

**William B. Ewald Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 7/15/1983**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** William B. Ewald  
**Interviewer:** Sheldon Stern  
**Date of Interview:** July 15, 1983  
**Place of Interview:** The John F. Kennedy Library  
**Length:** 19 pages

**Biographical Note**

Ewald, author, consultant. Special assistant, White House Staff; assistant to the Secretary of the Interior, (1954 - 1961); assistant to Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961-1964), discusses the 1960 presidential campaign and Eisenhower's view on the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed October 24, 1996, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. 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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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**

William B. Ewald, recorded interview by Sheldon Stern, July 15, 1983, (page number),  
John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of  
WILLIAM B. EWALD, Jr.

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, William B. Ewald, Jr., of Greenwich, Connecticut, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of a personal interview conducted on July 15, 1983, in Boston, Massachusetts, and prepared for deposit in the John F. Kennedy Library. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be made available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the John F. Kennedy Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

William B. Ewald, Jr.  
Donor

April 29, 1996  
Date

John W. Paul  
Archivist of the United States

10-24-96  
Date

William B. Ewald

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Dwight D. Eisenhower's views on John F. Kennedy [JFK] pre-1960
3	Kennedy-Nixon debates
5,9	Richard Nixon's 1960 campaign strategies
7	The black vote in the 1960 presidential election
11	Eisenhower's influence during the 1960 campaign
13	Eisenhower and JFK relationship during the Kennedy administration
15	Eisenhower's reaction to the Cuban Missile and Berlin Crises
16	Eisenhower's participation during the test ban treaty
17	Civil rights in the Kennedy administration
18	Eisenhower's feelings toward the Johnson accession

Oral History Interview

with

WILLIAM B. EWALD

July 15, 1983

John F. Kennedy Library

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: Why don't we begin with, is there anything that you might have on Eisenhower's [Dwight D. Eisenhower] assessment of Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] before 1960. It was while Kennedy was still in the Senate particularly, say, in the last four years while it was becoming apparent that he was going to run for President.

EWALD: Well, I think Eisenhower tended to look over the head, more or less, of all the possible nominees. I think he probably felt, coming into 1960, that the Democratic nominee would come out of the Senate. And generally speaking, he'd worked with Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and had known him, and kind of looked toward the Senate establishment-type of politician more than John Kennedy...

STERN: Mm-hmm.

EWALD: ...I think he saw Kennedy as kind of a, non-establishment figure, a man whom he did not know very personally. Certainly had not worked closely with Kennedy as a leader in the Senate, and therefore he was kind of out in the distance. I remember that in the summer of '57 Kennedy made a speech in Algeria. That was, I think, the only instance

that I have ever seen of Eisenhower's singling Kennedy out for any kind of a comment. And he did it in a cabinet meeting. He said he's made these comments about Algeria, about how they ought to be independent of France. He said, "That's fine. Everybody likes independence. We can all make brilliant speeches. But these things are rather difficult problems, and maybe somebody ought to make a speech to remind the senator that they're not so easy." It was a kind of back of the hand thing.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

EWALD: After all, it was not till summer of '60 that you knew Kennedy would in fact be the nominee. And Lyndon Johnson was very powerful coming up there. And Symington [Stuart Symington, II], there were a lot of other people. And Symington, of course, and Eisenhower had known him for years and years going back to pre-Columbia University days. And so Kennedy was kind of on the outside. One other occasion, in November '54, Eisenhower made a speech in Boston to the National Council of Catholic Women in Symphony Hall.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

EWALD: And he made the speech there toward the middle of November, to help Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall] be re-elected in early November. Problem was he was making the speech after the election, but Saltonstall could go out and say "He's coming, he's coming" and that could help Saltonstall. So he agreed to make this speech to Catholic women. Now, at that time John Kennedy was in the hospital with his back operation, and I believe Eisenhower mentioned that we pray for his recovery, something like that.

STERN: Mm-hmm.

EWALD: It's a nice touch in that setting. One other thing. There was a photograph of Eisenhower shot signing a fishing bill, something like that. Kennedy, Saltonstall were there.

STERN: That's right.

EWALD: Kennedy-Saltonstall measure.

STERN: Right.

EWALD: And John Kennedy's standing over the head of Eisenhower looking like a young kid. I'd put him at fifteen years

old, and it was only a few years before, of course, he became the nominee. But once you got into the campaign....

STERN: Okay. You read my next statement. The question was again after the campaign. Once Kennedy was nominated, there were a lot of accounts, for example, of the early reaction of the Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] camp to the acceptance speech in Los Angeles when he'd get nervous...

EWALD: Yeah.

STERN: ...ill at ease. As far as you know, is that accurate? The Nixon people thought that he could take him on in the debate because of that? Was that incident actually accurate as far as you know?

EWALD: Yeah. I think if you go back to July and August, September, early September of '60, there was great euphoria in the Nixon camp, and they thought, this guy would never go anywhere, he's nervous, he's unsure, he's got enemies within his own party. His vice-presidential nominee is there only by virtue of having had his arm twisted. And their feeling was that after the election, Kennedy will lose and you'd never be able even to find him in the United States Senate let alone on the floor, he'd be so burned. And they really felt that Nixon had an overwhelming kind of advantage. And part of the advantage came, of course, from the fact that Nixon did have the great power of the federal apparatus at his disposal to get himself made president. And I don't mean buying votes or that kind of thing. But what I mean is that, for example, if you were going to decide, "What's our foreign policy going to be?" well, you'd turn to the State Department people, at least the Republicans in the State Department. They would come up with position papers and all kinds of things. And I remember one, I guess maybe I mentioned it in the book, one meeting that was held where they had representatives from every department of the government meeting in some huge place. And these were the people who were going to bring you the position papers and be the research backup, all that kind of thing. It was a mob there and sixty, seventy, a hundred people, a large number. And they started cranking out position papers. They were going to put out one a week on major issues, and they pretty well did. They turned out these hundred-page papers and it was a big operation. They really thought this was going to be very effective.

STERN: Right, right.

EWALD: And he rode very high at that particular time, and, of

[ -3 - ]

course, Jim Shepley [James R. Shepley] of the Time-Life organization was supposed to convert all of this grist into presidential or vice-presidential quotes for the campaign trail. And so the wheels were rolling, and they started

out with a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of output.

STERN: Plus, of course, Kennedy and Johnson were stuck in that long session of Congress....

EWALD: That was the other thing. And Nixon was able to be out campaigning. That's right. And the long session didn't help.

STERN: Yeah, not at all. You tend, in your book, to concur with Teddy White's [Theodore H. White] assessment that the first debate was quote "disaster" unquote for Nixon. Do you know as a fact that he felt that personally? Did he agree with that assessment? One thing about, I'd just throw in as a point, was some people who have analyzed that event, I think, made the interesting observation that people who listened on the radio and didn't see it tended to say Nixon won, and people who watched it on television say that Kennedy won. I think that's kind of interesting.

EWALD: I think that's true. In fact, our son had a college friend who did some kind of a study of this. And to tell you the truth, we watched it on television and I thought Nixon came out well. But I was, you know, just not seeing what was there. I was looking for debating points and I thought Nixon handled himself better on debating which would be the thing you'd get over the radio. Kennedy messed up some answers and Nixon came in and supplied them. But that didn't count. What counted was the visual picture, and apparently the paint in the studio, the studio walls, blended in with Nixon's suit.

STERN: That's true.

EWALD: And I was surprised the day after, talking to people who said it was a disaster, and I think generally speaking, most people did. I don't know what Nixon himself thought or Eisenhower.

STERN: Well that's a point it hadn't occurred to me to ask. Do you know whether Eisenhower watched the....

EWALD: Well, Eisenhower watched the debates...

STERN: Mm hmm.

[-4-]

EWALD: ...but I don't know that he really thought the first one was a disaster. I think he felt Nixon might do certain things differently in the way he answered. I think everybody said he was too nice to Kennedy in the first....



STERN: Too defensive.

EWALD: Too defensive and too agreeing. And they said, “The next time, you’ve got to punch him in the nose.” So the next time, no matter what Kennedy said, here comes Nixon going to punch him in the nose, and he did punch him in the nose. Everybody said that, and I think Eisenhower said that. One of the debates Eisenhower watched with Prime Minister Diefenbaker [John G. Diefenbaker]...

STERN: Oh really?

EWALD: ...and they agreed that, I think, Nixon did not come off terribly well. I can’t remember which one of the debates it was.

STERN: Mm-hmm. That’s very interesting. Once you joined the actual staff late in October, to what degree was it a problem for the Nixon campaign to worry about the religious question? It must have been as soon, a kind of difficult thing on your side because of the, and obviously he didn’t want to exploit it; on the other hand, it could be beneficial and....

EWALD: Well, I think they felt.... You know, the feeling was pretty bitter in that campaign, and I think they felt the other side was exploiting it in reverse. And so they said, “Why should we sit here and take it?” And there were people – and they weren’t all these beady-eyed politicians either; some of them were high-minded people – who said we should exploit the religious issue. And they had all kinds of plans for doing so and speeches that could be made and so on. In the end he never did. But there was a lot of talk like this and I would say that it was more talk than anything else. And I don’t really recall that there was ever.... It was like the health issue, should you exploit it or not? And there was plenty of talk about how that could be exploited and they had doctors, panels of doctors testifying, this kind of thing. And basically, you hear a lot of crazy suggestions. There was one guy who said, “The thing we ought to exploit is the gold outflow.” And remember that was a problem in the fall in ’60 about the balance of payment, saying that gold was actually being drained off. There was one man, and

[-5-]

I do not know who he was, who spent the whole time in Geneva trying to trace whether Joe Kennedy himself was masterminding the gold outflow from the United States in order to get Jack elected. And all I can remember, this guy almost caused a gold outflow himself because he sent in an enormous expense account paying for his time in Geneva. He was over there, literally, cabling in stuff he’d found and he didn’t find anything. And it was a stupid thing to do. But on the other hand, you cannot stop enthusiasts from doing stupid things in campaigns and this was one of them. So we get a lot of nutty stuff.

STERN: What about the fifty-state pledge? What was the general feeling among the campaign people, that that is a good idea, bad idea? You feel locked in to it?

EWALD: Well, they thought it was a great idea until Nixon banged his shin in Carolina and had to change his schedule. He wouldn't cancel that trip to Alaska and the trip to somewhere else.

STERN: Although ultimately he could go back to Alaska.

EWALD: Ultimately he went to all fifty states and a lot of people said that cost him the election, too, because I think they felt that the fifty-state pledge was a typical Nixon stunt, you know [imitating Nixon], "This campaign's going to begin tonight, right here," right after he finished speaking after the nomination. And, "Nobody in history has ever visited all fifty states. I will visit all fifty," handing out headline stuff, but it was good stuff. And I think they felt fifty states were a good idea until they found out what kind of a damper that was putting on the closing days and weeks of the campaign because he found himself blocked up against a commitment. They said, "Go to Illinois and spend your time in Illinois. Take Eisenhower to Illinois and turn Illinois and you'll win the election." And he said, "No. I've got to go to Alaska." And so he had to fly all the way up there and he stayed up all night. I didn't go on the Alaska trip. I was in Los Angeles. He went from, I remember, Los Angeles to Alaska to Detroit and back to Los Angeles. And there was not a vote in Illinois gained on that trip, and a lot of time was chewed up. The other thing about the fifty-state pledge was the snowstorm in Casper, Wyoming where they brought this 707 in, and in the snowstorm we're all sitting there, and I describe this in the book in some detail: Nixon in front, the staff in first class and the press back in the rest of the plane. And you find you're coming down through the snowstorm. That's fine. Then all of a sudden the 707 is heading up again. And something's wrong, and it

[-6-]

turns out they couldn't land in the snowstorm. And at this point the reporters began to cuss, blaspheme, carry on because they said he's endangering their lives simply in order to fulfill his fifty-state pledge.

STERN: What about some of the ideas? I mean, in an election that was so close, that was for all intents and purposes a tie in terms of the popular vote, any one thing could have tipped it the other way. And there were so many if's, so many possibilities that could have been that one thing. I wonder, for example, about some of these ideas such as the proposal to tour eastern Europe or to send Eisenhower to eastern Europe. You think that might have been a bit much?

EWALD: Well, of course he did make those proposals.

STERN: But then he changed them, in a way, by adding Hoover [Herbert Hoover] and Truman [Harry S. Truman].

EWALD: Well, I really don't know how all that came about. I know that I came aboard and I thought that the idea of a trip to eastern Europe sounded like a pretty good idea. And it also, I thought, was useful because, quite obviously, we had a very, very strong ethnic vote in Chicago and Milwaukee, a lot of places. And you had the communist issue. And all of it kind of crystallized. And so I thought it was a good idea and did up a thing, and he used it in Muskegon, Michigan. He announced that he was going to go to eastern Europe. But meanwhile, which I didn't know, there was a separate project, and they had this plan to send all three presidents. And it kept changing around in different ways, and finally it ended up with Nixon's announcing that all three ex-Presidents were going and this was supposed to raise the roof, only it didn't do much of anything. And nobody thought much of it, including Eisenhower, Truman and Hoover. Eisenhower thought he'd been double-crossed. He wasn't gonna be a participant in this kind of thing. And Truman said it was a cheap political stunt, and Hoover said he didn't understand it. "But you say it and I'll do it," he said, [laughter], something like that and hung up the phone. Nonetheless, I think probably Nixon did pretty well in those areas anyway because he had had that very successful trip to Poland in the summer of '59.

STERN: That's right.

EWALD: It was a very moving thing.

STERN: What about the whole civil rights thing and then the

[-7-]

decision on Martin Luther King. Of course this could be debated forever. Do you think there is anything he could have done that might have...I mean, one could certainly argue that the margin of Kennedy's victory were the black votes that came in as a result of that call to King's widow.

EWALD: Not really. Not yet. His wife.

STERN: Yeah.

EWALD: Well, I think there was nothing that they could have done without grandstanding, which was done on the other side. I'll just use that in a not necessarily pejorative fashion. It was a very smart, adroit political stunt which was very clever and good. Nixon, I'm sure, was walking a tightrope. He wanted to hold the South. He wanted to hold the conservative middle. He wanted to do well on civil rights. But there were limits on how far he could go. Kennedy went beyond the limit and Nixon couldn't. Well, I don't know what would have happened if Nixon had said, "I, too, will make a phone call" or something like that. It might have hurt him among the people

who ended up voting for him on the conservative side. So it's a toss up.

STERN: Right.

EWALD: It was discussed and there was great indignation that he shouldn't interfere in the judicial process.

STERN: Yeah. What about, though, that little flak with the vice-presidential nominee, Ambassador Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge], saying that he wanted to have a black in the Cabinet.

EWALD: Well, the struck that out. Lodge was off on his own. As far as I understand it, we didn't see Lodge very much in the campaign. He was out campaigning, and they would come together at times and he would talk with Nixon and he'd go off by himself. Well, Lodge, you know, was a very strong civil rights activist and was...

STERN: Yeah.

EWALD: ...and always had been. And I'm sure that he thought this would win Nixon a lot of votes with a black in the cabinet. And I think Nixon's more conservative advisors said it'd kill him in the South.

[-8-]

STERN: I suppose I can assure you now there was a lot of disagreement even in the Kennedy camp over making that call. Some of his closest advisors said, "Don't do it."

EWALD: Oh, sure. They're counting trade-off's.

STERN: Sure. I was absolutely fascinated in your book with the description of the so-called Mission-Liberty idea, and the fact that you wrote it up and that it went through and finally got approval from Fred Seaton [Frederick A. Seaton] and Bryce Harlow and then "the rest is silence", to use your words. Did you ever find out what happened? Or why?

EWALD: I never found out and I don't think I'm going to find out from Mr. Nixon. I tried to interview Mr. Nixon for this book and over a long period of time, and for one reason or another, I didn't. But I would imagine, I do not know, he'd feel that the book is hostile. So I don't know and not only that, I doubt very much that he knows to this day what happened. I'll bet you if you go through Nixon's papers you will find a draft of Mission-Liberty somewhere, and it's probably sitting there in the 1960 campaign files.

STERN:                Yeah.

EWALD:                But he had a funny way of working. He really kind of stuck to his own talks and his own yellow pad and things he wanted to say, and he was really oblivious to what was going on around him. We could have put that thing out as a position paper which, you know, if he'd signed off on it, but he was very difficult to get to. Did I put in there in the book about the natural resources position paper?

STERN:                I don't think so.

EWALD:                Well, this was one of the things, one of the great position papers that were churned up by the organization which started way back in the late summer, and were supposed to come out a week at a time. And we got down toward the end of the campaign and there had not been a position paper on natural resources put out by Vice-President Nixon's people. Well, we had the document. It was about 150, 200 pages that had been worked up very carefully in the government, Department of the Interior, other departments. And it was thoroughly staffed out and thoroughly reliable. So it was on the campaign train. The Secretary of the Interior, Fred Seaton, was by that time really operating as the campaign manager; he hadn't read it, hadn't seen it, but he believed and trusted the people

[ -9 - ]

who had. Nixon hadn't. He'd known about it. Well, the time came. We had only a few days left in the campaign. We hadn't said anything about natural resources. There was no more time. Nixon had no more time. Seaton had no more time. I was the only person on the train who'd read it and I didn't understand all of it, but I knew the people who did. You know, I think it was fair. It was rather technical in some respects – what we would do about gold mining in Alaska. So anyway, they said, "It's time to put this thing out." And Fred said, "Do you agree with this document? [Laughter] I said, "As far as I understand it, I agree with it." And he said, "Ok, we'll put it out. It's the vice-president's position on natural resources." Nixon hadn't seen it. And Fred said, "Don't you dare harm one hair on the head of one duck." [Laughter] And so we put it out and it was good as gold. I mean it was a good piece of work, but it just shows how policies were made in those circumstances. And, of course, nobody cares when we lost the election.

STERN:                It suggests that maybe your method of campaigning could be improved which is something we won't talk about. On some of the...I was struck in your book when you mentioned that you returned to Washington for a weekend and then you got back on the plane on October 31<sup>st</sup>, and that you felt that the campaign lacked definition. You didn't know where you were going, that it was very chaotic, and that you thought that Nixon was reacting too much, that he was unsure.

EWALD: Right. No question. We got on the plane on October 31<sup>st</sup>. We didn't know where we were going. Got up in the sky before they decided which way to point the plane. Then I think we went to New Jersey. We didn't know, and we didn't care. We were really crazy because you're up there and you're in this container flying around. And people have been alerted, and there may be a crowd waiting up at Newark and there may be a crowd down in Norfolk, and you keep going. And you're very much out of touch. Kennedy'd be up in Boston blasting the candidate on some issue, and you don't have any inkling until you get it down on the ground. Then you get a newspaper; that's old news, by the way. You have a very hard time. You have two fighters in the ring, it's almost like being in two different rings, flying. It's really a strain. But certainly with the Nixon campaign in those last days, it was really pretty helter-skelter.

STERN: What about....

EWALD: Yeah. And he was reacting to the Kennedy attack insofar as you got it out of the papers, with "America is not standing still. You're not going to win the

[-10-]

election with that thing. He kept saying it over and over.

STERN: Too negative.

EWALD: Too negative. Sure. Who's going to go out and vote for something that's not been standing still? I mean it does not rouse you. And that was the fix that he got into.

STERN: What about, I mean, I know you deal with this in...

EWALD: Right.

STERN: ...I think terrific chapter about Eisenhower's ambivalence to the campaign in 1960. But I've always felt that in many ways the ambivalence was more Nixon's and I think maybe, you can stop me if you think I'm wrong, but I think one of the problems is his independence of this campaign was exactly that. He was determined that he could do it on his own. He was determined to do it without the shadow of Eisenhower, to show that he could win on his own. Otherwise, I don't see why he wouldn't utilize Eisenhower more fully until the end when it apparently made a tremendous difference.

EWALD: Oh, I think that's absolutely right. It gets back to the thing we were talking about at the very beginning. There's great feeling of strength and confidence. Now, at last he was liberated and he had all this enormous, all these powers around him to work with and he, Richard Nixon, was going to do

it by himself. And Dwight Eisenhower was only a problem that gave Kennedy something to attack. And really, I'm sure he was restive under it, going back to the Checkers speech, and the whole business all the way through. His relationship with Eisenhower was never a really easy relationship...

STERN:                Yeah.

EWALD:                ...and he, I'm sure, felt in fact, "I wonder what he thinks about me. Does he like me? Does he not?" And, "Will he invite me to his house or will he not?" and so on, and "Does he like somebody better than he likes me?", all that kind of thing. And he looked forward to cutting out, cutting loose, and "I'll win the election without any trouble." And finally, at the very end they realize that you need to pull out the biggest gun you had and they could have used him throughout the campaign. Now, Eisenhower did a lot of speaking in that fall...

[-11-]

STERN:                Right.

EWALD:                ...and he called them non-political speeches. And he'd go do different things, different places. And they were not campaign speeches and the Republican National Committee did not pay for them. But they were selected and audiences in selected places where what he had to say would certainly help Nixon. But that's not the same thing as campaigning.

STERN:                Mm-hmm. Did you feel that, I know at one point there was claim that, Nixon claimed that Mrs. Eisenhower [Mamie Doud Eisenhower] and Dr. Howard Snyder, I think it was...

EWALD:                Yeah.

STERN:                ...and both made a plea that his health was, not to over-utilize the President. Did you feel that that was, did you ever see any evidence of that actually happening?

EWALD:                At the time?

STERN:                Yeah.

EWALD:                No. No. I didn't see any evidence at the time but I know there were just enough people who reported on this episode to know that it did happen.

STERN:                Mm-hmm.

[End of side one]

EWALD: ...he was all set to go. And it was a very disastrous luncheon they had there. He really wanted to be asked, and Nixon didn't ask him, and told him he didn't want him to do any more.

STERN: They were saying something about the possibility of using the health issue. I gather Eisenhower was very distressed about that.

EWALD: Oh, yeah. No part, no part in that lousy political stunt. And Haggerty [James C. Haggerty] too. I think they all rejected it, despite people like Dr. Walter Judd of Minnesota, the keynoter at the convention, a very good speaker and very intelligent man, long in knowledge of China policy and all that. Yeah, he could have used the health issue. There was a team of

[-12-]

doctors to point out what's wrong with Kennedy, but they dropped that, bad politics.

STERN: What about once the election was over? What was your perception of the relationship between Eisenhower and Kennedy during the transition period?

EWALD: Well, I didn't see very much personally. I think once the election ended, Eisenhower, no question, was disappointed and hurt, and he said that it was as if someone hit him in the solar plexus with a baseball bat. But then he kind of picked himself up and decided that they could make this changeover as good and as right as they could, and they were going to do it the right way, get the incoming people briefed and let them get their feet on board and so on. Now, as I understand it, there was a movement, I guess, kind of on Kennedy's side, that after the election ended, we were now in a period of transition where you go looking to kind of ease in. And Eisenhower's people, and Eisenhower himself took the position, no, there'd be a turnover, high noon, January 20<sup>th</sup>, when it's theirs. Up to that moment, it's ours. We've got it. We'll cooperate with them, brief them and so on, but there's no question about who has the responsibility and who's in charge and who's president and all that to the end of his term. And I think they ended up fussing over that. And I think beyond that they really did try to see that the incoming people had as much help as possible. Of course this got them into the Bay of Pigs thing where the Kennedy people said, "Well, they gave us a lot of help. They gave us this awful invasion plan." But generally speaking all the departments that I knew anything about made....I know Seaton, for example, had Stewart Udall and his people in, and he wanted everything in the department cleaned up, no mousetraps left around. And this sometimes happens in these transitions. I'm told, back in the days when Eisenhower came into power and Douglas McKay came in as secretary of the Interior, he was not the world's greatest, but going through the files, they found one awful problem with a note scribbled on it, "Don't do anything about this. Leave this for the new guys," or something like that. It



was just some terrible problem that they were consciously dragging their feet on in order to give a hot potato to the incoming people.

STERN:                Yeah.

EWALD:                So, as far as I know, they really tried to have a good turnover.

STERN:                Yeah. The Kennedy people generally felt they were very

[-13-]

cooperative.

EWALD:                Yeah. And I think people like Goodpaster [Andrew J. Goodpaster] in the White House, and the president himself had Kennedy in for at least two briefings in the White House. They got along very well. And I think one thing, though, they really wanted to make sure when they went out the door, there was a sharp clean break. I mentioned all the papers: they took everything with them, just as the Truman people had taken everything.

STERN:                What about Eisenhower's reaction to the major Kennedy appointees? Did he have any very strong feelings about any of, say Dean Rusk or Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] as attorney general or....

EWALD:                Yeah. Didn't I quote that letter in there that he wrote calling them "a menagerie?"

STERN:                Yes. You did.

EWALD:                Yeah. Well, but that didn't include all of them. He didn't name them all, but he was livid.

STERN:                Was he mad at Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon] for staying in the administration?

EWALD:                Yeah. He did not want Dillon to, and he told him so. I think, basically, at first, he thought it'd be a good idea to put Dillon in there running Treasury and that would keep things on an even keel, keep the dollar from evaporating, that type of thing which they were concerned with. But then, I think he felt, as time went on, that really Dillon would have to become part of the new administration, and it was better just simply to make the break clean and tell him not to do it. By this time, I think, Dillon had decided. Anyway, he did take it.

STERN: Mm. What about the general subject of the Kennedy-Eisenhower relationship during the Kennedy Administration. You know, for example, there were a number of fairly long telephone calls. Did you ever talk with the president about his assessment of his successor while his successor was still in office?

EWALD: Yeah. He had a clear thing about the presidency. That is, this man is president, he's going to support him and help him and he's to lead. And Eisenhower was a

[-14-]

leader and I think he expected the same of other people. When Kennedy became the leader, he couldn't care who it was, he's going to support him, especially on foreign policy, national security policy. And he pledged that to Kennedy. He told him, "I will not criticize you on international issues," in other words, will not help to present a divided front. And as far as I knew, he really kept to that. Now he obviously had a great deal of bitterness and resentment at the Kennedy attacks on him, on his record, his performance. And there was a great deal of visceral dislike. For example, President Ayub [Mohammed Ayub Khan] of Pakistan came to visit Washington. And the Kennedys had an enormous party on the lawn at Mt. Vernon with bands and dances and fireworks and so on, for Ayub. And Eisenhower liked Ayub, and John liked him and a lot of people liked him. He was on our side. But he was a tough guy. He was the kind of guy you could imagine driving splinters under the fingernails of people he didn't like. And he was a mean hombre. Well, anyway, here comes Ayub as the great George Washington of Pakistan, and they take George Washington's home and turn it into a jamboree. Well, Eisenhower's disgusted. "What a sacrilege" and "These God-damned people" and carrying on. And then all of it would just end, just like that. He'd laugh, and say, "Well, I can't get angry, the doctor's orders."

STERN: What about some of the major credit....

EWALD: That was just the kind of temper that he really kept pretty well in check. And anything that President Kennedy asked him to do, he would do. All through the Cuban missile crisis, almost hour by hour, certainly day by day, he was briefed. And people were on the phone to him, talking to him, telling him what was happening. And it was hand-in-glove all the way through that.

STERN: How did he react to that whole, did he think it was well handled?

EWALD: Well, let me say I didn't hear him say one way or the other. I remember we were out in Gettysburg, in the editorial session. And we were working on the galleys or something. And the phone would ring, and he'd leave. And he'd come back and say, "Boy, that was good news!" It was almost as though he'd been informed, you know, but no, he's not second-guessing from that distance. I think he appreciated being informed. I think he felt responsibility at that point. He had

absolutely to stand behind the president.

STERN: Did he have, that quote in the book about, at one

[-15-]

point he said later on, I think it was after Kennedy's death that if he had been president, Eisenhower, he would have knocked down the Berlin Wall, for example. Do you know if he reacted that way in the summer of '61? He was very angry when it was put up?

EWALD: I don't know. I did not hear him say that at the time. I know Lucius Clay came up and talked to him. You know, Clay, they sent over there...

STERN: Right.

EWALD: ...and Clay talked to him and they agreed. No. He may have said it. And, you know, it's an easy thing to say afterwards. I think he felt that he had a kind of a pact with Kennedy not to talk foreign policy and not to make it an issue. In the '62 campaign, somewhere along the line, something got off the rails. And Kennedy made a speech or part of a speech, talking about how great his record was on foreign policy against Eisenhower's. And this infuriated Eisenhower and stirred him to action. And he went up to Harrisburg and he made a blistering attack on the Kennedy record. And then he said, "I think we ought to stop this. And I won't say anymore, and I don't think you should say anymore." I tell you neither side said any more. Then they just cooled afterwards. No. He really wanted to keep it out of the debate, but if it got into a debate, he had all these feelings. And in that Harrisburg thing he talked about the invasion, the Bay of Pigs. And he talked about "No walls were built, no people were sold down the river," that kind of thing. So he had a lot of visceral reservations about the policy, but he was not going to open his mouth.

STERN: Do you know whether he was consulted during the negotiations on the test ban treaty in '63?

EWALD: Yes. This was interesting because he was consulted and it was obvious that Kennedy really needed him, wanted his backing on it. And Eisenhower, obviously, in '63, with Republicans trying to find anything that they could that was anti-Kennedy, and coming into the '64 campaign, a real rough campaign, probably Barry Goldwater on one side and John Kennedy on the other belting each other around the country for six months. But he had advice on both sides of that issue. And I remember the luncheon at the farm where he sat at the head of the table. He had Lewis Strauss on one side and Lewis Strauss was very, very conservative, you know, atomic energy chairman, on one side, and he had Milton Eisenhower sitting down at this end, and I was here, and Brownell [Herbert Brownell, Jr.] was up there.

[-16-]

And they were simply talking about this treaty, whether Eisenhower should or should not endorse it. And Strauss was absolutely adamant against it. He said, "Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] has been fooled by the Russians any number of times" and he just shouldn't do it, and it was wrong and so on. And Brownell was typically like a lawyer. He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I think when I see the fine print" and "We have to read it very carefully." You know, he was not an expert in this field. He was a trained, very shrewd lawyer looking at all the political ramifications. Milton speaks out, and he said, "Well, I can see all have problems with it, but I think the world has waited so long for some kind of slowdown or cessation or pullback or something on this that I think people will just be aching for something, and I think that all things considered, that you should endorse it." And Eisenhower said, "I agree with Milton." Just like that. Then, of course, he cussed Harriman out. He said, "The only thing wrong with the treaty is that Averell Harriman designed it." And he understood Strauss' objections and all that. But basically it was one of those things where there was no compromising, and it didn't take him long; he did endorse it.

STERN: Yes. I remember.

EWALD: And it was a great help to Kennedy.

STERN: What about Eisen-....That is, almost the last question on civil rights. Did he feel that the Kennedy administration was generally supportive of the landmark ? civil rights? Did he back up....Did he support the submission of the Civil Rights Bill in June of '63? As you said earlier today, a lot of the things in the bill were actually things that came out in the '50's.

EWALD: You know, to tell you the truth, I have forgotten what his position was on it and I just do not know...

STERN: Okay.

EWALD: ...and so, I'm sure it's very easy to find out. And I'm sure....I'll tell you. I think he felt that they'd played a lot of politics with it. And again, it was not just the merits of the legislation. It was also who stood behind it, and he was quite resentful. You see, in Little Rock he had been attacked for sending in the troops. And then other people attacked him for kind of shilly-shallying around and not being decisive. And you know, when you had people who were really wounded and hurt at Oxford [Oxford, Mississippi], he felt "What do they think now? It was bitterness at the attack on him, that

[-17-]

ran through. So they played a lot of politics with civil rights.

STERN: Okay. Last question. Just curious in terms of Eisenhower as a person. How did he respond to the assassination, and the accession of Johnson? Did he feel positive toward Johnson? And how generally did he react simply to having a president killed.

EWALD: I wasn't in Gettysburg with him at that time. I've forgotten, this was November. I've forgotten where he was. I was in Washington. I remember exactly, somebody called me and said, "You ought to call President Eisenhower and tell him President Kennedy's been shot." By the time we got it together, he'd heard. My feeling is that obviously it was a great shock and well, just sadness and, you know, revulsion, that kind of thing everybody feels. I do think, however, that when Johnson came in he felt that he basically was unsympathetic to the Kennedy crowd and to the Kennedy administration in general, just politically. And I think he felt, when Johnson came in, that here was a man he knew, he'd worked with more closely. Remember Johnson, Kennedy debated whether or not Eisenhower should apologize to Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev] about the U2. And Johnson supported Eisenhower and Kennedy didn't. It's that kind of thing where Eisenhower, despite the fact he didn't trust Johnson completely, he really felt that "Here's a man I have worked with and who has some respect for me, who's been nice to me, at least has not been as bold in his attacks," and that's true with Johnson, I think, and who said nice things about him and vice versa. So I think he saw Johnson's coming into the White House as an opportunity, for example, for some changes. And Johnson, you know, called him down there...

STERN: Yes.

EWALD: ...and set him up over in the Executive Office Building and told him to write down in a memorandum what he would recommend on organizing the government. And Eisenhower did that for national security. Johnson didn't do it. But that didn't matter. And Johnson courted Eisenhower very assiduous-, more than Kennedy, very assiduously during his presidency. He would have him down for special occasions and really made a point of maintaining that good relationship.

STERN: Okay. Unless you have anything to add?

EWALD: No.

STERN: Okay.

[-18-]

EWALD: Okay.

[-19-]

William B. Ewald Oral History Transcript – JFK #1  
Name List

**A**

Ayub Khan, Mohammad 15

**B**

Brownell, Herbert, Jr. 16,17

**C**

Clay, Lucius D., Sr. 16

**D**

Diefenbaker, John G. 5  
Dillon, C. Douglas 14

**E**

Eisenhower, Dwight D. 1,2,4-7,11-18  
Eisenhower, Mamie Doud 12  
Eisenhower, Milton S. 16,17

**G**

Goldwater, Barry M. 16  
Goodpaster, Andrew J. 14

**H**

Haggerty, James C. 12  
Harlow, Bryce N. 9  
Harriman, William Averell 17  
Hoover, Herbert 7

**J**

Johnson, Lyndon B. 1,2,4,18  
Judd, Walter H. 12

**K**

Kennedy, John F. 1-6,8-11,13-18  
Kennedy, Joseph P., Sr. 6  
Kennedy, Robert F. 14  
King, Martin Luther, Jr. 8

**L**

Lodge, Henry Cabot 8

**M**

McKay, J. Douglas 13

**N**

Nixon, Richard M. 3-12

**R**

Rusk, Dean 14

**S**

Saltonstall, Leverett 2  
Seaton, Frederick A. 9,10,13  
Shepley, James R. 4  
Snyder, Howard McC. 12  
Strauss, Lewis L. (Adm.) 16,17  
Symington, Stuart, II 2

**T**

Truman, Harry S. 7,14

**U**

Udall, Stewart L. 13

**W**

Washington, George 15  
White, Theodore H. 4