, 28, 31, 33
Kennedy, Joseph P. Jr., 5, 6, 28
Kennedy, Robert F., 16, 17, 42, 57, 58
Knebel, Fletcher, 3
Kuhn, Edward, 18

L

Lodge, Henry Cabot, 16

M

Mansfield, Michael J., 58
Mazo, Earl, 44, 45
McMahon, Patrick J., 38, 39
McNamara, Robert S., 16, 48
Morrissey, Francis X., 51

N

Nixon, Richard M., 7-9, 11, 59

P

Powers, David F., 30

R

Reardon, Timothy J. Jr., 19
Reston, James B. "Scotty," 55
Robertson, Clifford Parker III, 36
Rogers, Warren J. Jr., 49-51
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 16, 57, 64
Rusk, Dean, 16

S

Salinger, Pierre E.G., 3, 19, 26, 30, 32, 35, 43-46,
49, 50
Sorensen, Theodore C., 3
Stevens, George Jr., 33, 34
Stevenson, Adlai E., 13
Symington, W. Stuart, 5
Sylvester, Arthur, 48, 49

T

Thomas, Albert, 9

Truman, Harry S., 11, 13, 16, 57, 64, 65

W

Walsh, Raoul, 33

Warner, Jack, 33

Whitney, John Hay, 45, 51

Wise, David, 43, 49