

Walter Sheridan Oral History Interview—RFK#3, 3/23/1970
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Sheridan, a Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) campaign coordinator in 1968, and a government investigator, discusses the 1960 presidential campaign in Pennsylvania, his work in RFK's Justice Department, and his earlier work investigating the Teamsters Union as a staff member of the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor-Management Field, among other issues.

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Walter Sheridan—RFK #3

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Third of Six Oral History Interviews

with

Walter Sheridan

March 23, 1970
Washington D.C.

By Roberta Greene

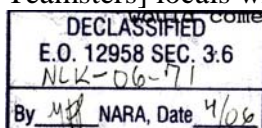
For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the Kennedy Library

GREENE: Okay. If you could begin again by talking about how you got to be Pennsylvania coordinator....

SHERIDAN: Okay. Now?

GREENE: Yes.

SHERIDAN: I was on the McClellan committee [Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor-Management Field] with Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]. He left in September 1959 to get involved in the presidential campaign of John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], and he asked me to stay with the committee to keep the continuity going. Sometime in, immediately after the Convention [Democratic National Convention] in Los Angeles, right after John Kennedy was nominated, we were in New York doing an investigation on the Teamsters Union [International Brotherhood of Teamsters] locals which were under the control of the mob in New York.



Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] called me. He had, by that time, become, I think the chief pressman for the campaign—at least one of them. He said that Bob had asked him to call and ask if I would come down and assist Pierre in the press operations for

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the campaign. Of course I was delighted because I had been waiting for nine months to be invited.

So I went down and started working with Pierre, and I met Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher], and we were getting into all of the problems involved from the press viewpoint in a campaign which, of course, was all new to me. I'd been doing this for a few days when Bob Kennedy called and wanted to see me. I went down to the Esso Building. When I walked in, he said, "Would you handle Pennsylvania?" I said, "Okay," not really knowing what "handling Pennsylvania" entailed.

It turned out what he wanted me to do was to be the coordinator—they had a coordinator in every state—for Pennsylvania. Of course, I had had no real political experience; I didn't know what I was doing. But I knew him, and I knew if he had the confidence in me to do it, that it would be probably mostly common sense.

So he told me to go see Billy Green [William J. Green, Jr.] in his office up on the Hill. Billy Green was the congressman from Philadelphia who was also one of the last of the bosses, but ran a very, very effective organization in eastern Pennsylvania. I went to see Billy Green. Billy Green was friendly, but a little suspicious and wondering what I was going to do in "his" area, more or less implying that he didn't really need me, that he could do all right by himself.

Then I ended up going up to Pennsylvania the next day or two. I went directly to see Governor Lawrence [David Leo Lawrence] in Harrisburg who was very cordial and offered me every cooperation. I offered him any help we could give him and others in helping to run the campaign.

It was just a feeling-along process where you, really using common sense, tried to decide where you could be most effective and how you could best spend your time. It was a very big state and a lot of ground to cover, and not too much time. As usual in a campaign, there's more activity than there was time to do. So I, early in the game, decided that Billy Green was indeed what he said he was and could indeed do what he said he could and that I would really serve no useful purpose in spending a lot of time in Philadelphia. I decided really to concentrate in the southwestern area, which is Pittsburgh and the surrounding counties, because it was Democratic strength which had never really come out the way it could. That was my basic decision.

I traveled all around the state, but did end up spending most of my time in the southwest area. As the campaign wore on.... In fact early in the game Bill Brady [William Brady] came up and really kind of took over the eastern part of the state,

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and later Gerry Tremblay [Gerald Tremblay] came up and helped with the northwest part of the state. With all of the Pennsylvania people and the students and us three, it was pretty much basically the organization. And then towards the end, as always, the extra people came in to beef up the operation. And that's how I got involved.

GREENE: How much did you see of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy in the course of the campaign?

SHERIDAN: John Kennedy made maybe eight or nine trips into Pennsylvania—I don't remember how many. I would know when he was coming, where he was going, and I would get involved with the advance men, not to the extent that I later did in other campaigns. At that point I thought it was more their responsibility to do the advancing, my responsibility to keep doing other things, which I suppose is maybe the best way to do it. But I later couldn't do that because you become to feel responsible for what goes on.

Joe Gargan [Joseph F. Gargan] was one of the advance men, I remember, and Fred Flynn. I just can't remember all of them that were in.

GREENE: Did Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] come into Pennsylvania at all?

SHERIDAN: I'm sure he must have, and yet I can't specifically remember him, but he must have. I'm sure he did. There were trips into Philadelphia and into the Pittsburgh area. Then there were three trips, I think, into the Bible belt which I did think at the time—but I didn't know that I was right—were maybe too much effort for too little votes. I came later to think that that was a waste of time; you should concentrate on your strength.

So I'd see John Kennedy—never in close proximity because I didn't think that was my job, and I was probably a little reticent to impose myself in the inner circles.

GREENE: Was there much change in the reception he got from the earlier visits to the later ones? Was there a lot more interest and enthusiasm as the campaign wore on?

SHERIDAN: Yeah, there was. And I suppose even in the Bible belt you could say that there was. But the real enthusiasm was in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and the coal mining areas. [Interruption] Oh,

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yeah, you could feel the thing growing.

I knew better, as time went on, how really serious my role was and the role of Pennsylvania was—because it was a very vital state. As it turned out in the end, we won. It was crucial that we won and I don't take that much credit for it because Billy Green delivered Philadelphia by 330,000 votes, which was unheard of. The southwest turned out better than it had, but again, it was a disappointment still. It just didn't turn out. There was an

awful lot of friction between the factions; half of your time was spent keeping Billy Green and Governor Lawrence happy with each other and happy with the situation.

GREENE: And wasn't Dilworth [Richardson Dilworth] a problem of sorts, too?

SHERIDAN: That's because Green and Dilworth hated each other's guts. This was really an awful lot of the thing, keeping harmony and keeping the tensions down and smiling at everybody and grinning them to death.

GREENE: Were you surprised or disappointed with the results? I know I saw in your file the private memos from each of the county leaders on how they thought their area would go and how they thought the state would go. To the man, they were just so off, you know. Everyone was saying he'd take it 500,000 votes and up.

SHERIDAN: They were all optimistic. But I think I had sense enough to realize that they were being overly optimistic. I think I thought he would do better in the Bible belt than he did. You know, he was so dynamic you thought it would rub off, but it didn't. The vote went terribly against him in those areas. I was disappointed in the southwest area, after having spent that much time there, that they still didn't come out like they could have. But Billy Green was just phenomenal; he won the election, or he won the campaign in Pennsylvania.

GREENE: And what about Robert Kennedy? Did you see much of him?

SHERIDAN: Yeah, I can recall two or three specifically. One, when he came to Philadelphia and Billy Green was waiting for him at the airport—Billy Green and I—and he was an hour, an hour and a half late. Billy Green was absolutely furious. When Bob finally arrived, he tried to placate Billy Green and then told me on the side what a spoiled brat he was.

One of the problems in Green's area was the idea of volunteers

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was completely repugnant to him; he didn't want any volunteers; he wanted his organization. But the volunteers had set up the headquarters on, I think, Chestnut Street, and they expected Bob Kennedy to come there. Billy Green, of course, was telling Bob it was a waste of time, there wouldn't be any crowd.

So Bob said, "Well, let's go by anyway." And we went by and there was just a huge crowd, it had stopped traffic. It was just a good example of Bob's judgment, plus his drawing power. It was very successful. Then we went on up through to a college, I can't remember what college it was, but that was a huge success. And it was my first experience with Bob Kennedy in the role of campaigner. I was surprised at how much he attracted, as well as how well he did at it.

Then I remember when he came to Pittsburgh. That was an interesting.... Well, there were a couple of trips to Pittsburgh, and I don't know if I'm separating them. But one, I know, was a labor luncheon where he was scheduled to appear. Then I started getting these calls, you know. "It would be better if he didn't come."

John Kennedy had, I think, just made the statement about, "It's too bad Jimmy Hoffa is still free," and there was a great reaction to it. And so Bob Kennedy personified the anti-labor feeling, or at least the labor leaders thought he did. So they started coming to me. The pressure really mounted as the date approached. It was, you know, "Please don't let him come, because the campaign is going well." Finally, Congressman Holland [Elmer J. Holland] came personally and said, "Please don't let him come."

I remember talking to John Seigenthaler about it. Seigenthaler, I think, was in Washington or Nashville, I'm not sure which. We agreed that he should come. And he came, and it was the biggest, best labor luncheon they'd ever had. He went over very well, as he always did. After the luncheon, Congressman Holland and the labor leaders came to me and personally apologized, and said how wrong they were.

Another thing I remember, from either that trip in Pittsburgh or another, was at the end of the trip going out to the airport you'd have a police escort and when you crossed a county line you'd pick up a new police escort. These were just little things that happened along the line, and I'm sure it happened everywhere, but I'd just seen them for the first time. When you reached the county line and the two police escorts peeled off, he stopped the car, got out and shook hands with them and thanked them. It was my beginning to see—although I'd seen it in working on the campaign, but it was a thing you saw more and more as the campaigns went on—how

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considerate he was of other people in the campaign.

GREENE: Was there any problem in Pennsylvania because of your association with the Hoffa thing, other than this one labor....

SHERIDAN: No, there wasn't. And, I think, because at that time, you know, my name—unless anybody read *The Enemy Within*—to most people didn't mean anything. Most labor leaders wouldn't associate with me with it, but they did associate him with it. I can't remember it ever being an issue, because I don't think they knew who I was, except an aide of Robert Kennedy's.

GREENE: What about Byron White [Byron R. White] and O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], people like that? Did you have any significant contacts with them?

SHERIDAN: Byron White I talked to before I went out. He was heading up the Citizens [Citizens for Kennedy] I'd have contacts with he and Joe Dolan [Joseph F. Dolan] on the telephone, but I don't think I ever had a personal contact after that. There were contacts with Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] all the time because he

had materials and there were never enough materials. There was a constant hollering and shouting about materials. One time I took the station wagon and drove all the way down to Washington, just loaded it up with materials, and drove it back up. I suppose there was more contact with Hackett than anybody. And then when the tabloid started coming out, of course, there was the big push on the tabloid, as there always is.

GREENE: That was the first time it had been used, wasn't it?

SHERIDAN: I don't think so. No, I think it'd been used in Massachusetts, hadn't it, by the Kennedys?

GREENE: That's possible; that's very possible.

SHERIDAN: It was the first time nationally. I'm sure it had. But they put great emphasis on it, and they were right. It was, I think, very effective.

GREENE: What do you know about the reasoning behind asking for these memos from the coordinators in the first place? Was there any specific purpose?

SHERIDAN: Well, I think just to get an overall view of

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what their people in each state thought. Because if they didn't get that, what they'd get is what the individual people in the state thought, which would all be self-serving. So, it was an objective.... It was the same motivation for having you there in the first place: that you were there for their interests and their interests alone. You'd get that kind of a report rather than a self-serving report from other people.

GREENE: Do you know of any appointments that came out of those? You know I would assume not directly out of them, but in which those were significant? There were a number of appointments made from Pennsylvania. The three that come to mind....

SHERIDAN: Well, Governor Lawrence was appointed for something relative to the cities.

GREENE: Right, he was named to the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in Housing, and then Matt McCloskey [Matthew H. McCloskey, Jr.] as ambassador to Ireland, and John Rice [John S. Rice], who was the state chairman, was appointed as ambassador to the Netherlands.

SHERIDAN: That's right.

GREENE: Those are the only three I was able to find; there may be more.

SHERIDAN: I don't know of any others.

GREENE: Were you consulted on any of those?

SHERIDAN: No.

GREENE: So you don't think that was one of the reasons for the memo?

SHERIDAN: Well, it might have been. You know, I think they'd take that, plus all the other things they had. I'm sure they sought other opinions than mine when they were doing something like that. A good indication is they didn't seek mine when they were making the appointments.

GREENE: Is there anything else on the campaign....

SHERIDAN: On the Pennsylvania campaign?

GREENE: Yes. That isn't in that fine memo you've written?

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SHERIDAN: Oh, gosh, it's so long ago. I was in Harrisburg the night of the election and I remember calling Bob at the Cape. Things seemed to be going so great. I said, "Nice going," and he said, "Nice going." Pennsylvania had then been won. I remember falling asleep, and then when I woke up things weren't that good any more. That was kind of touch-and-go for a while.

GREENE: Was there anything during the transition period? Did you discuss with Robert Kennedy, at all, what he might do himself—the attorney generalship, or anything else he was concerned with?

SHERIDAN: You mean after the election?

GREENE: Right.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, there were several discussions because he really didn't know what he wanted to do, and he fluctuated. He seemed to be inclined more to get into the Department of Defense in an under secretary capacity because he thought it was very important and unmanageable and that he might be able to do something with it. The President asked him to be attorney general, and he was reluctant to do it because he'd been doing that kind of thing and he didn't want to just keep doing that kind of thing. I remember riding with him up to Georgetown Hospital [Georgetown University Hospital]. In fact, I drove him up there one day. Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] was in the hospital. I don't remember if it was a baby or what, probably.

GREENE: That's a safe guess.

SHERIDAN: He was really at the point of decision then as to whether to agree to be attorney general. I told him I thought he should, but I understood why he didn't want to.

GREENE: Do you think the major reason was what he said about not wanting to continue to chase people?

SHERIDAN: Well, he didn't say that at that time. He didn't say that until after John Kennedy was killed...

GREENE: Oh, you're right. Excuse me.

SHERIDAN: ...but I think that was the idea. I think he just felt, you know, "I've done this, and I can make a broader contribution than just law enforcement." I felt the same way. I always wanted to get

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out of LEMP and I've never really gotten out, but he did. I've gotten out a little bit, but not as far as he did. I think it was mainly that, that he just didn't... I think he saw the problems. I just think he had a real vision of what the New Frontier was all about and the bureaucracy problems that it faced and that he had the facility for cutting through that kind of thing. And I think he thought he could do that better in a different role. I think he would have liked to have been kind of just a trouble-shooter throughout the government.

GREENE: Was it your feeling that he finally decided on the attorney generalship because the President said that's who he wanted, period?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes, there's no question about that. I think he finally just deferred to the President, very reluctantly.

GREENE: Is there anything else in that period? The formation of the administration?

SHERIDAN: You know, this is a personal note, but from the time I had met him he had just, for no good reason, sort of overwhelmed me with kindness. He was always doing the little extra thing. I never expected it, and I never came to expect it, but it was always there without expecting it. And at the inauguration time, of course, he sent, or I received, the packet which had tickets for everything. I just appreciated those things very much.

GREENE: Were you special in this way, do you think? Or was he that way with other people on the committee that he worked closely with?

SHERIDAN: No, he wasn't. I think I came to be special, and was always surprised that I was, because of all the people on the committee only Pierre and I went forward from the committee with him, and Carmine Bellino [Carmine S. Bellino].

Then the night of the inaugural ball we went to the Armory [District of Columbia National Guard Armory], which was just a madhouse. And then the next morning he called me from Florida, I think, and he opened the conversation with, "Didn't my mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] look nice last night?" You know, it's so disarming, but yet so typically him. He asked me in that same conversation if I would come with him as a special assistant to the Department of Justice to which I said, "Yes."

GREENE: Did he outline at that point what it would be?

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SHERIDAN: No, no, he didn't. He just asked me if I would, and I said, "Yes." And then a short while after that John Seigenthaler and I went over to the department and kind of opened up shop. First, I went over with him to see Attorney General Rogers [William P. Rogers], who was still there. I just went with him, I didn't go in with him. I remember the attorney general's office was a series of big empty offices with Roger's office at the end. Then Seigenthaler and I went over, and we were the first ones in. We had a temporary office in the assistant attorney general in charge of the Civil Division's office which was on the corner of the second floor. Jane Lahey was there. And that's where we were when the inauguration came up and the big snow.

GREENE: At least you weren't one of those...

SHERIDAN: They were exciting times, I must say.

GREENE: Do you know anything specific about other appointments to the department? Were you involved in any of those?

SHERIDAN: I was involved specifically in one of them. After we were there for awhile, it wasn't too long.... First, he asked.... Well, I have to go back a little ways. On the committee we.... We're getting into Hoffa. Do you want to get into Hoffa?

GREENE: Yes, I'm sure it's going to be rambling anyway.

SHERIDAN: There's no question that a great deal of the committee's activities were devoted to the Teamsters Union and Jimmy Hoffa. Now, that's not to say that they all were, because there were investigations of the Bakers' Union [American Bakery and Confectionery Workers International Union], the Hotel, Restaurant Workers [Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union], the UAW

[United Auto Workers]. There was a number of them, as well as a lot of management like Sears, Roebuck [Sears, Roebuck & Co.]. The first thing we ever did was Sears, Roebuck.

We would send things over to the Department of Justice which appeared to be violations of the federal law. He was always impatient that they weren't doing anything with them. We'd have meetings with the Department of Justice about it, and he was always pushing them to do something.

So, as a result of this, what had happened was that Malcolm Wilkey [Malcolm R. Wilkey], who was then assistant attorney general in charge of the Criminal Division, and Rogers got together and decided to bring in some people to do nothing but look into the Hoffa

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situation. And it turns out that the first Hoffa squad was not ours, it was theirs. Malcolm Wilkey brought in a fellow named Jim Dowd [James Dowd] who had been with him when he was U.S. attorney in Texas, and Dowd brought in three or four people. That was a little group looking into the Hoffa material coming over from the committee. Dowd was a special assistant to the Attorney General.

Rogers, in turn, brought in George MacKinnon [George E. MacKinnon] from Minnesota, who is now just newly appointed district judge here in the District [District of Columbia]. He worked on his own. He'd been a former U.S. attorney and, I think, even attorney general of Minnesota. He worked on his own, going through the same material. The idea was to look at the material, see if there was a legitimate prosecution and what was the best prosecution.

So Dowd, in '58, '59, '60, decided that the best prosecution in a legitimate violation of the federal law was what came to be called "the Sun Valley case." This involved some land in Florida where Hoffa had an interest, and they were selling it to the Teamster members for retirement homes. There was a lot of hanky-panky involved.

So Dowd reached the point where he was ready to indict Hoffa— this was in the fall of 1960—and presented his recommendations to Malcolm Wilkey and to Rogers. They concurred in his recommendation. He went to Orlando, Florida, where the case was centered, to present an indictment of Hoffa and was in the grand jury room summing up to get an indictment when he was called on the telephone, called out of the room, and told to come back to Washington. When he got back they raised all kinds of questions of why was he doing this. He told them he'd been authorized to do it. It was obvious to him that something was wrong. We learned subsequently that there had been dealings between the Hoffa and the Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] people which this ultimately resulted in what I suppose you could call a deal, whereby Nixon would not prosecute Hoffa and Hoffa would support Nixon.

GREENE: When did you find out about this?

SHERIDAN: Shortly after going over there, Jim Dowd sought me out because he wanted to unburden himself of this, I guess. He was a very honest fellow, and he wanted to stay on with us, and did for a year. But he told me the story himself.

We weren't there too long when first the Attorney General asked me to.... Well, John Hooker, Jr. [John Jay Hooker, Jr.], from Nashville—I guess, Seigenthaler had suggested that Hooker would be the ideal person to prosecute Hoffa. So Hooker had come up to

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Washington, and I had gotten together all of the committee testimony, which was bound in green books and filled at that time forty or fifty some volumes. Hooker spent some time in Washington going over them.

I remember he was trying to make up his mind whether to do this or not. And I remember riding with him out to Bob's house in McLean, and he had made his decision, which was not to do it. And I remember him saying, you know, "You are kind of wedded to this, you have no choice. I do have a choice; I don't want to get stuck, narrowed down into this kind of thing." So he turned it down and went back to Nashville. Then either he or Seigenthaler recommended Jim Neal [James F. Neal] as a guy who would be good for this.

At this point Bob decided that you just didn't need one man, we needed more than one man. So he asked me to start getting a group together of real bright, young, honest guys from the outside. Jim Neal wanted to be assistant head of the Tax Division, but finally agreed to work with this group. And then we got Charlie Shaffer [Charles Shaffer] from the New York U.S. attorney's office. It gradually built up into a group of about fifteen attorneys.

One fellow, Bill French, for instance.... Bob, from the time he became attorney general, started meeting in small groups until he had met with everybody in the Department of Justice. Each group he'd meet with, at the end he would say, "If there's anybody here who doesn't think they have enough to do, come up and see me afterwards." Bill French was in the Lands Division, so he came up afterwards and said, you know, "I don't have enough to do." So Bob sent him down to me, and he joined our group. That was kind of the beginning of the Hoffa group, so to speak.

GREENE: That's very interesting. I think maybe, from a selfish point of view, it would be easier if we went back to the very beginning, because I'm going to lose you otherwise if we don't put the groundwork in first.

SHERIDAN: Back to the beginning of where?

GREENE: Back to the committee. Can you do that at all?

SHERIDAN: Oh, we haven't done the committee, have we?

GREENE: No, we haven't done the committee.

SHERIDAN: Okay.

GREENE: So, I'd like to go back.

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SHERIDAN: You want to start at the beginning, then?

GREENE: Yeah. Now, I saw in that summary you gave me to look at before that you came on in... [Interruption] Well, I saw that you started in—you said three months before August, so it'd be about May or June?

SHERIDAN: Started on April 15th, 1957.

GREENE: April. How did this come about? Where did you first meet Robert Kennedy? What qualified you for this kind of a position?

SHERIDAN: I had been in the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] for four years. Then I had gone to work for the National Security Agency [NSA], and was working for them, living in Bethesda, going to Our Lady of Lourdes Church. One of the members of the staff was a fellow named Nick Lopez who was one of these leaders of church groups. He was head of the Holy Name Society, head of the Knights of Columbus.

GREENE: Et cetera.

SHERIDAN: So I came to know him because I joined each of those groups for a short time. I'm not a joiner; I didn't last very long. But he just suggested that I come down because it was a gung ho committee.

I had first really heard of it a few months earlier. I remember I was attending classes, while I was at NSA, over at a Far East studies school that NSA had. I remember reading *The Reporter* magazine which had an article about Dave Beck [David S. Beck] and Jimmy Hoffa. I don't think I'd really ever heard of Jimmy Hoffa before then. It said how if anything ever happened to Beck, Hoffa was the logical successor. Then the blinding of Victor Riesel happened, which was in late '56. Then there was an article about Senator McClellan [John L. McClellan] starting a committee to look into this kind of thing.

It kind of got at me a little, this would be a pretty good cause. But then I didn't think of it again until Nick Lopez brought it up. So I went down and I talked to Don O'Donnell [Donald F. O'Donnell] who was kind of the co-chief counsel of the committee. He's one of these people who will be there forever, very ineffective, do-nothing guy, but he was interviewing applicants at the time. He told me it would be eighty percent travel; it would be a temporary job for one year. I told him, "No, thank you," and I went home.

So then I saw Nick Lopez a couple of weeks later and he said,

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"You really ought to come down. It's going great." So I went down again and talked to Don O'Donnell again, and finally I decided I'd give it a go. So I said I was interested. And then he called me back a few days later and said that I should come down and talk to Bob Kennedy—who I knew only as vaguely the brother of the fellow who tried to be vice president in 1956.

So I did, and I went down. It just so happened that it was in the middle of the Beck hearings. There was a little fellow with gray hair sitting next to me with a big bag. He was waiting. It turned out that he was Nathan W. Shefferman. So I sat and waited and finally, after a couple of hours, Bob Kennedy came out looking very gaunt and just nodded at me, and I walked out the door with him. He started interviewing me as we were walking along to the stairs. We got up to the top of the stairs and he asked me how much money I wanted. I told him, I think, ten thousand dollars. I think I was making something like seven or eight. He said, "We can't do that. The chairman wouldn't stand for that. That's too much money. But if you want to come on for a little less than that, okay." I said, "Okay," and I was hired.

So I finally came on. He had, in the meantime, decided that I could have the ten thousand dollars. So I started at ten thousand dollars.

I remember a thing that has pertinence later. Everybody that was hired had to have an interview with Senator McClellan. You were actually already hired, but, you know, Bob was a great diplomat. I suppose it was necessary. There were three of us that were hired at the same time, and we went up for an interview with Senator McClellan. I remember one of the things he said was, "If I ever hear of you leaking information to the press, I will deal with you just as harshly as I know how." And, of course, I was impressed. I wasn't about to leak anything to the press.

So, I went to work. There were a few false starts where I was going to go here and I was going to go there. So, finally, I was told to go to Chicago and meet a fellow named Pierre Salinger who had just come back from the Beck investigation and was now looking into Shefferman's relationships with Beck and Hoffa. So I went to the girl who made airplane reservations, because somebody said that's what you do. She made me a reservation for the next day at noon on the lunch flight. So I came in the next morning, and I was going through the Shefferman files in the back in the file room. Bob came back, and he looked at me, and he said, "I thought you were going to Chicago?" I said, "I am, at noon." He said, "I never go any place at noon," and he turned around and walked away. Of course, I never went any place at noon after

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that either.

GREENE: He meant you should go at six in the morning.

SHERIDAN: Because you're wasting the whole day, you see, if you go.... So I got out to Chicago and I met Pierre. We went to this old federal building they've since torn down. Pierre was there—typical Pierre with his cigar and his feet up on the desk. He was a very flashy dresser at that time, and he had a checkered yellow shirt and a checkered red bow tie. And there's an old fellow named Parky whose name was Parkhurst, Edgar Parkhurst.... It turns out that Bellino was kind of an overseer of the accounting end of the operation and Parkhurst was working for Bellino and going through toll call records, which I had never heard of even though I had been in the FBI four years. We went out that night to... [Interruption]

GREENE: Do you remember where you were?

SHERIDAN: Okay.

GREENE: Sure.

GREENE: So I remember that night we went to a restaurant called Mike Fish's. Somehow, Pierre had known Mike out in San Francisco because Pierre had worked on the *San Francisco Chronicle* and then went with *Collier's*. *Collier's* folded on Christmas Eve and Pierre was out of a job. He was, at the time, doing a story on Dave Beck, so he went to Bob Kennedy and Bob Kennedy hired him. And you learned all this in the first ten minutes you talked to Pierre.

We went to Mike Fish's, and it turned out to be kind of a hangout, and I never go to Chicago now without going to Mike Fish's. But it also turned out that it was a hangout for the mob, and still is, which gets funnier as it goes on. But Pierre explained the whole thing to me, that we were investigating Shefferman, and they didn't really know what Shefferman's role was when we started. They were trying to show a relationship with Hoffa or kickbacks to Hoffa or Beck. Shefferman's organization, which was called Labor Relations Associates, appeared on the surface to be a personnel outfit. So we started moving around subpoenaing records of clients. Gradually a pattern appeared where, 1) the clients were either Sears, Roebuck or Sears, Roebuck affiliates or subsidiaries or suppliers; and, 2) when you got beneath the surface, he wasn't really doing personnel work, he had a very sophisticated union-busting operation going, which was extremely effective.

We ended up, Pierre and I, interviewing the top officials of

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Sears, Roebuck with the evidence we had, which was damn good, as to what Shefferman was really all about. They lied to us for four months. And, eventually, the Sears officials got the idea that maybe it wasn't fun and games, that maybe this Kennedy fellow was really going to have hearings. So then they went out and hired, I think, Jake Arvey [Jacob M. Arvey] and all the political clout they could get to get across the point that if John Kennedy wanted to be president, Bob Kennedy really didn't want to hold these kinds of hearings. They ended up in a meeting with Bob Kennedy where they started lying to him, and Bob kind of threw them out of the office. They went back to Chicago and then finally came in and admitted everything that they'd been doing.

But in this whole process Pierre and I, in addition to a lot of work, did have a lot of fun. We traveled all over the midwest area, going like crazy. But some of the sidelights.... There was one night when there was a huge cloudburst in Chicago, and Pierre and I were out near, I think we had just eaten at Mike Fish's, and we were out in the vicinity. It just started coming down like cats and dogs. So we burst into this club, which was a private key club they called them, called Andre's. As we stayed there, the water started coming down the steps into the place. Pretty soon you had a foot of water in Andre's, and the waiters and waitresses were taking tablecloths and sopping it up. Pierre and I ended up down wringing out the tablecloths with them, and the evening ended with Pierre in his bare feet at the piano

playing his limited repertoire of the “Moonlight Sonata,” I think it is. That’s the thing he plays most often and best.

Then Hoffa was acquitted right in the middle of all that, while we were conducting this. He was acquitted in the Cheasty [John C. Cheasty] case.

GREENE: That’s....

SHERIDAN: I don’t know when it is.

GREENE: I have the dates somewhere.

SHERIDAN: Hoffa was acquitted. Pierre and Carmine went to Detroit to reopen the Hoffa investigation. I stayed on to continue the Shefferman investigation.

GREENE: Who else was involved at this point? La Verne Duffy, and there were a couple of other names I’ve come across as investigators.

SHERIDAN: Well, let’s see. At the same time, as best I can remember, there was an investigation going

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on in New York of the “paper” locals situation. That was Paul Tierney [Paul J. Tierney], Walter May. I don’t know who was there when in the beginning, but it was Tierney, Walter May, John Constandy, Jim Kelly, Sherm Willse [Sherman S. Willse]. Duffy and McShane [James J.P. McShane] were down south investigating in Tennessee. Al Calabrese [Alphonse F. Calabrese] and Jack Balaban [Jack S. Balaban] were investigating the textile workers.

GREENE: Were most of these people on the staff before you came on, or were they brought on around the same time?

SHERIDAN: Most of them were. The people who came on when I did, or just before or just after, were Pierre, and I, and a fellow named Count Langenbacher [Irwin Langenbacher], a fellow named Joe Maher [Joseph F. Maher], and Kenny O’Donnell. But Kenny was really kind of Bob’s right-hand man who I think John Kennedy put in there to be sure Bob didn’t mess everything up politically—but a very valuable guy.

But in the Hoffa investigation, itself, it was basically Pierre and Carmine in Detroit and this other group in New York who were started right after that looking into the ‘paper’ locals, which was Hoffa’s grab to the East Coast back in the fifties.

GREENE: Was that the one that Hogan [Frank S. Hogan] started you on?

SHERIDAN: Hogan had done the wiretapping of Johnny “Dio” [John Dioguardi], which

they introduced in the hearings, yeah. And Constandy used to work for Hogan, and Jim Kelly and Sherm Willse used to work for the New York Police Department and they had come with the committee.

GREENE: It sounds like the staff responsibilities were pretty well divided and that your department was quite separate from what, let's say, the people were doing in New York.

SHERIDAN: It was, and it wasn't. If you were talking about Teamsters you were divided, and yet there was some interplay so that you knew what each other were doing, basically, but not in detail. Kenny O'Donnell was the focal point for that because everything came in to him, and he had a tremendous retentive memory. If he saw something that you were doing that had a bearing on what they were doing in New York, he would coordinate that.

But in addition to the Teamsters investigation, there were also investigations into these other unions going on at the same time. I was investigating Shefferman at the same time,

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in the beginning. Then I got into the Hoffa thing almost exclusively after that.

GREENE: Didn't you also do, fairly early, an investigation of why the '53 and '54 hearings were so abruptly terminated?

SHERIDAN: Oh, yeah. That wasn't early. No, that was later.

GREENE: Oh, that was later.

SHERIDAN: Yeah. From the time I went on in April '57 until September '57, I was mainly investigating Shefferman and the whole Sears, Roebuck thing. Pierre was with me on it until he broke away to go into the Hoffa thing after Hoffa was acquitted. At that point the group—like Pierre and Carmine in Detroit, this other group in New York—principally, went off on the Hoffa investigation. At the same time, they still had the textile investigation going and I don't know what other ones going.

Then there were hearings in the summer of '57 on Jimmy Hoffa, which were the first Hoffa hearings. I was brought in to be kind of an instant expert on trusteeships, which were the first words I ever spoke with John Kennedy. I was sitting right between John and Bob, and I'm the expert on trustees, which I had learned that morning, and the first thing he says to me, the President turns and says, "How many states are there in the Central States Conference of Teamsters?" I said, "I don't know."

GREENE: That went over big.

SHERIDAN: It did, because they never minded you saying I don't know; it's when you

tried to guess, you know, to bluff. Because you can always go find out. But if I had guessed and said, "Sixteen," and he had used that figure and I was wrong, this is what they couldn't tolerate. And I just on instinct, I didn't know, I told him I didn't know. But then I went and found out, and he knew then.

GREENE: You know, Robert Kennedy wrote in his book earlier than you arrived on the scene that when they changed from the Senate subcommittee [Senate Permanent Investigation subcommittee] to the select committee [Select Committee to Investigate Improper Activities in the Labor-Management Field] as a means of, as I understand, circumventing the jurisdiction problem, wasn't that...

SHERIDAN: Yeah, right.

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GREENE: ...and he needed people from the Labor committee [Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare] to fill up the new select committee, he says that the reason that John Kennedy was hesitant was that he felt two Kennedys in a situation like this one were more than enough.

SHERIDAN: Right, I'm sure he was.

GREENE: What do you know about that? Anything further? Was that a political concern to him?

SHERIDAN: No, no. I know there was a lot of political concern involved, because there was no question John Kennedy was going to run for the presidency. There was no question he was pro-labor and would want labor support. You know, you were getting into a very tough.... Nobody had ever seriously taken on the Teamsters Union before. There were other unions. You were going into labor, investigating labor in a very tough way with a very tough brother doing it. So it was, I think, fraught with political dangers. And yet I think it turned out very well.

GREENE: Was there a lot of pressure exerted from the different areas?

SHERIDAN: Oh, God, yes. Oh, yeah, the kind I mentioned with Sears. But there were others where they would go to the President or send people to the President. He always just sent them to see Bob, and then Bob turned them away. That early, Bob was being the no-man, the ruthless one, see. But there were a lot of pressures. I don't know of any instance where it had any effect whatsoever.

GREENE: Did it worry him though, particularly at the time you were near him?

SHERIDAN: I think it probably worried Kenny and the President more than it worried Bob. I think he thought even then, you know, you do the right thing and

it's going to come out right.

GREENE: What about pressures from the other side, even from within the committee, to prosecute Reuther [Walter P. Reuther]?

SHERIDAN: Oh, there was a lot of in-fighting. First, it was obvious that with McClellan as chairman and Bob as chief counsel and John Kennedy on the committee, the combination was unbeatable, at least up till the end when McClellan kind of drew back. They just were better, smarter. They did their homework, they knew their

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facts. So, when Mundt [Karl E. Mundt] or Curtis [Carl T. Curtis] or Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater]... But Goldwater didn't do it much. Goldwater was basically honest in his approach to the whole thing. He didn't like Walter Reuther and he wanted to get Walter Reuther, but he didn't try to gimmick up the other thing, whereas Mundt and Curtis would. They'd play with it. And every time they'd get caught up because they wouldn't have the facts or they'd be wrong. It was beautiful to behold really.

Then there came a time—I think it was after Ives [Irving M. Ives] died—that Senator Capehart [Homer E. Capehart] came on the committee, who was unbelievably fraudulent and was so obviously in the pocket of the Teamsters. I remember a hearing where Hoffa was being questioned and one of his people would get up and leave the room you could just watch the whole process—and about two minutes later the pay phone behind the committee thing would ring. The girl would answer it, and come over with a note for Senator Capehart. The Teamster guy would come back in and sit down, and Senator Capehart would ask the question he had just been given by the Teamster fellow. In fact, at one point, he even introduced a document that he had been given by them. But it was so obvious that it didn't make that much difference.

GREENE: Was there a lot of pressure from people like that to get on Reuther?

SHERIDAN: Oh, yeah, there was continual pressure to get on Reuther. In Goldwater's case, I think it was that simple: "Walter Reuther is a Communist," or what have you, "and I think he should be investigated." I think with some of the others it was a combination, or a scapegoat. A way of getting off of Hoffa was to get on Reuther.

GREENE: How did the Kennedys handle that?

SHERIDAN: Adroitly. There was no real problem because the fact was that you were investigating labor racketeering. The Teamsters Union was fraught with labor racketeering, the UAW was not. The UAW was an almost entirely clean local. Their only real racket-type was a fellow named Dick Gosser [Richard T. Gosser] from Toledo. They knew it and we knew it.

Fairly early—in late '57 or early '58—they somehow started an investigation of the Perfect Circle corporation in Indiana. Muncie? I think Muncie. Jerry Adlerman [Jerome S. Alderman] and I went out to investigate it. It was a strike situation where there had been violence, and it was a question of who started the violence. It was pretty evident, after I

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got out there, that the company had started the violence. The company had ended up shooting at unarmed workers. So they had the hearing, and what could have been a terribly anti-UAW hearing turned out to be really a pro-UAW hearing because the facts were on their side and we had the facts.

Then there was the continuing pressure to get into the Kohler [Kholer Company] situation in Wisconsin, which they finally did in late '58, I think, no, late '59, summer of '59. There was a lot of hanky-panky involved with that because, by that time, Hoffa's people were actively supporting the Republicans, feeding them information about Reuther and most of it wrong information. Then two of the staff members really became dishonestly involved in investigating Reuther and were giving false information to Bob.

GREENE: Who were these people?

SHERIDAN: Well, there are two of them. He mentions them in the book *The Enemy Within*—McGovern [Jack McGovern] and an ex-FBI agent, I can't think of his name. But the two of them are actually dishonest and were dishonest in the investigation in what they told him. He didn't fire them, I don't think, but he really told them off.

GREENE: How was he regarded at this point both by the committee members and by the investigative group?

SHERIDAN: I think by most of the investigators he was very highly regarded. I suppose more by some than by others, but he was certainly respected by them all. But he just drove very hard, and I don't think any of them had ever worked so hard in their lives. Some of us responded, you know, enthusiastically to it. I suppose others who had been there a long time might have resented it a little bit. I think the senators on the staff all respected him, and I think some of them hated his guts—like Curtis and Mundt probably.

GREENE: Did he attempt to camouflage the bitterness between them, or was it fairly evident?

SHERIDAN: I think it was fairly evident, except they were always overtly gentlemen about it. But, you know, there was no.... I think it was obvious. He was always very direct and would call them if he thought they were being dishonest. He was a very direct person.

GREENE: Well, I didn't mean to interrupt your....

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SHERIDAN: That's all right. But there's just so much to it, you know, that....

GREENE: I know. Today, I thought mainly if we could just get as much as we can on the organization and the relationships, it would be a good start.

SHERIDAN: You mean the committee?

GREENE: Yeah, and how he fit in. You know, how Robert Kennedy fit in to all these different investigations that were going on. What kinds of things did he work on personally?

SHERIDAN: He took an amazingly active role in that he always knew what everyone was doing and not only what they were doing, but the details of what they were doing and what they had to do yet and what they hadn't done yet, and what then was more important than what else.

I think the whole key to a successful committee like that is cutting through to what's really the guts of the matter—in the memos to him, being able to say it in two pages instead of ten; and in preparing for a hearing, knowing not only who were the key witnesses, but what they had to say that was key. The investigators necessarily had to make that original digest. He would then take what you gave him, plus your backup and what you had to prove it, and then he would distill that even further and pick what he thought was the, and rearrange the order of things. But, you know, his judgment was just excellent. He went out in the field, you know, a lot. He would come out and actually see and have meetings as to what was going on, what the problems were.

You mentioned that '53-'54 situation. What had happened was the first investigation of Hoffa and the Teamsters was undertaken by a House committee under....

GREENE: Smith [Wint Smith].

SHERIDAN: No, Smith was the counsel. Wint Smith was the chief counsel. But the chairman was....

GREENE: Senator Smith of Kansas?

SHERIDAN: No.

GREENE: Or Bender [George H. Bender], are you thinking of....

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SHERIDAN: No, Bender came later. I don't think Smith was the chairman of that. But it

was Wint Smith, and he was a congressman, I think, not a senator.

But anyway, the hearing was held in Detroit and it involved Hoffa's relationship with Allen Dorfman. It involved particularly a matter of a \$100,000 check that was missing. It was held just prior to Thanksgiving in 1953. They were getting close to what was wrong, and there was a telephone call from some place. Wint Smith went out and took it and came back and said, you know, "The hearing is adjourned," and later said he'd gotten a call from "On High." Then there's been speculation—and Drew Pearson wrote about it—that at that point, in return for getting the hearings called off, Hoffa became a Republican. Senator Ferguson [Homer S. Ferguson] of Michigan—gosh, it's so hard—was involved in it, either he then got Hoffa's support or he was instrumental in helping Hoffa. The Postmaster General was involved in that at the time—Summerfield [Arthur E. Summerfield], I think. But anyway the hearing died right there.

Then George Bender took it up in Ohio, I think, in '56. He started investigating "Babe" Triscaro [Louis Triscaro] and Bill Presser [William Presser] in Cleveland. And again, right in the middle of the hearing, it adjourned. It was supposed to be resumed in Washington and never was. It turned out that Bender, who was running for reelection, then got the Teamsters' support. We proved all this subsequently—in fact, I did—but, see, that didn't really happen until '58 when Hoffa appointed Bender to investigate the Teamsters Union. So I went out to investigate Bender. That's when we proved all this stuff.

GREENE: In this earlier, the '53 hearings, wasn't this ex-Governor Ratner [Payne H. Ratner] a major figure?

SHERIDAN: Well, it turns out he was, see, but we learned all this in retrospect because Payne Ratner was the governor of Kansas. Kansas?

GREENE: Kansas. Supposedly it was his "prestige" on Smith...

SHERIDAN: ...on Wint Smith that was very instrumental in this. I went out to Wichita and went through all of Ratner's files. He was very nice when I first went out and the longer I stayed the more agitated he got. I remember I was back there in his files one night, and Senator McClellan's, I think, third son [James H. McClellan] had just been killed.... He's got, I think, three or four sons killed, and this was the third one, or maybe the last one. One was killed going to another one's funeral. It was just a

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whole tragic story. But his third son had just been killed, and Ratner came storming in in his shirtsleeves and he looked terrible because he knew I was finding things. He just went into a rant and rage and ended up saying, "Well, I'm glad McClellan's son was killed. It serves him right." Then Bob and Bellino came out, and we had a meeting with Ratner. And he lied, but I had gotten some pretty good backing which we later hit him over the head with in the hearing.

The same was true in the Bender thing where we found this.... That's a whole other story. I'll tell you if you want to hear it.

GREENE: Sure.

SHERIDAN: See, all of this is retrospect proving what we had always known all along. But until you had a reason to get into it, you just didn't find it.

GREENE: What originally brought you into the '53 hearings with Smith and Ratner? That was the deal between the Republicans for the Michigan election?

SHERIDAN: In other words, why did I go to Wichita originally?

GREENE: Yeah.

SHERIDAN: I can't remember. It was something that came up on Ratner, and I just can't remember what it was. I can remember why I went into the Bender one, but I can't remember that.

GREENE: Yeah, that, too.

SHERIDAN: Bender, the reason for that was that in '58 after we'd been through the '57 hearing and the '58 hearing, Hoffa finally, in a public relations ploy, he hoped, decided that he was going to appoint his own internal investigating committee, he appointed George Bender the head of it. Well, of course, you knew as soon as he did that that it was a farce. So kind of to back that up, I went out to look into George Bender. I remember I was going to go out to Bill Presser's office. He was head of the Teamsters in Cleveland, and he was also head of the taxicab drivers local. So I got in the cab and said, "Take me to your leader," and he did. He just drove right out to the Teamsters' house. But in going through the files, I noticed this invoice which was...

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[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

SHERIDAN: So anyway, I was going through his files and I found an invoice which showed that Presser's local or the joint conference had at Christmastime, given something like eight or ten champagne buckets to a list of people, and they had the people listed. One of them was George Bender. Another one was the federal judge Connell [James C. Connell] out there, who's a good friend of theirs. One of them was Ray Bliss [Ray C. Bliss], the chairman of the Republican National Committee, but I don't think he was at that time.

So, anyway, it was just one of those things that tied them together, so I just made a note of it and made a note of some other things. Then I asked, I wanted to take the files with me, which you always tried to do if you could get away with it. They could always really resist if they wanted to. He didn't want to let them go, so he said he would photostat them

and I could come back and get them. I said, "Okay," and I gave him back the files. I gave him about five when all I wanted was about three pieces of paper in one of the files of the five. That was just to confuse him. So, he took them, and I went away.

I came back maybe a week later and went out. He said, "We haven't had time to photostat them. Here you just take them; I haven't even looked at them." So I took them and just casually went through. What I was really looking to see was if he'd taken out those papers. And sure enough I come to the invoice; and there's the invoice, and the bottom of it with the names on it had been torn off. I didn't say anything, but then I just put them all together and I said, "Bill, you didn't keep your word." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, they aren't the way I left them." He got a little flustered and he said, "Well, you have your job to do and I have mine." And I took them away. But I knew that the buckets had been ordered from a local place in Cleveland where I knew there had to be a copy of that invoice with the names on it. So I went directly to them, got the copy with the names on it, and later found out that the next morning he went there because he thought of it, too.

GREENE: Too slow.

SHERIDAN: But I already had it. We just had him caught cold. It was kind of a "nothing" case, but it was obstruction of justice. He had destroyed an invoice under subpoena, and he ended up going to jail for a year for it.

The other interesting thing about that case were these

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telephone toll calls which Bellino was bugs on, which I had never really used, but which I now have a great respect for because they show that this person called this person on such and such a day at such and such a time and talked for so long. After a while, with enough of them from enough different places, you can plot out chronologically just about where everybody is on a given day and who they're in contact with. This is why they always thought we were wiretapping, but we weren't.

In the trial of Presser, a couple of years later on this case, his defense came down to the fact that he wasn't in Cleveland on the day I said, on the days that those files were there so that he couldn't have been the one who tore that paper off. We had three toll tickets with calls from Hoffa to him on those days in Cleveland, person-to-person, which he had accepted, and he was convicted.

GREENE: Bellino was a crucial part of that team, wasn't he?

SHERIDAN: Oh yeah, absolutely. He's a genius at figures and in toll calls and has tremendous patience and durability. He would sit until one o'clock every morning, never leave the desk—just with that little pencil making out these chronologies and schedules. I couldn't do it, I wouldn't have the patience to do it. We had GAO [General Accounting Office] people who were doing the same thing, and they have that kind of patience. With that product you can really.... It serves as a great basis for leads, just what you get off of those chronologies. I'm a great believer in chronologies now.

GREENE: I have a number of other questions, but I think we ought to put them off because I know you want to go. The only thing I'd ask you to do is to help me in preparing for the next one.

SHERIDAN: On the committee, the best preparation is *The Enemy Within*, really, because it's got the guts of it in there.

GREENE: And, of course, what we're primarily interested in is Robert Kennedy's role and how he functioned within the group.

SHERIDAN: Right.

GREENE: So, I think if I can relisten to what you've put on here I can interpret it....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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