

Joseph S. Farland Oral History Interview –JFK#2, 9/30/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Farland (1914 - 2007), United States Ambassador to Panama (1960 - 1963), discusses the Bay of Pigs controversy and Panama's involvement, the Panama Canal treaty, and JFK's visit to Costa Rica for the San Jose meeting, among other issues.

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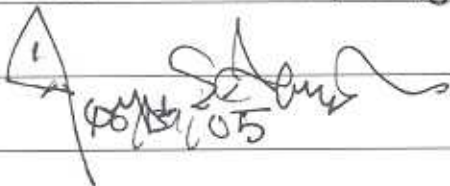
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Second Oral History Interview

with

JOSEPH S. FARLAND

September 30, 1970
Washington, D.C.

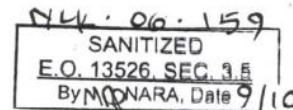
By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Let me ask you, Mr. Ambassador, to cast your mind back to the early days of the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] regime and back to the question of the Bay of Pigs situation. You were in Panama at the time, and in your earlier interview you mentioned that in your capacity as ambassador to Panama you were able to know certain things by hearsay because of that position. For instance, you mentioned that you learned that Castro [Fidel Castro] may have been in the number two tank in the estuary and that sort of thing. I have several questions. What or whom were your sources of information, and how reliable did you consider them at the time? How was it that you became privy to this hearsay information?

FARLAND: Well, this information is of the utmost secrecy...

MOSS: Right.



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FARLAND: ...and I don't think it's divulgement at this time would be appropriate.

MOSS: This at least pinpoints the type of information.

FARLAND: The information that I had was hearsay, but it was also some personal observation. I was involved after the fact.

MOSS: Right. In the review?

FARLAND: No, not in the review, in.... Well, I can't go any further.

MOSS: All right. Fine. I mean, it's understood. In these interviews we do some interviewing that is in a very highly sensitive area, getting over to CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], for instance, and that sort of thing. We try to keep as much as we can. Do you remember anything else about that event which would be useful to future historians in trying to tie the threads together on exactly what happened and why?

FARLAND: Well, while going over that transcript just now, I noticed it's recorded my conversation with Foreign Minister Galileo Solis. In that conversation he very clearly set forth the apprehension which Panama had as a result of this...

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MOSS: Yes.

FARLAND: ...and the apprehension of other countries in Latin America.

MOSS: Right. You expressed it in terms of the United States having set up a kind of Yalu River beyond which we would not go; in other words, giving a de facto recognition to the Cuban situation, to Castro, and the communist presence there. To what extent were they very much afraid that this was an endorsement of Castroite revolutionary activity throughout Latin America – the exporting of the revolution?

FARLAND: I don't know about the word endorsement, but they felt that inasmuch as there was a sanctuary established, and that sanctuary would be used for the purpose of training infiltrators, their position was in jeopardy.

MOSS: Right.

FARLAND: I might add one little story that I don't think was in the former transcript.

MOSS: Yes.

FARLAND: A newspaper report indicated that a plane bearing a Panamanian flag on its tail and a fictitious number landed in Miami at the time of the Bay of Pigs.

MOSS: Yes.

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FARLAND: I received a note from the foreign office asking for a discussion and for an explanation, which had been received in the form of a note. Before I could note the terms, I went over to the foreign office to see Galileo. In the course of that conversation, he and I being very good personal friends, I said, "Galileo, look, I don't know whether there was such a plane as was described. I don't know whether the story is true, that when the reporter went back they tried to get them to paint it out and the number also painted out. But I do know that the concern of mine is very much on all fours when it comes to the problem of communism in Latin America and elsewhere." And I said, "You're doing your bit to fight it; we're doing our bit. Let's assume that that plane was there, a plane being used by the CIA on this particular mission. If I answer your note, this is going to be a permanent record for all time for the world to see, and our cause is not going to be enhanced. I'm going to ask you as a personal friend, Galileo, to withdraw your note and remove

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the necessity of my embassy an answer." He said, "Joe, I was forced by a man in my department to send this note, but after hearing what you've said, "I'd appreciate very much if you'd hand it back to me now." That ended that incident.

MOSS: Okay. You didn't, of course, pursue the question of his being forced. I wondered when you used that term forced by somebody in his department.

FARLAND: There was in his department a nephew of the president, whose leanings were not necessarily.... [Interruption]

MOSS: Okay. Let me pursue this business of the communist beachhead, if you will, in Cuba, and its effect on the rest of Latin America. You had during this period, of course, an unstable situation in Brazil. And, there was here in Washington, a new interest in things like counterinsurgency, special forces, and that kind of thing, a renewed interest in providing assistance to Latin American countries under AID [Agency for International Development], in the form of help to internal security forces and this kind of thing. Now, you had there in Panama the jungle warfare school; right? Now, to what extent did you, as ambassador, have control over what was going on here?

FARLAND: In the jungle warfare school?

[-5-]

MOSS: Yeah. And what was your view of this as a training ground, perhaps, for Latin American internal security Cadres?

FARLAND: Oh, I had nothing whatsoever to do with the jungle training. This was strictly a military operation.

MOSS: Under CINCARIB or [commander-in-chief, Caribbean] under the government?

FARLAND: Under CINCARIB. My contribution to this particular effort was the giving birth, my idea was the Inter-American Police Academy.

MOSS: Right.

FARLAND: I'm the pappy of that one. The genesis of that was when I was in Quantico, I saw training for the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. I was in a military installment, and facilities were such that it was conducive to or it facilitated the training of these agents. Well, in the zone was a duplication of that, with a great number of empty buildings and unused facilities.

Realizing that there was little or no communication between countries – there was very little communication even within the countries between cities; Interpol [International criminal police organization] was having a hell of a time trying to make communication – and realizing that if you could bring these men together from the various countries, an esprit de corps would develop

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which I thought would be most helpful. So I suggested this. The idea went onto a shelf for a long time. I forget precisely the reason, but Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] was looking for something to use as an instrument, this came off the shelf, and the Inter-American Police Academy was born.

MOSS: Did he talk to you about this personally?

FARLAND: No.

MOSS: No. Okay. Let me ask you this because it raises one or two rather touchy questions, I think. To what extent does this get beyond AID, and to what extent does it amount to a kind of meddling in the internal affairs of other countries? You get people like Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith] for

instance, in his book, The Ambassador; talking about the Latin American – U.S. military brotherhood and this creating a kind of climate in which certain ideas are pushed, as opposed to others, in the internal affairs of South American countries, to the effect that the United States, is, in effect, influencing what is going on internally. How does this general thesis strike you?

FARLAND: Well, Ambassador Galbraith does not believe that an ambassador exerts influence within a country. I'm not exactly sure what the ambassador's duties really are. If he does not, he may

[-7-]

as well stay here in Washington. There's a difference between meddling in and influencing. Now, referring specifically to this military alliance, I think the United States has been accused of that far beyond any justification in fact. My own record in Trujillo, I think, when the record is fully judged, will indicate that the United States was not supporting Trujillo [Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina]. And you will recall in previous testimony that Trujillo attempted to assassinate me and my family the last day.

This national, or Inter-American Police Academy is in no way interfering or mucking around in the internal affairs of the country. The idea is just the opposite. And when I conceived of this, I came back and had a long talk with J. Edgar Hoover. He firmly supported the idea – and he put this condition on it – if, as he said, “Joe, you can keep the military from getting their hands on this.” That was his caveat to it. And I might add, the military, our own, tried desperately to take this unto itself, and I fought just as bitterly to keep it from them.

[-8-]

MOSS: Did you have any problem in Panama with the existence of the jungle warfare school from the Panamanians?

FARLAND: No, I think the only real difficulty I had was the one time the Pentagon announced it was going to try out some particular equipment and utilize a certain section of the Darien for the purpose of the testing ground and had invited some observers from our allied countries, without ever asking the Panamians if it would be convenient. And I had to take my hat in hand and go over and see my friend Galileo.

MOSS: Yes.

FARLAND: But outside of that, the jungle warfare school never caused me any grief.

MOSS: Right. What about the question of military assistance advisory crew in Panama? You had authority as ambassador, as chief of mission – Bowles-Kennedy [Chester B. Bowles] letter giving you blanket authority over everything. Did this really work for you?

FARLAND: In the other transcript you note that I said that the embassy of Panama had grown Topsy-like and was a most unusual embassy...

[-9-]

MOSS: Yes.

FARLAND: ...in the fact that the lines of authority and lines of activity were unlike those in other embassies. My military group consisted of two veterinarian officers and that was all. We had no, nothing else except that which was coming through AID. On the other hand, being in proximity to the zone, the commanding general of CINCARIB exercised a considerable amount of control over the military assistance to the Guardia Nacional.

MOSS: Right. And you say he did. Now, to what extent did you get in on working out the priorities of what should be done and what should not be done?

FARLAND: I got in up to my ears because I felt this was my duty. I remember there was one disagreement as to the priority of a small airplane which serviced some of the back communities that couldn't be reached by road, particularly for the purpose of getting medical supplies into these areas. General Andy O'Meara [Andrew Pick O'Meara] seemed to think otherwise. He and I had an altercation on this, and the ambassadorial point of view came up ahead.

MOSS: Okay. Let me shift the...

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FARLAND: Incidentally, on that score, my push there in Panama was to turn the Guardia into a type of CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps].

MOSS: RIGHT.

FARLAND: I wanted it to utilize its manpower for the purpose of building bridges, for the purpose of building roads, for the purpose of adding medical assistance to the outlying communities.

MOSS: Do you recall at all an instance in which you came back to the military assistance people in the pentagon, asking for a platoon of engineers to work on that road from here to there?

FARLAND: Yeah.

MOSS: I heard someone explain that you just didn't understand the situation, that engineers don't go around in brigades; you know, [Laughter], you just can't do this.

FARLAND: Yeah. That road was to be a Jersey [New Jersey] Turnpike, just an access road.

MOSS: Yeah. You finally ironed that out though and got more or less what you wanted?

FARLAND: No, that one was a real problem. It never got where I wanted it to go, but it will someday.

MOSS: Yeah. What was the chief obstacle in all that, do you think, the difference in approach, in technology or understanding, and at what level and that kind of thing?

[-11-]

FARLAND: Well, it was the whole concept that AID was opposed to it, plus the fact that there were several Panamanian politicians who, because of their landholding, wanted the road to go elsewhere.

MOSS: I see.

FARLAND: But the AID could only visualize a huge, well engineered superhighway.

MOSS: Right.

FARLAND: And my concept of a developing nation is not to go in and put in that which would be utilized twenty, thirty, forty years from the time. I much prefer, and I still prefer, and I think the philosophy that's sound is, to go in and give them the opportunity to help themselves.

MOSS: Right. Okay, let me change the subject a little bit. You talked in your earlier interview about having a great deal of support in the business community in Panama. This was Panamanian businessmen or American businessmen in Panama?

FARLAND: Both.

MOSS: Both. Alright....

FARLAND: This was on the low to middle echelon.

MOSS: Right. Okay. Let me ask you a similar question to the one I asked you about military aid and internal affairs and so on. The conventional

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liberal wisdom, if you will, has it that American interests in Latin America tend to be exploitive and imperialistic and that sort of thing, the activities of what, First National City [Bank], and United Fruit [Company], and all the rest of it. How do you react to this general feeling, and does it really bother the Panamanians?

FARLAND: No, it didn't bother the Panamanians. Actually, they were delighted to see foreign capital come into their country. They're very enlightened in this respect. They realize that indigenously they have less than what's required to meet the aspirations of their people. And exploitation in Latin America, to go on the broad picture... Latin America is very much in the same position that this country was in, in the days of the "Robber Barons": the Goulds [Jay Gould] and the Rockefellers [John Davison Rockefeller], the Harrimans [Edward Henry Harriman], et cetera, et cetera. They're going through this very trying time. I think the influx of American capital, properly utilized for the purpose of helping the small entrepreneur, the growing middle class, is going to be a very significant factor in the development of Latin America.

[-13-]

MOSS: Okay, going back and reading over the newspaper accounts of Panama at the time, there was some talk of looking to Panama as an opportunity for a model development program that would sort of light the way for the rest of Latin America and this kind of thing.

FARLAND: It could be a showcase.

MOSS: It could be. Now why did this not develop at a faster pace? Why did it not come off in the kind of expectation that was reflecting....

FARLAND: I frankly don't know, Bill. It's one of those questions that bothered the heck out of me ever since I've been connected with Panama. I am inclined to think that – and this explanation may be less than complete – we were so closely associated with Panama and Panama was so closely associated with the United States that we knew so many of their faults and they knew so many of ours, that there

was a constant friction, an agitation, as within a family, that when something was attempted, there was always a reason to say no, on both sides. And you must remember that our association with Panama goes back long before 1903.

[-14-]

MOSS: Right. You have another idea running through here. This is the idea of the Central American common market. Common markets and that sort of thing were very much in vogue at that time. How realistic was this, and how did the Panamanians react to this kind of idea?

FARLAND: The Panamanian reaction to common market concept when I first arrived was nil. It wasn't just lack of interest, it was a negative attitude. By the time I left, they had adopted an affirmative attitude in which, while they had not become a member of the common market, they were a partner once removed. The basic reason behind all of this was the desire of Panama to be a partner with the United States. They wanted a bilateral agreement between the United States and Panama.

MOSS: Under what terms?

FARLAND: Some preferential terms for their products: sugar, rum, and then manufactured commodities in the future. They even conceived of the Zone [Panama Canal Zone] as a small Puerto Rico.

MOSS: All right, you have that kind of desire, and then over against it you've got the Panamanian economy, which is, I think I read, two-thirds agricultural, and the imbalance of the wages of Panamanians working in the zone versus the rest of Panama. How does this balance out now,

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how do they view this as a workable situation?

FARLAND: Well, this has been a source of a friction, too. The people in Coua Proqua look down on Panama as almost separate and distinct from their end of the country, in terms, politically and economically. I don't quite follow your question really.

MOSS: Well, I'm wondering how realistic it is, one, for the United States to, on the one hand, try to diversify and make self-sustaining the Panamanian economy, and two, work on this bilateral situation, which seems to me to emphasize a special situation for the zone. It seems to me that the two are contradictory.

FARLAND: Well, I think they are contradictory, and the United States did not work on that basis at least when I was there. I kept reading the message to the Panamanians daily that a bilateral was just not in the works, that they should join up with Central America. They should not try to join with South America because they'd be swallowed up. Not only their proximity but their whole economic tie was with the Central American states.

One reason they were opposed to it was that they felt because of the Zone, the wages in Panama were much, much higher than say in Honduras, and that as a result, they would be clobbered.

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They didn't realize a factor which is of prime importance, that their particular position geographically gave them a leg up on any of the rest of the countries. They didn't realize that their means of communication with the United States, and Europe, and elsewhere, was so much better than the others, that this gave them a leg up. The fact that their indigenous personnel, indigenous laborers in Panama, trained because of the zone, gave them a plus factor.

MOSS: Yeah, but they still felt that in a common market situation, they would come off on the short end.

FARLAND: They felt that.

MOSS: Let me move on to the question of the canal treaty situation. I've heard it reported in one source that President Kennedy asked you directly to Congress and talk this up. Is this so, do you recall the circumstances of that?

FARLAND: I recall it most clearly because of a very interesting factor involved. I had been told some several months prior to Kennedy's visit to Costa Rica, by Ed Martin [Edwin M. Martin], to keep my cotton-picking hands off Congress, and that I was prohibited from going up to talk to congressmen.

[-17-]

I told him that I considered that my prerogative; I would most certainly consider his comments, but I felt that I had the right to discuss with elected representatives of the people the problems that were extant in Panama and considered me and the United States.

However, following that discussion, I had not gone up on the Hill for some time. When Kennedy came to Costa Rica, he of course had interviews with all of the Central American presidents and President Chiari [Roberto F. Chiari]. After the interview with President Chiari, I, Dean Rusk, Ed Martin, and one or two other people were called in to Kennedy's presence. And, after serious voting discussions, President Kennedy turned to me and said, "Joe, when have you been up on the Hill last?" And I looked over at Ed Martin and

I said, "Well, Mr. President, I had not taken the opportunity of going up on the Hill for some time." And he said, "Well, I want you to get up there, and I want you to take some soundings, and do this just as soon as you can." And I said, "Well, I'm planning to go back..." No, he said, "When are you coming back to Washington? – this is the way the conversation started." I said, "Well, I'm planning to go

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back very shortly. My daughter is going to be selected queen of the Apple Blossom Festival and I want to be there for that, and I would like also to have some consultations." He said, "Well, I want you to get back as soon as you can, and take some soundings on the Hill. I want you to find out what the thinking is on this treaty among the leadership on the Hill, and I think you're the best one to do this." And again I looked at Martin and said, "Mr. President, I'd be delighted."

MOSS: And what did you find when you went there?

FARLAND: I found a great deal of sympathetic understanding of the Panamanian problems, and much more than the Department of State had any recognition of. I found no really adverse attitude whatsoever.

MOSS: Okay. Now what did this amount to in the way of your reporting back to the president and to the State Department on the situation? What were your recommendations then?

FARLAND: I told the president, subsequently, what I'd found, what I believed the attitude would be on a more pragmatic approach to a very serious problem which could affect our relations throughout all of Latin America.

MOSS: Okay. And this pragmatic approach was the one, was it, of ironing out the little problems on

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wages and so on and deferring the questions of sovereignty and perpetuity?

FARLAND: Well, I would have liked to have met the matter a little more head-on. But, there were factors on our part, and which were recognized by me, and most certainly recognized by the president, that to attempt a renegotiation at the particular time was politically best and astute in our country. So, it was my suggestion to do two things: appoint a high level commission for the purpose of trying to remove the points of irritation which existed within the present treaty, within the 1903 treaty with modifications, and proceed with a thorough study of the sea level canal. If we were

going to undertake the sea level canal, we would need a new treaty in toto.

MOSS: Right.

FARLAND: And this would obviate the necessity of raking the old coals and arousing the fire that had been so much in being over the years.

MOSS: Do you have any evidence that President Kennedy was interested in moving on this perhaps a little faster, a little more deliberately, after the 1964 elections?

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FARLAND: I don't know. I think it was his attitude all along to move expeditiously on this.

MOSS: You don't know whether the coming '64 elections had any bearing on it as far as he was concerned?

FARLAND: No, I don't know about that. I know his attitude. His attitude was: Let's get this out of the way, this is an anachronism in point of time.

MOSS: Yeah.

FARLAND: As a matter of fact, during Chiari's visit here, on at least three occasions during the formal meeting with Chiari, President Kennedy said, "We've recognized the fact that you have sovereignty in the canal zone," which was beyond anything that State had ever agreed to...

MOSS: Yes.

FARLAND: ...or the White House. But this was his attitude.

MOSS: You mentioned earlier, while we were talking upstairs off tape, an incident that you had with George Ball [George W. Ball] following a group meeting about the treaty. Do you want to record that for the tape?

FARLAND: Well, I think I alluded to it in my previous testimony. The president, during a preliminary meeting prior to the first meeting with Chiari,

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asked some very pointed questions and asked me one – my opinion as to what we should do. And I made a recommendation which was perhaps somewhat new to

the Department of State.

The next day, George called me up to his office and suggested that henceforth I make no recommendation to President Kennedy prior to sounding heads out in the Department of State. And I suggested that as a personal representative of the President, it would be most difficult for me to answer a direct question when asked.

MOSS: This whole question of the ambassador's relationship to the president comes up again and again, of course. Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.], in his book, quotes you as saying that the president understood your problems much better than the State Department did.

FARLAND: I think so.

MOSS: No, how do you, as an ambassador, deal with this situation, simply frontally as you did with Martin and Ball, or are there other resources at your disposal, other weapons in your arsenal that you can use to get the attention of the

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president? You mentioned in your earlier interview that as a holdover Republican, you did not have the political back door key. How did you get around this?

FARLAND: Well, I think each matter requires special handling, and I don't think there's a blanket approach that you can make. In Panama, it turned out that Carl Kaysen became the back door key.

MOSS: Yeah.

FARLAND: And Carl's understanding, sympathetic understanding and liberal approach to a very, very unhappy situation made it possible for the president to have a better understanding of what was going on.

MOSS: On another subject, did you get involved at all in the question of the National Labor Relations Board here at home trying to extend its jurisdiction over crews on Panamanian flag vessels? Do you recall that?

FARLAND: Yes, I was involved a little but I don't remember any real facts of that.

MOSS: Okay.

FARLAND: It's gone.

MOSS: Okay. Let me ask you another isolated incident. Do you recall the incident of the boarding of

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the Soviet ship, Miklukho Maklai, in the canal, and what the purpose was and the details surrounding that?

FARLAND: I do recall it, but here again this has gone into the foggy memory.

MOSS: Okay, let me push it a little further. I understand that on at least one occasion it was discovered in the State Department that the

FARLAND: I don't recall that at all.

MOSS: Okay, fine. In your...

FARLAND: I want you to understand that there were some things down here and with my embassy, was a most peculiar one. I got it rectified to a certain extent, but the operational zone, was completely and separately, and totally apart from my jurisdiction.

MOSS: Okay. It was totally apart from your jurisdiction despite the famous Bowles-Kennedy letter giving you authority as chief of mission. Did this bother you in any way?

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FARLAND: It most certainly did, because you can't have a strip ten miles wide and fifty miles long running through a country in which an activity is being carried on that doesn't have some ramifications reflecting over into the country of my jurisdiction.

MOSS: All right. What steps did you take to try and rectify the situation?

FARLAND: I had several very acrimonious discussions. I had several very productive discussions. I remember talking to Chester Bowles when he came through early – I forget the year now, Bill – but he was there and in Costa Rica also. But I brought this matter up with him

I straightened out part

MOSS: You straightened out part of it. Enough so that you could live with it.

FARLAND: Enough so that I could live with it.

MOSS: Okay. You mentioned Bowles. Let me ask you some questions about people. Now Bowles, of course, in the so-called Thanksgiving Day massacre became a special assistant to the president for underdeveloped countries, and as such, I

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presume, took a rather more regular interest in Latin American than he had before. What was the reception to this Bowles appointment on your part and on others, in the Latin American area?

FARLAND: Well, it didn't make much difference to me one way or the other. I know that there was a concensus, or at least I heard of a concensus in opposition to it.

MOSS: Yeah. The other way of asking the question is, how useful was this move?

FARLAND: Well, the only use that I made of it was that it gave me an opportunity to secure an ear who would listen to my complaint [REDACTED]

MOSS: You had another key to the back door, in effect. Okay. Now, how much did other people.... You mentioned Kaysen, how did, oh, people like Schlesinger, and Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin], and Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan], and so on provide you with the same kind of ear at the throne, as it were?

FARLAND: Schlesinger was very helpful. He came through one time. And while even he may not realize this, his presence there gave me an opportunity to espouse a number of causes to him which he carried back. He was a most attentive listener and he was helpful in this regard. I might add this too, when the riots broke out and

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things came to a hell of a pretty pass, I was naturally terribly concerned about the events. I was trying to devise some means or some formula to get things back on the right track, regularized. I came to Washington and through a mutual friend made an appointment with Schlesinger; I went over and outlined to him, I think, seven different possibilities, seven different formulae which might have varying degrees of success in accomplishing the purpose. And again he listened most attentively, and when it was all over he said, "Well,

Joe, this is all very interesting, but I am no longer in a position to talk.”

MOSS: This was when?

FARLAND: This was after the riots. I might also mention what turned out to be a very prophetic event. I'd been asked by Loy Henderson [Loy W. Henderson] to come up to American University to talk to some of the graduate students up there in political science on Panama its problems and its future developments. And I talked for a long time. It was getting quite late and they kept asking questions, and I had a dinner engagement. I finally said, “Well, I must bring this to a close, but I want

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you to sincerely realize that what we've been talking about this evening are not moot questions; this is very much alive. And it's not something that is in a vacuum, it's very much in a viable atmosphere.” And I said, “Maybe not next week, next month, next year, but these questions will make headlines in your local papers and on the news media around the world.” And I said good night. The next day, while driving to Princeton, the announcement was made on the radio that a riot had ensued, and all hell broke loose.

MOSS: You mentioned in your earlier interview an episode on the return flight with President Chiari from Miami to Panama, you lost an engine. Is there more to that story than the simple fact that that happened? Could you recall his attitude, and yours, and who did what?

FARLAND: I forget how much I talked about that in my...

MOSS: You mentioned it once and said that you would come back to it again in another interview, and then you simply sketched out the fact that he was in Miami, overstayed by fifteen minutes, and he had to get back to Panama by midnight or something because of the constitutionality of his...

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FARLAND: Oh, well, yes, I did. I can tell you some more about that.

MOSS: ...and that kind of thing.

FARLAND: For what I consider to have been a most stupid reason, if a reason at all, President Chiari had asked his Asamblea for permission to leave the country for precisely so many days. This is in their constitution, that they can't leave without approval of the Asamblea. He cut it too short. The plan was to leave New York in the morning, however, David Rockefeller [David Rockefeller, Sr.] had issued an invitation to come up to his home for a luncheon.

MOSS: Right.

FARLAND: And Chiari very much wanted to do this, so, in order to accomplish this, we had to get a clocker to land on David's lawn, right at the end of the luncheon, fly back to LaGuardia [Airport] and take the presidential plane to Miami, which we did. But this was again getting it cut pretty fine. Chiari, for his own personal reasons, overstayed his time in Miami. We had him there on schedule. We got into a plane, a Panamanian plane, owned by a company called the VIP Airline – this was their one plane – and we started off.

I frankly was worn out; I'd been at this thing for three weeks, and I felt that my duty

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was over. I was sitting in the tail of the plane talking to Dickie Arias [Ricardo M. Arias Espinosa], who was a former president, and enjoying several large scotch and sodas, when I saw some commotion. Dickie got up and went up to talk to Nino Chiari and came back and said, "Joe, we lost an engine. We're turning back." I looked out the window and there is a valley right below us. And I said something in Spanish that need not be repeated here. And I said, "I don't believe you, Dickie. Let me along; give me peace; I'm tired." He said, "No, I'm not kidding you, we're heading back." So I sobered up in a hurry, and when we got there – I'd had word sent ahead to get the Secret Service back and get some assistance – and we landed, went up to Pan Am's [Pan American World Airlines, Inc.] VIP room, and I started calling because Chiari had to be there by midnight. By this time I think it was somewhere around 9:30 going on 10, and I needed a supersonic jet and I needed it in a hurry.

So I started calling. First thing, I called the White House, and I got George Ball out of a cocktail party someplace. He gave me carte blanche

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for anything I wanted to do. So, I called Homestead Air [Force] Base, and they wouldn't listen to me. And finally I called SAC [Strategic Air Command] out in...

MOSS: In Omaha?

FARLAND: ...in Omaha. And they thought there was some nut down in Miami who was out of his mind. [Laughter] So they called the White House and I got a call from SAC saying, "Yes sir, yes sir," but there was no plane available. They got in touch with Ramey [Air Force Base]. They had nothing that could do it. Finally I got a call saying that there's a jet on line over at Homestead. So I said, "Well, that's just good and dandy; how do I get to Homestead?" So, eventually, down out of the air in all that traffic pattern comes an old, dirty, beaten up coast guard clocker. And Nino turns to me and he says, "Well, who should go?" And I said, "Well Nino, you have to take your foreign minister with you." He said, "All right, but you come too, Joe." [Laughter] So, they're on the inside...

MOSS: You guaranteed that that thing would fly?

FARLAND: "I'm on," I said. There's a little strap on the side, and I'm looking down at the swimming pools down here about two thousand feet below wondering

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whether or not this is an ambassadorial assignment. [Laughter] We got to know Ramey, and here's a poor colonel in a sports shirt. He's been called away from a cookout some place, very much disturbed. But he said, "Get in my car, and away we go." And we got, here is this jet, it was a 707, all lined up to take three people to Panama. And Nino looks at it and said, "That's not supersonic." And I said, "No." And he says, "Take me back to Miami." And here the clocker is already up and away. So, the colonel got in his car and called on his radio to the tower and brought it back and set it down and back we went to Miami.

Bill, this is the funny part of the whole story: We came down, landed, and as we were getting off, I saw a plane with the Panamanian flag on its tail. And the motors were revved up, obviously, preparatory to taking off. And I looked at Nino – and I'm going to quote this precisely – I said, "Nino, get your ass up on that plane as fast as you can, when that takes off, you're in Panamanian territory." [Laughter] He never stopped. Up the steps he ran; I can still see him with Galileo running after him.

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Well, the plane actually took off fifteen minutes after twelve, but the log showed off that it took off five minutes till. The day was saved for Nino.

MOSS: Oh, that's a wonderful story. Great.

FARLAND: I went back up and starting calling around to try to get Dusso, and finally went to bed in the hotel there and slept till way in the next afternoon.

MOSS: Did you have any aftereffects when you got back to Panama?

FARLAND: Oh no. He was very happy. He was very happy. The actual facts were that some of the members of his Asamblea were thinking just how terrible it was that poor Nino wasn't going to get back and who they should elect as a president on the spot.

MOSS: [Laughter] They were all ready to take over.

FARLAND: They were all ready.

MOSS: Let me ask you, if you will, on tape, to talk a little bit about Senator Smathers [George A. Smathers] in Florida and his interest in Latin America. Particularly, I understand he was involved in that whole housing project, or some of his friends were, down in Panama. Now what is his bag – I guess, in conventional terminology now – in this whole thing. How does he operate or did he at this time?

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FARLAND: Well, he had a great deal of friends who I wondered about over the years. His relationship with Trujillo and with Manuel de Moya [Alonzo Manuel de Moya] gave a lot of people considerable pause. There were times when I wondered whether or not this relationship was in the best interest of the United States. His relationship with certain individuals in Panama were of considerable concern both to me and to the embassy.

In the matter of the Kheel-Gilbane Housing Project his interest was acute. As a result of the Kheel-Gilbane Housing Project, a new head of AID came to Panama by the name of Ben Tench, a Floridian, who advised me one night in Salvador [San Salvador], after a considerable amount of whiskey had been consumed, that he had been sent there directly by Smathers for the purpose of seeing that this project went through. And at that time the name of the project wasn't even known to the embassy, although my lines of communication had indicated that this was afoot. He, as I say, took considerable interest in this. And when I had indicated that I could not sign off on the Kheel-Gilbane project, that the embassy had not had an

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opportunity of even examining it.... And furthermore to ask me while in Washington to sign off for him on behalf of the country team was not only an absurdity but it was contrary to the practice of the department. And, I could not speak for the country team, I could only speak for myself as ambassador. And I told him this, and he allowed as how that was fine, but the signing should be done within the early future.

Well, I didn't. And on a return to Washington – this is according to Ed Martin. Ed had received a call from George saying that he could not understand why I was dragging my feet: he could not understand why I, a political appointee, was left in a post of this magnitude and that he intended to take my qualifications directly before the Senate. And, I said to Ed at that point, "Did he really say that?" And he said, "He certainly did." And I said, "You know, Ed, I don't give a goddamn." But this was one factor naturally, that led to my resignation.

MOSS: Do you have any feel for how closely Smathers was able to talk to President Kennedy after President Kennedy was elected, on things of this sort?

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FARLAND: Well, one reason why I thought it was about time for me to find out where I was going, whether or not there was another ambassadorial assignment in the offing, or whether or not I was going to get it in the back of the neck, was when I read in the paper that George was the only non-family who attended Kennedy's birthday party that year.

MOSS: This, of course is circumstantial evidence. Did you have anything more direct?

FARLAND: A lot of hearsay but I just, being a lawyer, I can't, I'm not...

MOSS: Right. Surely. Do you have any knowledge of any Kennedy family financial interest involved in Latin America, say, or friendship with the Trujillo crowd or Rubirosa [Porfirio Rubirosa], or any of these?

FARLAND: Of the Kennedys?

MOSS: Yeah.

FARLAND: None.

MOSS: Okay.

FARLAND: There was a relationship however with Tito Arias [Roberto Emilio Arias], which gave me considerable pause.

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MOSS: In what ways?

FARLAND: The history of Tito's machinations in Panama and in Latin America, are pretty well known and are not exactly what could be found at a Sunday school picnic. Through Dame...

MOSS: Margot Fonteyn [Margot Fonteyn de Arias].

FARLAND: ...and previous associations, Tito was making some fairly regular visits to the White House. He called me one day and said that after having talked to "Jack," he would like to suggest to me the possibility of our government considering him as an emissary to discuss a diminution of the Castro influence in Latin America by going to Castro. This just didn't follow.

MOSS: How did you check this out? How did you follow it out?

FARLAND: I reported it through the most carefully guarded channels, but that was the end of it.

MOSS: You never heard anything more of it?

FARLAND: No, it was an absurdity. Although socially I know there were numerous meetings.

MOSS: Any other particular occasions on which this caused you some trouble or do you have a story to tell on it?

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FARLAND: I can't, I really can't remember anything on this.

MOSS: Okay. Let me take you over to the San Jose meeting in Costa Rica. How much of that do you recall? I have a schedule here that you might use to refresh your memory. This is from the president's schedule of appointments, and perhaps if you would glance over that while I flip this tape and see if it works any better on the other side, you might be able to come up with a story or two about that trip.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

FARLAND: ...particularly welcomed by these presidents was one that I was most gratified in seeing come to fruition because it was one of the things that I had been one of the advocates of. President Kennedy couldn't have received a more rousing welcome. I know he'd received rousing welcomes elsewhere, but from the standpoint of the Latino the hearts were open. The town was a Kennedy town, and the people just were reacting with a type of enthusiasm that befits a conquering hero returning home.

Kennedy sensed this, as any man attuned to the public is bound to sense. He drove Secret Service crazy. I talked to these fellows

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in the embassy one afternoon and they didn't know what in the devil to do to keep him from getting into the crowds. Ray Telles [Raymond L. Telles, Jr.], who was the ambassador there and also a very astute politician, had outlined some suggestions which had been negated by the department and strongly negated, and there was some acrimony about this. During one conversation right after he arrived, Kennedy asked, "Am I going to go to such and such? And Ray had to say, "No, you're not, Mr. President" And the President said, "Well, I think this is less than appropriate. I don't understand why you didn't line this up for me." Poor Ray had to stay, just sit there and take it. And the president said, "I'm going to do it." And Ray said, "I'm gratified that you are."

He went to the university, for one place, and left his Secret Service and went right into the crowd where there was a great deal of communist sympathy and possibility of difficulty. The crowd reacted in the most affirmative manner. It was nothing but the call of "Viva Kennedy," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. The meeting at the opera house was colorful, but like most of those meetings, that in itself was pro forma and for the record and for the public – a lot of words were

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just blather.

The real work was done by the meetings between the various presidents and President Kennedy at the embassy residence. President Chiari for reasons of his own, just asked that he be allowed to talk to President Kennedy without either interpreters or any witnesses. As a result, the extent of that conversation is unknown. President Kennedy told me in general terms that Chiari had presented the cause of Panama, the need for additional financial assistance, and the need to support his government, what he was trying to do, and so forth, all of which I heard many, many times. What else transpired I don't know. It was following that conversation, when he was reporting this to Rusk and to me, that was when he asked me to go to Washington.

MOSS: Was there any concern, either on the part of President Kennedy, the State Department or others that Chiari was not proceeding rapidly enough on reforms within Panama? This hit the press a little bit, that one of the problems was that he was, I think the quote was, mildly corrupt.

FARLAND: Chiari himself I don't believe was at all corrupt.

MOSS: But his government was.

FARLAND: The government was. I think much of what's going

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on down there right now is the result of this having gone on for a long time. Chiari's family was, shall we say, quite interested in a number of projects. There was an expression in current use during that time that concerned one of Chiari's, Nino's brothers. Everybody in Latin America has a nickname. Nino is a nickname for president. His brother's nickname was Popo. In Spanish you ask how things are going, they will say, "Poco a poco" (little by little), and in this instance they reply would be, "O, Popo a poco." [Laughter] Let's say that his brother was very safe.

MOSS: How much did this really concern you and concern the State Department?

FARLAND: It concerned me a great deal. I made a speech to the American Chamber of Commerce down there – American society – which had many Panamanians in attendance, but it was carefully couched. I was talking about the Alianza and the future, what was to be the future the Alianza held for Panama and the hopes of the embassy. Then I lashed out, in no uncertain terms, that the funds which the

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American people, the taxpayers, were putting into this Alianza to the tune of billions were meant to go to the aid and assistance of the downtrodden, and the poor, and those who needed help, not the rich politicians, and that I strongly suggested they keep their hands out of the pocket. And, the cartoons that appeared the next day were quite descriptive.

MOSS: Yes, I can imagine. How much was this taken to heart, and how much went in one ear and out the other?

FARLAND: I didn't achieve a miracle.

MOSS: [Laughter] Okay. Let me go back to the San Jose meeting. I notice that Wayne Morse was there; is this for purposes of slattery or did he have a real role to play?

FARLAND: There were a number of representatives to Congress there; this was done for the purpose of maintaining communication. Their position is primarily that of the observer. I don't know of any role they had to play.

MOSS: Okay. I think that's just about the end of my rope as far as being able to...

FARLAND: I think that you have taken it up admirably. I'm sorry I couldn't answer a couple of those questions.

MOSS: Well, that's all right.

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FARLAND: It turned out to be hazy. But I would suggest that you get a hold of top General Robert Fleming, Jr. [Robert John Fleming, Jr.]; he's out in California.

MOSS: Okay. Well I'll do that. I was planning to go out to California in November.

FARLAND: He's still full of it, and he's an interesting source.

MOSS: I'll give it a try. Thank you very much indeed.

FARLAND: When this is transcribed, if you will have your secretary send a transcript to me – the address is rather interesting, I mean, rather peculiar – Ambassador to Pakistan, Rawalpindi,

R-A-W-A-L-P-I-N-D-I Department of State, 200521 I think it is.

MOSS: Okay. This is the overseas post office in Department of State. Okay, we can check that out even if the numbers are not quite right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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Joseph S. Farland Oral History Transcript – JFK #2
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