

**George C. McGhee Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 08/13/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** George C. McGhee  
**Interviewer:** Martin J. Hillenbrand  
**Date of Interview:** August 13, 1964  
**Length:** 24 pages

**Biographical Note**

George C. McGhee (1912-2005) was Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs from 1961 to 1963 and Ambassador to West Germany from 1963 to 1968. This interview focuses on international relations during the Kennedy administration and the administration's handling of crises, including in the Congo, New Guinea, and the Dominican Republic, among other topics.

**Access**

Open

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed October 6, 1964, copyright of these materials has passed to the United States Government upon the death of the interviewee. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

**Suggested Citation**

George C. McGhee, recorded interview by Martin J. Hillenbrand, August 13, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GIFT OF PERSONAL STATEMENT

by

George C. McGhee

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

In accordance with the provisions of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 as amended (63 Stat. 377) and regulations issued thereunder, I, George C. McGhee, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a transcript of a personal statement approved by me on September 24, 1964, and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this document is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument available for research in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. At the same time, it is his wish to guard against the possibility of its contents being used to embarrass, damage, injure or harass anyone. Therefore, in pursuance of this objective, and in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 507(f)(3) of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as

amended, this material shall not for a period of five years be made available for examination by anyone except persons who have received my express written authorization to examine it. (This restriction shall not apply to employees of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library engaged in performing normal archival work processes.)

3. A revision of the above stipulation governing access to the aforesaid document may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States or his designee if it appears desirable to revise the conditions herein stipulated.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

5. The donor retains to himself during his lifetime all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. After the death of the donor, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.

Signed *[Signature]*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Accepted *Wayne Crow*  
Archivist of the United States

Date Oct. 6, 1964

George C. McGhee– JFK #1  
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	The Kennedy administration's handling of the Congo
2	Meeting with the Kennedy administration's critics
3	Drafting the U Thant Plan
4	Opposition to the U Thant Plan
6	Conference on the Netherlands West New Guinea conflict
7	John F. Kennedy's [JFK] involvement in the conference
8	Ramification of President Rafael Trujillo's assassination in the Dominican Republic
9	Visiting the Dominican Republic to negotiate with Ramfis Trujillo
11	Jupiter missiles in Turkey
12	Recommending policy concerning Laos
13	UAR troops in Yemen
14	JFK's visit to Germany
15	The German people's reactions to JFK
17	Effect of Germany trip on JFK
18	Impressions of JFK
20	JFK's handling of meetings
22	Roles of the White House staff
23	JFK's legacy concerning international relations

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

GEORGE C. MCGHEE, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO GERMANY

interviewed by

Martin J. Hillenbrand, Minister, American Embassy, Bonn

August 13, 1964

Minister Hillenbrand: You might want to begin, Mr. Ambassador, with some general observations as to how you would propose to proceed.

Ambassador McGhee: Unfortunately, I have no notes with me here in Germany covering the period of my association with the President. As a consequence, I am handicapped in not being able to recreate the precise background situation, the times and the statements made by President Kennedy in reference to the matters to which I will refer. Since notes were taken by others in most of the meetings I attended with the President, which will be more reliable than my memory, I will not attempt to recreate what was said by the President and others on such occasions. I will, however, attempt to give my impression of the particular ideas, policies and directives of the President, concerning which I might have some particular insight because of what transpired between myself and the President.

Minister Hillenbrand: I understand that you would prefer to begin with the subject of the Congo. Do you have any general observations, with particular reference as to how this question was handled in the Executive and as to the personal role of the President?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes, I might begin with the Congo because I worked on this problem longer and in closer contact with the President than perhaps any other one problem. Immediately upon my appointment as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, I was assigned responsibility within the Department, under the Under Secretary and Secretary,

G. C. McGhee

George C. McGhee

Martin J. Hillenbrand

Martin J. Hillenbrand

for handling our relations with the Congo crisis, although day-to-day responsibility continued to reside in Assistant Secretary Williams. The Congo, at that juncture, was perhaps the most critical of the foreign situations that we faced. There was the imminent threat that the Katanga secession could provoke hostilities. Any intervention by the Bloc powers into such a conflict would have the effect of projecting not just the "cold" war -- but a "hot" offshoot of it -- into the heart of Africa.

The Administration was at that time under strong attack, not only by members of the Republican Party but by prominent Democrats such as Senator Dodd of Connecticut and Senator Russell of Georgia, for its handling of the Congo affair. The basic criticism seemed to be that U.S. policy did not reflect a proper appreciation of the position of Mr. Tshombe, the head of the Katanga Government, and what he was purported to stand for. According to these critics, the U.S. was backing the Congo central government headed by Prime Minister Adoula in forcing its will upon Mr. Tshombe, who was in secession against the central government, without regard to certain more important issues. These issues included the presumed right of Katanga to self-determination, opposition to the use of force by the UN, and the fact that Mr. Tshombe, because of his close alliance with the Belgian mineral industry, presumably represented "free enterprise" in contrast to the socialist tendencies of the central government.

In any event, the President and the Department of State were under attack by influential and respectable critics. Shortly after I assumed my new responsibility, the President called me and asked me to get in touch with the leaders across the country who had been most vocal in their criticism of our Congo policy and attempt to explain it to them. In particular I was to explain that we were not trying to force Mr. Tshombe

into the arms of the central government, but offered him an honorable and fair way to end his secession if he was willing to negotiate in good faith. I first made a quick trip -- the Air Force sent me down by plane -- to talk with Senator Russell in his home near Atlanta. He had become interested in the Congo largely as a result of conversations with Georgia missionaries who had returned from there. He gave me a good hearing and appeared somewhat mollified by the explanation I gave him. I contacted Senator Dodd and spent a great deal of time with him. I called on the telephone Mr. Rockefeller, Mr. Nixon, and scores of other leaders across the country, attempting to persuade them of the correctness of our policy. The President, who felt under great pressure, was eager to learn the results of my conversations and, as I recall, he called me from a weekend cruise to ask me to summarize for him what the various individuals had said and whether I thought they would continue their criticism. The principal disappointment in this regard was Mr. Nixon. He had not, on Friday, indicated to me that he would publicly oppose the President's policy, however, on the following Monday an article of his appeared in a national publication attacking the policy vigorously.

The President took a very real interest in developing a vigorous policy to cope with the Congo crisis. He approved, in principle, our taking the lead in devising a concrete proposal which would hopefully be made to Mr. Adoula and Mr. Tshombe by the United Nations. Such a proposal would consist of a series of steps to be taken by both concurrently, which should result in the unification of the Congo. Although this proposal later became known as the U Thant Plan, the actual plan was largely worked out in the Department, quite a lot in my office, with representatives of the French and British and the Belgian governments



present. In the end, the French dissociated themselves from the effort, after having agreed to it, and the British did not play an active role. After its approval by the President, the Plan was accepted by the United Nations and put forward to Mr. Adoula and Mr. Tshombe, who accepted it in principle. Neither, however, but particularly Mr. Tshombe, would proceed to carry out the Plan. Mr. Struelens, who was the representative of Mr. Tshombe in the United States, was a very effective pleader for his cause. Twice I saw Mr. Struelens personally in attempts to get Mr. Tshombe to change his view toward the U Thant plan, however, he did not do so and the threat of hostilities between Mr. Tshombe and the UN increased. In order to show those who were in opposition to his policy that he had given Mr. Tshombe every possible chance to accept the U Thant Plan, the President finally decided that I should go out to Elisabethville to negotiate with Mr. Tshombe. Senator Dodd, who had been persuaded to cooperate, wrote a letter of introduction for me to Mr. Tshombe. Pursuant to the President's instructions, I went to Leopoldville for talks with Mr. Adoula and, in time, to Elisabethville where I had three days' discussion with Mr. Tshombe. He agreed to the U Thant Plan in principle and to taking immediately some preliminary steps toward carrying out the Plan. Later, however, and I am frank to say quite largely as a result of the reluctance of Mr. Adoula to match the steps that Mr. Tshombe had agreed to and taken, Mr. Tshombe reneged on his promises. There subsequently ensued open fighting between the Katanga and UN forces which resulted in the end of the Katanga secession. The President had always opposed the introduction of force by the UN against Katanga. He would not agree to this being a part of the U Thant Plan. In the end the Katanga Gendarmerie itself initiated the use of force, and we had little opportunity to intervene to

stop the fighting that ensued even had we wished to do so. Fortunately, there were few casualties and the UN forces were victorious.

The wisdom of the President's Congo policy was, I believe, clearly established. He had proved to those who opposed his policy that Mr. Tshombe had been given every opportunity to end his secession on fair and honorable terms, before the hostilities actually occurred. As a consequence there was little public criticism of the President's policy in the end, and even Tshombe's staunchest supporters acquiesced in his defeat.

Minister Hillenbrand: Just to ask one or two questions - Given the other preoccupations of the President during this same period, would you say that the Congo was the subject of frequent consideration in meetings in the White House or did it only come up on an ad hoc basis to the attention of the President?

Ambassador McGhee: No, the Congo came up frequently at regular meetings at the White House -- both small and large meetings. The President took a keen interest in all details of this problem. He discussed it with Mr. Spaak during the latter's visit to Washington, and with visiting British officials. He followed all of the details very closely.

Minister Hillenbrand: Do you recall any specific meetings in the White House at which important decisions were made by the President?

Ambassador McGhee: It is very difficult for me to dissociate the various meetings and what was decided in individual meetings without access to notes.

Minister Hillenbrand: As the next subject, we might take up the question of West New Guinea-West Irian. Would you care to make any general observations in beginning your comments on this?

Ambassador McGhee: The Netherlands West New Guinea crisis, which became acute during the President's administration, arose from the demands of President Sukarno of Indonesia that the Dutch evacuate and turn over this territory to Indonesia. The problem was assigned to me to handle as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, under the general supervision of the Secretary and Under Secretary. The President himself made the decision that we would take an active role in mediating the matter. Although we had little sympathy for Sukarno or his objectives, it seemed to be in the Dutch interest, as well as the general interest, that the Dutch withdraw. The Dutch were not prepared to fight for their position in West New Guinea, and as a consequence there was no reason why we or others should. We were willing to risk some of our good will with the Dutch, if necessary, in order to bring about their withdrawal.

From the beginning, it was hoped that this could be accomplished under the United Nations, so that it would not appear that Sukarno had been rewarded for his aggressive and threatening attitude. At an earlier stage, I had, as Counselor of the Department, proposed a United Nations Trusteeship for the territory, however, this was abandoned because of the difficulties which had been encountered in the Congo in paying the bill for United Nations actions of this type. As a result of the President's decision that we would play a more active role, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker was asked by Under Secretary Ball to serve as mediator, not on a national basis, but in behalf of the United Nations. It became my duty to set up the conference, which took place on an estate near Middleburg, Virginia, and to follow the day-to-day results.

The President was keenly interested in this conference and I and others would inform him daily of the results of Mr. Bunker's negotiations

with Ambassador van Roijen, who represented Holland. There was one critical juncture near the end of the negotiations where the President played a personal role. I was told that he strongly implied to an Indonesian representative that if Sukarno persisted in the use of force in taking West New Guinea, that the U.S. 7th Fleet might intervene. Sukarno is reported to have replied that this was the first time he had ever been so threatened, however, it appeared to have had a good effect on Sukarno. The Indonesians yielded on critical points in their negotiations with the Dutch and an agreement was finally reached.

Minister Hillenbrand: From the point of view of how this subject was handled procedurally in the White House, was it considered generally in formal meetings, either sessions of the National Security Council or portions of the National Security Council, or was this the kind of thing that the President handled directly with the few individuals who were primarily concerned?

Ambassador McGhee: This particular subject was not handled in regular, formal meetings in the White House. It developed quickly and was handled by the State Department, with frequent discussions with the President over the telephone, in small ad hoc meetings involving only one or two individuals, and by exchange of memoranda. I do not recall its being considered in the Security Council as a whole, or in meetings consisting of a large number of the members of the Security Council.

Minister Hillenbrand: Do you have any further thoughts on this subject that you would like to add?

Ambassador McGhee: No, except that I think the President's policy in this case was very successful. We did incur some adverse reaction on the part of the Dutch, but they were in the end able to get out of New

Guinea under honorable conditions. There was a transitional UN regime which seemed to minimize the implication of Sukarno's being rewarded for aggression.

Minister Hillenbrand: Does this, then, conclude what you wish to say on the subject of West New Guinea?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes.

Minister Hillenbrand: I believe you have indicated that you would next like to discuss the subject of the Dominican Republic. Here again, do you have any general observations you would like to make?

Ambassador McGhee: I came into the Dominican Republic affair while I was still Chairman of the Policy Planning Council at the Department. Mr. Ball had been assigned the task of determining how to cope with the situation which had emerged in the Dominican Republic following the assassination of Trujillo. The government under President Balaguer was very weak. There were threats that various officers of the Dominican Forces would attempt a coup to reestablish a dictatorship. The individual who appeared to be the key to the situation was General Ramfis Trujillo, who was the head of the Trujillo family. Disinclined as we were to deal with any member of the Trujillo family, it was felt that he was the only element in the Dominican Republic with the prestige and power -- he was head of the Air Force -- to avert a dictatorship.

The Dominican situation was considered by the President to be extremely important in the light of the proximity of the island to us and its relation to the other American States. The great expectations that had been created as a result of the assassination of General Trujillo after 35 years of dictatorship appeared in jeopardy. The President decided that we must assume a more positive policy, in an attempt first to stabilize the situation to prevent another coup and later to facilitate

adoption of a constitution and free elections. Mr. Ball, after a great many conferences with the officers concerned, devised a strategy for accomplishing these objectives and asked me to undertake the task of negotiating the proposals which had been worked out. He and I went to New York and met with President Balaguer.

I was then asked to go to the Dominican Republic and negotiate with General Ramfis Trujillo. The essence of our offer was that we would, if Ramfis Trujillo would agree to stay on for an indeterminate period and keep his officers from seizing power, turn over the estates and other property of the family in the Dominican Republic, and get his uncles Hector and Arismenda, out of the Dominican Republic, permit him to continue as head of the Air Force and to lead a normal life in the Dominican Republic. We expected difficulties in getting him to turn over the valuable holdings of the family. I conducted my negotiations with Ramfis Trujillo over a period of several days, and persuaded him to get his uncles out and to give up the family properties. The remaining point in the negotiation became how much money we would permit him to recoup, out of the income of his sugar properties, prior to passing title either to the government or some foundation which would be set up for this purpose. The properties were presumably worth upwards of \$100 million, and Trujillo was being offered various amounts by individuals who wanted to acquire them.

The last thing the President told me before leaving Washington, knowing that compensation to the Trujillo family would be a part of the negotiation, was "Negotiate as if this were your own deal." In other words, the President admonished me to give Ramfis Trujillo as little as possible -- even though the money would come from the Dominican Republic and not the United States. Eventually we agreed on a figure.

As a matter of fact, he never received it because, although he had fulfilled his portion of the bargain up to that point, he eventually lost his nerve and abandoned the country. This included abandoning his remaining properties without receiving any compensation.

Minister Hillenbrand: Apart from the admonition at the beginning of your mission, was the President personally involved in the formulation of instructions along the way?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes, the President had been closely involved. He must have had a part in getting John Martin into the situation earlier. Martin, a journalist and keen observer, who later became Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, went there and made a very careful, on-the-spot survey. It was on the basis of his report that Mr. Ball's program was worked out, which I later was asked to negotiate.

Minister Hillenbrand: Once you had made this arrangement with Ramfis, even though it was not actually executed, what happened subsequently, that you would care to mention here, involving yourself and the President?

Ambassador McGhee: You mean some other area?

Minister Hillenbrand: No, I mean as far as the Dominican Republic was concerned. Were you further involved in subsequent developments?

Ambassador McGhee: No, I was not further involved. At one stage, when Ramfis Trujillo was acting in a very irrational way and not carrying out his end of the bargain, the President asked me to visit him again. I got as far as Miami, but we were unable to get Trujillo to agree to see me. He sent back rather inchoate messages saying that he had given me everything that he could -- that he didn't want to see me. So after staying two days in a hotel in Miami, I eventually came back, and didn't have any subsequent relation to the policy there until later as Under Secretary.

Minister Hillenbrand: I understand that you feel you have something to add on the subject of the removal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey.

Ambassador McGhee: Yes. One of the initial acts of the President was to ask Mr. Acheson to study NATO policy in general. I participated as a member of Mr. Acheson's supporting committee. One of the particular recommendations of the report concerned the removal of the MRBM's -- the Jupiters -- from Turkey and Italy. At one of the meetings dealing with this problem, the President turned to me, presumably because of my experience in Turkey, and asked me if I thought the Turks would permit us to take the MRBM's out. I replied that I doubted it, but that we could go into the matter thoroughly and see what could be done. As a result, we studied the matter and got the advice of the Embassy in Ankara. When the Secretary and I were in Ankara shortly thereafter, at the CENTO meeting, we talked with the Foreign Minister of Turkey about the MRBM's. His reaction was sharply against their removal. The Turks had put a good deal of money into the installation of the Jupiters, which had just come into place. According to the Foreign Minister it would be difficult for the Turkish people to understand their removal without any compensating additions to their security. As a result I had to report to the President that, in my opinion, the Turks would not agree to the removal of the MRBM's without some compensation or stronger pressure than would be justified at that time.

Much later, the Jupiters were removed, but only when we were able to put Polaris submarines into the Mediterranean. It would have been preferable if the President's original wish could have been carried out, since the removal of the MRBM's at the later date was widely, although wrongly, interpreted as a consideration paid by us for the removal of offensive Soviet missiles from Cuba.



Minister Hillenbrand: What was the underlying rationale in the Acheson Report for the removal of the Jupiters at that relatively earlier period?

Ambassador McGhee: Basically, it was felt that these weapons, as "soft" weapons, were vulnerable to a first attack and would be a liability instead of an asset. In the event of a nuclear attack they would draw immediate enemy fire, since they would have to be put out. There would be little opportunity for them to have ever been effective as second strike weapons. Moreover, they were, because of their location, unusually provocative to the Soviets. Their disadvantage appeared to outweigh their strategic value.

Minister Hillenbrand: You have indicated you would like next to turn to the subject of Laos and South Vietnam. Do you have any general observations to begin with?

Ambassador McGhee: Before the Kennedy Administration came into office, I had been working with Secretary-designate Rusk helping prepare him and the President for the time when they would assume office. The question to which I devoted particular attention was Laos. A "shadow" inter-departmental committee had been organized, which I chaired, to make recommendations to the President as to the policy he should pursue in Laos. Our report was presented to him and he accepted it, as I recall, in its entirety, with the exception of one recommendation. As a counterpoise to the intrusions of the Viet Cong into Laos, we had recommended that he send troops to Thailand. Although this step was later taken, when the situation in Laos became more acute, he declined to do it at this time. I assume that he did not wish to take such a provocative step so early in his Administration. As a consequence, although we stepped up our effort in Laos, we made no spectacular

changes in policy.

I was not deeply involved in the President's consideration of the South Vietnamese affair. I can recall, however, one instance where I received a call from his office early in the morning asking me to prepare, for a meeting to be held shortly, a summary of lessons from the Greek guerrilla war (I had been Coordinator of Greek-Turkish Aid), insofar as it might be applicable to the South Vietnamese-Viet Cong guerrilla war. I produced at this meeting a paper giving some eight or nine points as reasons why we were successful. The President immediately saw the point that our success, to a very considerable extent, depended on the elimination of Yugoslavia as a sanctuary for the guerrillas. He used this as a basis for proving his point, at the meeting, that we faced grave difficulties until Laos could be removed as a sanctuary for the Viet Cong coming into South Vietnam.

Minister Hillenbrand: You were not, I take it then, involved personally in later stages of either of these crises?

Ambassador McGhee: No. In the allocation of responsibilities, I was not.

Minister Hillenbrand: You have indicated that you have something of interest to say on the subject of Yemen. Perhaps you might comment on this.

Ambassador McGhee: I handled the Yemeni affair, as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, during the period of our active interest in seeking a solution. The Department and the President had become concerned over the Yemeni affair, largely because of the introduction of large numbers of UAR troops. We feared that if this build-up continued there might ultimately be war between the UAR troops in the Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, who was supplying the royalist forces. As a consequence,

with the approval of the President, we decided upon a more direct role. We first sent Terry Duce, an ex-oil man who knew this area quite well, to talk with Prince Faisal. Later Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker went out under UN auspices in an attempt to negotiate with Faisal the cessation of Saudi Arabian assistance to the Yemeni royalists. At the same time he sought from Nasser a phased withdrawal of UAR troops. This effort reflected the willingness of the President, as in the Netherlands West New Guinea, to inject American influence and prestige, through high ranking Americans, into direct mediatory roles.

Minister Hillenbrand: Was the President himself physically present at the meetings on this subject in the White House?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes, a few, although this was again a subject which was handled mainly by those of us in the State Department who were concerned.

Minister Hillenbrand: One subject, Mr. Ambassador, which you obviously were in a unique position to observe, was the historic visit of President Kennedy to the Federal Republic of Germany, which took place shortly after your arrival in Bonn in the spring of 1963. Would you care to make some observations about this?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes. I came to Bonn only a month before the visit. I tried, during this period, to visit all of the places he would visit and meet all of the people he would meet. This visit was, in retrospect, an extraordinary success -- probably the most successful of all of his visits. This was, I believe, due in very considerable part to the good relations existing between Germany and America. Germans appreciate what America has done in the post-war era, and the fact that we keep large numbers of troops here as a guarantee of their security. They appreciate the fact that the President himself stood firm when

Berlin was threatened in 1961, and augmented our forces in Germany.

Nevertheless, the success of the visit went beyond what might have been expected, in large part because of the unique affinity which developed during the visit between the President -- his personality -- and the German people, who are essentially an emotional people. The image of the young, handsome President, who spoke in a distinctive intellectual style, who had a ready humor -- a friendliness and yet a certain reserve -- combined to evoke a tremendous response on the part of the people of Germany. Starting from his arrival in Cologne, through his departure from Berlin, the crowds in the streets were in most cases as many as many as could be handled. In Frankfurt, the square in front of the Rathaus was full to capacity. For his major speech in Berlin the Rathaus Square was absolutely full -- containing perhaps 150,000 people. The people, particularly the young people, were insistent on getting a view of the President or shaking his hand or in some way exhibiting to him their admiration and enthusiasm.

His own conduct during the visit was remarkable. He spared himself no hardship. He invariably went out among the crowds and shook hands. He always had a smile and a wave of the hand. He made two major speeches. The first, in Frankfurt at the Paulskirche, was devoted to the American concept of the Europe of the future and of Atlantic partnership. His speech in Berlin contained a denunciation of the Soviet system as exhibited in East Berlin and a strong pledge to the city of continued American support. Because of his forensic improvisations in Berlin -- particularly his repetition of the phrase "Let them come to Berlin" and his use of the term "ich bin ein Berliner" -- the response of the crowd was in excess of any I have ever seen of a mass audience.

The response everywhere was greatest on the part of the young people.

They responded to his dedication to public service -- to his idealism. He became a symbol of the obligation -- and opportunity -- for young people everywhere to support the principles he stood for.

I might say with respect to the President's overall attitude that he started, in my judgment, with some reservations about Germany. He gradually came, however, in my judgment, to place a large degree of reliance on Germany for the accomplishment of his overall European policy. I believe his visit to Germany made a deep impression on the President -- as well as on the German people. I remember, on a later occasion after questions had been raised in the press in Germany as to whether or not we would continue to keep our present level of forces in Germany, that the President gave strong assurance to this effect to Foreign Minister Schröder, who was then visiting in Washington. His assurance that we would keep American troops here as long as they were needed was a stronger statement than we had been able to give up to that point, and we were later able to use this assurance to good effect.

Minister Hillenbrand: You were, of course, in almost constant contact with the President during the course of his visit here and were in a unique position to observe his personal reaction to the crowds and to the various functions which he attended. It would be of interest to hear your comment on his personal reaction in specific instances.

Ambassador McGhee: As usual, the President prepared for his visit very thoroughly. He knew the backgrounds of the people that he was to see. I recall, for example, the dinner he gave at the Embassy Club in Bonn for the Chancellor. Although there were approximately one hundred guests he invariably, when he was introduced to someone, had some word indicating his appreciation of their position. When he met the various publishers, the President indicated to them that he knew

about their papers and the policies they stood for. When he met the various labor leaders, he knew the union they represented or -- for example -- the fact that it was the largest union in Germany.

In his contacts with the people of Germany, I am convinced that there was a genuine response on his part. He enjoyed the adulation of the crowd. He seemed to feel an affinity for the individuals who made up the crowd. When he would step down and shake their hands, it appeared to be a spontaneous gesture. On the other hand he exhibited a certain reserve. He made no effort to pursue the crowd or to be aggressive in seeking their favor. His image was as a handsome, articulate, smiling, but rather reserved young man -- idealistic, yet practical and effective.

Minister Hillenbrand: The visit had, as you say, a lasting effect on the President's thinking on the role of Germany in our European policy. Do you have any observations to make about how the visit might have affected other members of the party who accompanied the President, some of whom were in his immediate entourage at the White House?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes, the Secretary of State was with him, and I believe the visit provided the most intimate contact that he had had with Germany since his coming to office. Mr. McGeorge Bundy, the President's adviser on National Security affairs, was also present. He had an opportunity to meet many high ranking Germans and observe, as did others, the warm response of the Germans to the President and the United States. I believe the effect on the whole party was to demonstrate to them that the Germans are a people on whom we can rely -- people who have a natural inclination to an association with us. The Germans showed themselves as people of spirit, a people who are willing to work hard, a determined people, a very good people to cultivate as an ally.

Minister Hillenbrand: Do you have anything further to say regarding the visit?

Ambassador McGhee: No, one can say a great deal, but I think that is probably the essence of it.

Minister Hillenbrand: You have been discussing, so far, the specific problem areas with which you were concerned and in the course of dealing with which you had contact with the President. Perhaps it might be helpful, in conclusion, if you were to give us some of the general impressions that you received of the President, his personality, his working habits, his methods of arriving at decisions, and so on.

Ambassador McGhee: Well, one could say a great deal about the personal characteristics of the President. One of his most striking attributes, of course, was his extraordinary intellectual qualities. He had an extremely quick and retentive mind. He absorbed facts quickly and always had them available at the appropriate place in a discussion. He did not forget even the most obscure detail. His mental processes were extremely quick. He would reach decisions quickly. He sometimes indicated an impatience with those whose mental processes were slower.

He had, I believe, a tendency to think more in pragmatic and specific rather than in general terms. He was more interested in a solution to a specific problem now, than in a generalization with regard to a variety of problems which might be encountered over a period of time. I recall, in one of my first meetings with the President during the campaign, when I had prepared some position papers for him which I thought he could inject into his foreign policy debate. I had a paper on the concept of the "Community of Free Nations", which is a subject that has always interested me. I explained this concept to him and suggested it would make interesting material for his speeches. Although

polite, he did not really display great interest. He asked me what solution I could suggest to him for the Cuban problem. The campaign debate had centered largely on Cuba, and he was obviously more interested in specific ideas and solutions to this problem than in generalities.

As President it was difficult to get him to consider generalized policy statements. The previous work of the National Security Council in dealing with generalized statements of policy covering long periods of time, or many countries of the world, found little interest on the part of the President and other members of his immediate entourage. The Security Council, of course, did not meet regularly, as it had previously, and its staff was largely dismissed. Responsibility for general policy statements was assigned to the State Department. The interest of the President focused on the solution to the many acute problems and crises that arose. This does not mean that the President was not thinking ahead in anticipation of other crises, but it was hard to get his interest in a general type of discussion.

Minister Hillenbrand: And yet, at the same time, he did use for the first time a number of phrases which have become common language, such as "the grand design" and so on.

Ambassador McGhee: Yes. That is correct. He was interested in broad concepts with intellectual appeal. His "grand design" was such a concept. His use of the word "partnership" in his Philadelphia speech introduced a very useful definition of the relationship we were seeking between Europe and America under the "grand design". In the case of concepts which had been developed under the prior administration, such as the MLF and the Alliance for Progress, the President and his staff contributed greatly in providing intellectual depth and attractiveness



which made them more appealing. Many of his speeches involved attractive intellectual concepts as generalities. He appeared, however, to be chiefly interested in the details of specific critical problems -- how to "make a deal" -- how to get the problem solved.

Minister Hillenbrand: You attended, of course, many meetings in the White House. Would you care to comment on the general way in which he was inclined to conduct meetings. Did he operate as a chairman -- Roberts Rules of Order -- or did he have an informal, less stringent way of conducting meetings?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes. Starting with the period when I was Counselor of the Department, I attended meetings of the National Security Council, although they were held rather infrequently. Later they were largely superseded by ad hoc meetings including the individuals directly concerned. The President did not favor the type of National Security Council meetings previously held, for which a paper had been prepared, everyone had been thoroughly briefed, and everyone made extensive comments. The President's meetings were more informal. Since they were often called on short notice, there was not always an adequate opportunity to prepare a comprehensive paper setting forth the considerations to be discussed. The President presided in an informal way. The discussion was usually spontaneous -- people would state their views as they chose to. The President would occasionally call on someone. When the President thought that he had obtained adequate information to arrive at his decision he would, sometimes rather abruptly, say so and the meeting would be ended. There was no general tendency to discuss subjects exhaustively. The meetings became more a vehicle for giving the President what he needed to fill in the gaps in his own background and thinking, as preparation for his decision.

Minister Hillenbrand: Do you believe that this was, in general, an effective way of arriving at decisions and having those decisions executed by the appropriate departments of government?

Ambassador McGhee: Yes. I would, myself, perhaps have recommended giving a little more attention to the general aspects of foreign policy problems -- to devising, for example, a comprehensive general policy for Latin America, or a general policy for particular countries, which would endure over a period of time. It is true that the large number of crises faced during the President's administration forced him to consider particular situations. In dealing with these situations, the President's approach was a very incisive one. He sought to cut through the verbiage of long papers and the obscurity of long and redundant discussions to get the particular point involved. Quite often this meant how to deal with the individual concerned -- usually a difficult individual such as Sukarno or Tshombe.

The President, in seeking contact with the individual in his vast organization actually dealing with the problem, no matter what his rank was, was able to get closer to the facts than he would have through dealing with intermediate officials who had only a generalized approach to the matter. This often, of course, upset the organization of the Department concerned. People were often eliminated from the decision-making whose broader view could have contributed to a solution. Nevertheless, these methods did enable the President to act with speed and effectiveness in dealing with particular solutions -- in drafting a statement to be made, in sending out an emissary to negotiate, or in taking whatever action was required to make progress with respect to the problem at hand.

Minister Hillenbrand: Having watched the President during the

course of several years, attending meetings and making decisions in the way you have described, did you note any changes in the President's thinking or approach or did the methods which he brought with him into the presidency remain pretty much unchanged throughout the period of your observations?

Ambassador McGhee: No. I think that with experience in working with his staff that his habits became more normal and orderly, and that he relied increasingly on the responsible officials concerned. This didn't mean that when he wanted to get through to the specifics of a problem that he wouldn't get in touch with whomever he wished, and have whomever he wished at his meetings. I think in general, however, that he tended to place increasing reliance on the professional officers and on the regular departmental and inter-departmental machinery.

Minister Hillenbrand: Would you care to comment, again based on your observations, as to which of the principal members of the United States executive played a predominant role in White House decisions.

Ambassador McGhee: It's difficult to generalize about this. The individual on whom the President relied varied with the circumstance. First and foremost, I believe, the President relied on the Secretary of State, and increasingly as they got used to working together. He also had great confidence in Secretary McNamara and placed heavy reliance on him in mixed politico-military matters. He placed a very special reliance on Under Secretary George Ball -- particularly in economic matters generally, Common Market or all-European matters, and matters which involved working out agreements with difficult individuals. He placed great reliance, too, on Mr. McGeorge Bundy, who was more accessible to him and spent more time with him than those of us in the State Department.

Minister Hillenbrand: Before we conclude, are there any further observations you would like to make at this point?

Ambassador McGhee: The President constituted a very powerful force during the period he was in office -- a force felt both in our country and in the world at large. He was assisted in his efforts by the attraction of his youth, personality, and background, but also, and particularly to Europeans, by his intellectual concepts and expressions. He was given credit for being a serious student, a deep thinker, and an accomplished author and phrase-maker. His written and oral expression had a particular style and elegance.

The world was, during his Presidency, in a <sup>evil</sup>parlous state. The President faced many crises, mostly of other people's making. He coped with them in a direct, intelligent and energetic way. He was willing to engage American prestige in their solution.

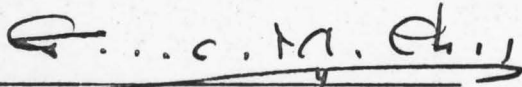
He will be remembered for standing firm in Berlin and for his determined efforts to prevent Communist takeover in Laos and South Vietnam, and to prevent chaos in the Congo. He will be remembered for his successful management of many lesser crises, such as that in West New Guinea and the Dominican Republic. In particular he will be remembered for his courage and masterful handling of the confrontation with the Soviets over offensive missiles in Cuba.

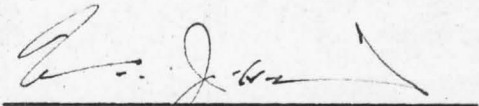
He was not afforded great opportunities to create many new plateaus of major policy. The "grand design" -- his concept of European unity within the framework of an Atlantic partnership probably comes closest to being such a policy. Equally important, perhaps, was his determination to seek a "detente" through limited agreements with the Soviets.

Even though the President was not able, in his lifetime, to achieve a major breakthrough in the struggle between the free world and the

communist world, he was able to cope successfully with the Soviets, managed to keep our relations within manageable proportions, and perhaps laid the foundation for an ultimate understanding.

The Kennedy era will, I believe, leave a deep and lasting impression on world history.

  
George C. McGhee

  
Martin J. Hillenbrand

STRAIGHTENERS PATENT  
MILITARY FIBER USA