

Wilhelm Grewe Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 11/02/1966
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Biographical Note

(1911 - 2000) West German Ambassador to the United States (1957-1962); West German Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1962-1971), discusses diplomatic service in Washington, among other issues.

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By Dr. Wilhelm Grewe

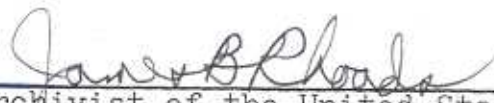
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Dr. Wilhelm Grewe


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Wilhelm Grewe – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

Dr. Wilhelm Grewe

November 2, 1966
Paris, France

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Mr. Ambassador, you can begin with the top of that list, or if you have any statement to begin with why you can go right ahead.

GREWE: I think the natural thing would be to start with my first meeting I had with Mr. Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], at that time not President Kennedy. It was back in 1958 or '59, I'm not quite sure. It was a luncheon at my residence in Washington, when a member of the German Bundestag came to discuss problems concerning foreign aid development assistance and things like that.

O'CONNOR: Who was that, by the way? Do you recall?

GREWE: Yes, it was a member of parliament who is now, unfortunately, dead. His name was Paul Leverkühn. He was a lawyer from Hamburg and a man interested in the problems of developing countries and foreign aid. That was a subject which interested the then Senator Kennedy very much and so we had a luncheon, the three of us, in my home, and that was my first meeting with him. I don't remember any details of this conversation, only that it was a very agreeable atmosphere and an interesting talk. Then, of course, I followed very closely the electoral campaign in 1960, which was a very fascinating experience for a foreign observer in your country. I still remember my own prediction for the outcome of the elections.

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O'CONNOR: I still remember that too, as a matter of fact.

GREWE: You do?

O'CONNOR: You predicted that John Kennedy would win, did you not?

GREWE: Yes, that's correct, but how could you know?

O'CONNOR: Well, because I've been doing some research on this and investigated back into it and found out that you had.

GREWE: I see. Well, indeed, two weeks before the election day I got the feeling from some telegrams which I received from Bonn that they expected me to give a certain prediction, which up to that time I had tried to avoid.

[Laughter] But then I thought it was inevitable and so I sat down and wrote a telegram. In this telegram I said, "This is a very close race, indeed. It is one of the closest races which ever happened in the United States and even Mr. Gallup [George Gallup] does not know what to predict," because this was in this small margin where even the polls do not precisely answer your questions. And so I said, "You can't expect me to be more prophetic than Mr. Gallup is, but if in the meantime, from now on, you have to make some decisions and to base them on the assumption that either Mr. Kennedy or Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] should win, please base your assumptions on the victory of Mr. Kennedy." That was the kind of prediction I gave and it seems that it was not too bad.

Then, of course, there is the question "What did we expect from a Kennedy victory." I think this point is on top of your list. Perhaps I should make some remarks on this subject. What did we expect? Well, we did expect a certain change of American policy vis á vis Europe, and in particular vis á vis my own country, Germany. And the kind of changes we expected was that United States policy would be more oriented toward detente with the East, United States-Soviet talks on possible accommodations. In this direction some of the residential advisors of his pre-presidential time—men like Wiesner [Jerome B. Wiesner], Rostow [Walt Whitman Rostow], et cetera—had traveled in the Soviet Union, and they participated in some meetings in the Soviet Union shortly before the election. It was a Pugwash conference or something similar, I don't quite remember what it was,

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but I got rather full reports on what happened there. From the remarks they made and from the proposals and suggestions they discussed, I got a certain picture of what type of thinking might be the dominant factor in the future administration. This was, of course, on that line, make a new effort for detente, and try, for instance, to achieve a certain accommodation on the Berlin problem. In November and December, I still remember there were many

discussions in Washington on a possible, what they called, “Berlin border deal” at that time, which meant that we should definitely recognize the Oder-Neisse Line in exchange for a new Berlin settlement or something like that—ideas which were discussed at this private conference I just mentioned. So this was the type of thinking we expected from the new administration, a policy which would be, at least in theory more oriented in the status quo in Europe. All that was, as you will understand, not a hundred percent what Bonn liked at that time. So as far as my own judgment at that time was concerned, I reported to my government that it might be better to have such a program executed by a strong and dynamic president than a theoretically strong program executed by a weak or controversial president. And so...

O'CONNOR: Did you have in mind Vice President Nixon at that time? In other words were you suggesting perhaps....

GREWE: I don't want to call names here. In any case, this was kind of my argument. The conclusion was, this will be a very forceful and dynamic new president, even if not all of his ideas are very convenient for us. On balance it will be better for the West to have a strong president than a weak one or somebody who is not firm in his ideas, so don't be too pessimistic with the outcome. This was quite important because there was a strong faction in Bonn which had more sympathies with Vice President Nixon and favored his victory. There were some important political figures keeping this view—amongst them Chancellor Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer] and men like Strauss [Franz Josef Strauss] and so on. So I tried a little bit to counterbalance this trend in Bonn with my own reports.

It was in the same line that the last day before the elections—that means on the seventh day of November, 1960—I decided to go to Boston and to parti-

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cipate in Mr. Kennedy's last election speech before the crucial day. And this last speech was to be in Boston. As there were no election events in Washington, D.C., you see, I was very much interested to really see such an assembly and how it worked and what kind of speeches were delivered and so on. So against the advice of my own advisors within the embassy, who told me that an ambassador should never go to such type of rallies because if he wasn't sure who would win it would be very risky.... [Laughter] But then I thought it might be a good thing to go, and I did, and it was very interesting indeed. It was a crowd of I don't know how many thousands in a very big hall in Boston, and people were waiting for hours and hours because Mr. Kennedy was late. Finally he came—I think it was between nine or ten in the evening—made a very short speech, twenty minutes or so, and that it was. It was a very concentrated and dynamic speech, and the people were completely enthusiastic, and I think the purpose was achieved. As far as I was concerned, I later learned that my presence in Boston became known to Mr. Kennedy and he appreciated my interest in his election campaign.

Well, then there was the time between the election and the inauguration. I still remember the last day before the inauguration was this tremendous snow storm in

Washington where everybody was blocked in his car. So was I for several hours, only a few hundred yards from my embassy, but I couldn't return. Then the next day, in a brisk cold before the Capitol, the inauguration was a very impressive ceremony, and later on the parade on—where was it?

O'CONNOR: Pennsylvania Avenue.

GREWE: Yes, Pennsylvania Avenue. My neighbor at all those ceremonies was always the Soviet ambassador because—for years this was the fact—he had presented his credentials one day before I did. So in the order of the State Department protocol there was always the Soviet ambassador and then the German ambassador. In every line, you see—and we were lined up all the time—always I was standing and chatting with the Soviet ambassador.

O'CONNOR: Did he [Mikhail A. Menshikov] give you any impressions of his attitude towards the election of John Kennedy?

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GREWE: Well, I think he was...

O'CONNOR: He's one man we won't be able to interview.

GREWE: [Laughter] You won't. I see. Well, I think, in general, he was probably more critical to Mr. Nixon than he was to Mr. Kennedy. He was not very explicit on the subject, but that was my feeling. Well, then after the inauguration day normal business started. The first half year of my relations with the new president were, at least from my viewpoint, excellent, very harmonious, and we had a series of very good talks. It was not too difficult to get him for a talk. In those conversations, it was much more substantial than ever before under President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], and you really could discuss with him problems. So I was very impressed by this style of his handling the business there.

Then the first visitors came from Germany—I mean, prominent official visitors—Mr. von Brentano [Heinrich von Brentano] in February. It was the first foreign minister's visit to the new administration. I just found a few notes which at least indicate the subjects of those talks. They were, as you will understand, Berlin, which was in the foreground all the time; then relations with Poland. That means American relations with Poland and German relations with Poland, a strong desire expressed by President Kennedy to improve relations with Poland, and he wanted very much to do us the same thing. Then a famous subject which is very acute at the present time—balance of payments in connection with stationing of American forces in Germany. But in comparison with the present stand of the American administration, Mr. Kennedy was very first to say that the German support for the American balance of payments was not a bargaining point and had no direct connection with the stationing of forces in Germany.

O'CONNOR: President Kennedy had made, I think, even before the visit of Foreign Minister von Brentano, some criticism, though, of Germany with regard to the balance of payments problem, hadn't he? I thought that had initially perhaps caused a bit of strain between the United States and Germany.

GREWE: Well, this is an eternal problem. If you have troops of this dimension stationed in a foreign

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country, then you have problems like that. At the same time, there was a certain criticism that we should increase our foreign aid, and this coincided. Foreign aid was the next item on the list of the talks with Mr. von Brentano, and the last item was disarmament. And here, in this connection, President Kennedy stressed that he was very much occupied with Berlin and he considered Berlin one of the crucial problems. Anyway he seemed to regret to have to deal with this problem in addition to many others which he had at hand, like Laos, and so on. But then at the end he stressed very much that even being occupied so much with Berlin one should never forget other problems which perhaps would open a better out-look to the future, like disarmament and things like that.

Well, then in April, there was the first Adenauer visit to the new administration. I can't go into the details of what happened there. Again Berlin was very much in the foreground, as I well remember. But perhaps it's more interesting to give a short characteristic of what seemed to be Mr. Kennedy's attitude towards Mr. Adenauer and what their relationship was. In my view, and as far as I could observe, it was a mixture of rather strong admiration for Mr. Adenauer as a historical figure in European history during the last decade; in connection with that, a very marked personal respect which he showed to him; but also, on the other hand, of course, a remarkable, let me say, distance from the way of thinking, and a certain reserve as to the—what he might have considered too rigid—views of the chancellor and criticism like that, which of course he never expressed as I do it now but you could feel a little bit of this sentiment. But in general, I think they got along quite well at his first visit, and Adenauer certainly was rather impressed at the end of his visit. He had to undergo a certain revision of his views, and I think he did. I still remember, in driving to the airport, that he expressed such feelings that this was a very important meeting for him and that he corrected a series of views or prejudices which he might have had before.

O'CONNOR: The views that he may have had before, did they stem primarily from what John Kennedy or his advisors had said before the election or had

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they been influenced by actions of the president after the election, in other words between January and April 1961?

GREWE: This is very difficult to decide.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I didn't know if you would really know.

GREWE: It's probably a combination, you see. As I said before, there was a certain trend in Bonn before the elections already painting Mr. Kennedy in a certain way as somebody who had the idea to start a new foreign policy and a new era of American-Soviet relations and all that. Then a little later, it was probably there were some impressions from his first speeches and so on.

Then, in order to conclude my remarks on this first period of our relations, I think all... Oh yes, I would like to mention one other rendezvous I had with the president. As a matter of fact, it was my first talk with him after this luncheon in '58 or '59, which I mentioned. There was a reception for the diplomatic corps given in the White House early in February 1961, only a fortnight after the inauguration. Oh, there were more than one hundred diplomats to it. Afterwards when the receiving line was dissolved, the president talked with some ambassadors and so he did with me and for quite a while. I think the reason or the explanation was that he got some reports on my activities, including my activities as a writer. I just published a book at that time. He got some reports on those activities by one of his assistants, which was Mr. Holborn, Jr [Frederick L. Holborn]. So in this discussion, he mentioned this book and even gave the impression that he had read it, which certainly couldn't be the case, but he managed quite well. So this was really my first discussion with Mr. Kennedy as president of the United States.

O'CONNOR: That's a very interesting little episode.

GREWE: Yes, I think it was a very good opening, and at least I had the feeling that it was one. I think this feeling prevailed for the first half of 1961. It was only in August, or beginning with August '61, that we got in a little more troubled water as a consequence of the Berlin crisis.

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In August '61 I had two of my daughters from Germany visiting in the United States. I spent a few weeks with them in western Virginia, and later near Lake Erie. It was a little south of Lake Erie that I got the news of the erection of the wall in Berlin on the thirteenth of August. As a matter of fact, I had a speaking engagement on the fourteenth of August at that place on the same subject, namely on Berlin.

O'CONNOR: I suppose that required quite a bit of rewriting, or did you make that speech?

GREWE: Yes, yes, I did. I did although I got an urgent telephone call from Washington to come back at once. So I made a compromise. I made my speech, I think it was, at eleven o'clock in the morning, and I ordered a

special private airplane. Immediately after having concluded my speech, I entered this airplane and flew to Washington and came there in time to attend the first meeting of the so-called ambassadorial group after the erection of the wall.

Well, then began a rather difficult diplomatic period. We had this ambassadorial group in Washington, and their German and American views were not always a hundred percent identical. In order to give a certain idea of the differences, I think it was.... The main difference was that U.S. policy at that time was to restrict the American engagement over there on the status quo in West Berlin, and no longer to insist on Western rights in East Berlin, whereas for many years it was the policy that the rights of the occupation powers extended not only to West Berlin but to Berlin as a whole. Well, it was a policy which everybody will understand as practical from the American viewpoint. We didn't quite like it, and there were some of the first points of difference. Also I got the feeling that President Kennedy, not at the very first day, really realized what the erection of the wall meant to the Berliners and to the Germans over there, and that perhaps only in the course of further days did he realize the full importance of this event. Also I got the feeling that sometimes he was not absolutely sure himself whether it was appropriate to preserve a completely passive attitude at that time, or whether one should have tried a more active policy to prevent the erection of the wall. Of course, he never expressed any precise view of that but he very often put questions and said, "Well, do

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you feel that we should have handled this business otherwise," and so on. This question he very often repeated, and from that I got the impression that at least it was a question with which he was very much occupied.

O'CONNOR: Did you or Chancellor Adenauer feel that President Kennedy was rather weak in this particular instance in not pursuing perhaps a stronger policy at the time of the erection of the wall?

GREWE: Mr. Adenauer certainly was not of the opinion, and there was no responsible German politician who had made such demands at that time. It was only later that many people suddenly said, "Shouldn't the Americans have been more active at this stage, and why didn't they do this and that, and so on?"

O'CONNOR: I wondered if American hesitancy at that time had really contributed in Mr. Adenauer's view, or your own view, to a feeling of mistrust perhaps of the president? Mistrust or a feeling of his unwillingness to...

GREWE: No, I wouldn't think that this was an important point. I mean, in connection with the whole event there were some elements of difference and misunderstanding. For instance, there was one remark of the president which we didn't really very much like and which has a little bit poisoned the atmosphere. It was a remark which he made a few days after the erection of the wall and when he said,

“After all, the East Germans have had more than fifteen years to reflect whether they wanted to stay in East Germany or to go to the West.” This was a remark which has a little bit troubled the atmosphere. I'm sure that from our side there have also been some remarks which had the same effect on his side. This is something which happens in such a time and which one can regret afterwards, but it's very difficult to avoid entirely such things.

At least, we got, as I indicated before, in more troubled waters, and the water was even more troubled by some remarks made by prominent American politicians which were not members of the administration—I mean some senators. Mr. Fulbright [J. William Fulbright], already before the erection of the wall, had given an interview and expressed the view that the East Germans were perfectly justified in

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erecting such a wall to separate their sector from the West. There were some remarks by the Majority Leader, Mr. Mansfield [Mike Mansfield], promoting the *de facto* recognition of East Germany and the *de jure* recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line, and the substitution of the occupation status in Berlin by some contractual arrangements and by a UN guarantee, and things like that. We didn't like very much this trend of public discussion because we felt it weakened our position vis á vis the Soviets. This was the reason why I followed some invitations to participate in TV interviews in the United States in the course of September and early October. In those TV interviews, I tried to explain the position of my government and where we felt we couldn't make concessions and where there was room for concessions and so on. In the course of this public discussion, I think there were some more differences coming up with the White House, at least with the press section of the White House, Mr. Salinger [Pierre E. G. Salinger] and company. So at least in the second half of 1961, there was not quite as complete harmony which prevailed in the first half of '61.

O'CONNOR: Were there any particularly personal problems, personalities that you, for example, did not get along with very well among the president's aides—for example, Mr. Salinger or others that were there? I wondered, in other words, if personality problems entered into this in 1961.

GREWE: There was a theory that being a former professor and intellectual myself, I couldn't get along with the presidential intellectual advisors. I don't think that this theory was correct. I always had very good relations with men like Rostow and Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] and so on, and so I think this theory was not quite correct. I found it sometimes more difficult to get along with some of the diplomatic officials of the State Department.

Furthermore, in the course of 1961, I very often had—this was a consequence of the situation—to comment on some legal questions involved in the Berlin situation. After all, Berlin had a very complicated legal status evolving from the 1945 situation, so-called four power status, and later on this whole business with the Paris treaties. It was a very complicated arrangement, an arrangement which was largely created by the four or the three governments—the four, I mean, the three western

powers plus the Soviet Union, or later on in the case of the Paris treaties, the three Western powers. In fall '61, I sometimes had great difficulties to explain also the legal implications to an administration whose predecessors had created this system, but who no longer really knew this system and liked it very much. And so this was probably the background for remarks which were made at that time, that I was too legalistic in my conversations with Mr. Kennedy.

Well, then coming to the last phase—that means early 1962...

O'CONNOR: Before you go on to that could I something about ...

GREWE: Yes?

O'CONNOR: You participated, I presume, in that ambassadorial group concerning Berlin from the time of its beginning. I mean, it was begun before the Kennedy administration.

GREWE: Yes.

O'CONNOR: I was wondering if there was any difference, major differences, in the way it functioned prior to the Kennedy administration and during the Kennedy administration, whether it functioned more smoothly or more effectively, whether there was any difference, whether it had more importance during the Kennedy administration than it had prior to the Kennedy administration, or what.

GREWE: Well, I think the main difference was that under the Kennedy administration, we were occupied with more burning day-to-day problems. The time before, we tried to develop long-range plans for the reunification of Germany and the future status of Berlin in a more theoretical way. But in 1961, the whole thing suddenly became the centerpiece of a major international crisis and so it suddenly changed its character completely.

O'CONNOR: Was the ambassadorial group an effective group in handling this problem? I mean, this was a day-to-day problem, as you say, rather than, as before, a theoretical problem, or a long-term problem.

GREWE: Well, I think it was not an ideal, but a workable machinery for crisis management adapted to this specific kind of crisis we had at that time.

O'CONNOR: Was it actually a decision making body or was it more a body to make known decisions that had already been made to the representative governments.

GREWE: Well, ambassadors never make decisions of their own. They always depend on instructions from their home governments, and so it was here. So in agreeing on the main lines of how to handle the problems and what practical measures should be taken and so on, we had, of course, to get our instructions from the capitals and so we did. This does not exclude some questions of detail or where we had larger powers from our governments. We could make decisions, but this was always in the framework of a specific authorization. At that time governments were very cautious to give too much authorization to their ambassadors.

O'CONNOR: Particularly on the Berlin problem, I suppose.

GREWE: Yes. Well, that's the time of the ambassadorial group. Now let's come to the end of my term in Washington. That means the first half of 1962.

O'CONNOR: Of course, there also was another meeting of Chancellor Adenauer to Washington in the late 1961.

GREWE: Yes, that's correct.

O'CONNOR: I wonder if Chancellor Adenauer's feelings toward President Kennedy had changed considerably or at all in the interim period, and what the effect of that meeting was, whether or not it soothed any doubts that he might have had or actually intensified any.

GREWE: I think in general it was a meeting which was more difficult than the first one, the April meeting, because in November '61 we had to review the results of the exploratory talks undertaken by Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk] with Mr. Gromyko [Andrei Andreevich Gromyko]. The first lines

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of a possible compromise project were developed at that time with the later access authority to Berlin, and things like that. So I think in general this November meeting was a more difficult and strained meeting, but I do not recall that at the very end there was any kind of bad feeling or dissatisfaction or things like that. I wouldn't say so.

O'CONNOR: I wondered because as I had been told Chancellor Adenauer was very much worried by President Kennedy's meeting, earlier meeting, with Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] in Vienna. I wondered if he

had talked to you about that particular meeting, if he had shown considerable anxiety at that meeting, and whether or not this had...

GREWE: Well, Adenauer was a man who was always full of distrust if there were talks in which he didn't participate, [Laughter] whoever made such talks, you see. I think that's a characteristic feature of such old men. So it may well be that the Vienna talks really did disturb him, and that for a long while he was not quite sure what really happened and whether or not President Kennedy really did not give up any essential positions.

O'CONNOR: Did you feel that way about that meeting?

GREWE: About the Vienna meeting?

O'CONNOR: Yes.

GREWE: No, I don't think so. I got the feeling that the substance of the Vienna conversations did not move in any way the situation to one or the other direction, and it was important only insofar as it was the first personal meeting between Mr. Khrushchev and President Kennedy. It was difficult to guess whether Mr. Khrushchev was or was not impressed by the personality of his counter-part, and that nobody really could know.

So may I switch over to '62?

O'CONNOR: Sure, we can go on to '62.

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GREWE: In 1962 I had two meetings with President Kennedy, which both in a way were not very fortunate. The first one was in February. I came back from Bonn and I had a very long conversation with him in his private apartment in the White House with a cup of tea, and so it was quite relaxed in a way and in itself a very agreeable conversation. During the last ten or fifteen minutes we discussed the question, which for many years was a point of difference between the two governments, and that was the question of the former German assets. This little piece of the conversation later on led to some misunderstanding and confusion, and so this meeting, which at the very day I considered to be a very agreeable and fruitful one, later on left obviously some misunderstandings on both sides and was not so good as I thought.

Something similar happened early in April. In February Mr. Kennedy complained very much of some remarks made in public by Chancellor Adenauer and Mr. Strauss. He complained that both men had expressed some distrust vis á vis the United States and so on, and this was not justified, and that I should report, and I did. I went over to Bonn and I returned with some explanations which I tried to deliver to the president, but it was difficult to get an appointment. When I got an appointment together with Mr. Mende [Erich Mende],

the vice chancellor in mid March, I didn't have any opportunity to switch over to this subject during that meeting. So we had to arrange a new rendezvous and that was only on the third of April. That means six weeks later than the first conversation, where the president raised his complaint.

O'CONNOR: Why would it have been so much more difficult during the first half of 1962 than it had been in '61? Could it have been a result of previous disagreements, such as the disagreement on the German assets, or was it the result of influence of State Department officials?

GREWE: I don't know.

O'CONNOR: Because that is one of the puzzles I had hoped to ask you about, that why.... I had heard that there was some difficulty in your seeing the president in 1962 and I didn't really understand what the reason for the difficulty would have been.

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GREWE: Well, maybe it was a consequence of what preceded. That I don't know for sure. In any case, it was six weeks later. And when I tried to give all the answers, the explanations to the complaints which the president had made six weeks earlier, he seemed no longer to remember what the complaints were. So this discussion was a little futile. If there is somebody who offers some explanations and excuses to a point which you don't remember, then it's not very sensible to go on. This was my last official rendezvous with the president, and it was not very fortunate because I had no other point to discuss. I was under instructions to give all those explanations to the president, but the president seemed no longer interested to hear them because he had forgotten what the complaints were.

A little later, there was a time of considerable stress or even tension between Bonn and Washington because of some leaks which had happened.

O'CONNOR: This was in connection with the negotiations in Geneva between the Soviet Union and....

GREWE: Yes. It started with a paper which I got from the State Department on the ninth of April on the access authority and the negotiations with the Russians. We got the paper with the comment that it should be delivered in a few days to the Russians and that we should speed up to make our comments. That we didn't feel to be quite adequate because it was a very important decision to be made and we felt it was impossible to set a deadline of forty-eight hours or so for making such difficult decisions. We didn't see the reason why the time to reflect had to be so short. A little later, on the thirteenth of April, I think it was, I got my instructions from Bonn to reply to the State Department with respect to these papers. My instructions were rather tough. They rejected the

papers with respect to several points. So at the State Department, nobody was very pleased with this demarche.

O'CONNOR: Who did you have to give this to, by the way? Who did you see in connection in receiving the papers and in giving...

GREWE: Foy Kohler [Foy D. Kohler]. He was the opposite number in the State Department at that time. He was in charge

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of the European Desk, and also he had a special mandate to conduct the negotiations in the ambassadorial group. Sometimes Chip Bohlen [Charles E. Bohlen] was present; sometimes Mr. Thompson [Llewellyn E. Thompson, Jr.] or somebody else. On the same day when I carried out my instructions from Bonn, there was this leak of the German objections. Of course, it was very embarrassing for me because the embassy is always in the danger to be suspected to be responsible for such a leak. Looking backwards, I think I can swear that it was not the embassy. The source of the leaks has been at another place. And in any case...

O'CONNOR: When you said another place, were you referring to Bonn? Do you have any suspicions about that?

GREWE: Well, this is one of the likely possibilities, I must say, yes. In any case it was a very embarrassing situation for me, and I still remember the rather lively conversation with Foy Kohler on the telephone on that subject. I was outraged myself because it weakened my position considerably. I didn't like this method, but I had to bear the consequences. A short time later the two governments, through the American embassy in Bonn and the officials of the Foreign Ministry, decided to talk at another place on the same subject, no longer in Washington. That, of course, didn't please my embassy very much. Also I got the feeling that my government was retreating from the very strong objections they had made on the thirteenth of April, and so I cabled to Bonn, "If you want to retreat, it's quite all right with me, but please let me be present if you retreat and when you retreat. Otherwise I would be the black man here in Washington and I don't like to be in this situation." But exactly that happened. The retreat took place at a meeting between Mr. Rusk and Mr. Schroeder [Gerhardt Schroeder] in Athens at the Athens NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Conference in April '62, where I was not present. I think this left the feeling that the embassy in Washington was stiffer than the Bonn government on the same project. So quite a lot of things came together to create an atmosphere which was not too pleasant in April, '62.

I felt that it would be better to resign, to make room for a new beginning, and to let both sides forget what happened during this last half year. Before I could act correspondingly, Chancellor Adenauer in a public

speech in Berlin announced that there should be a retirement in Washington. "Certain complications can arise," he said, "in which an innocent man who has done his duty, has to go, where a change must take place." So I spent most of the summer in Europe and, after winding up my duties, left in September, 1962.

I think my last visit to President Kennedy was in the first days of September '62. This last rendezvous was again a rather pleasant one. Everybody tried to forget what had happened before. And I still preserve as a souvenir some very nice photos showing the president together with me in the garden of the White House. It was not my last personal meeting with the president. I had one other opportunity one year later. That was in spring 1963.

O'CONNOR: When President Kennedy came to Germany?

GREWE: No, it was after the NATO Conference in Ottawa. After Ottawa, the NATO ambassadors, the whole NATO Council together with the Secretary General, Mr. Stikker [Dirk U. Stikker] at that time, were invited by the United States government to see military installations all over the country. And so we saw quite a lot of military installations—Minutemen and Titan installations and whatever it was. This round trip ended in Washington. All the NATO ambassadors were received by President Kennedy and he addressed them, and then we had a short discussion in his room in the White House. At the end, he came to greet me very personally, and that was the last time I saw him. I was not present when he came to Bonn and to Berlin in the summer of '63. I was then here in Paris. So the last opportunity to see him was this one in spring '63 in Washington.

O'CONNOR: You said you had dealings with Foy Kohler in connection with the ambassadorial group and as far as negotiations between Germany and the United States were concerned. Did your relations with Foy Kohler show the same cycle, in effect, that your relations with the president did? In other words, were there difficulties with Foy Kohler or with other people in the State Department at essentially the same time as the difficulties with President Kennedy existed?

GREWE: I think there was a certain parallelism.

O'CONNOR: Were there any other people in the State Department with whom you may have had difficulties at one time or another? You joked earlier in the session that you sometimes got along better with President Kennedy's intellectuals than you did with officials at the State Department.

GREWE: Yes, but here I'm going to report on my relations to President Kennedy. I'm not so very much eager to talk on a number of other people.

O'CONNOR: You were talking, sir, about your meeting with President Kennedy on the German assets problem. What problem did you have?

GREWE: It was in my conversation on the nineteenth of February where I tried to convince him that we had worked out a solution for the German assets problem which would offer a rather smooth solution, a solution which in a way would satisfy people in Germany without burdening something new on the American taxpayer. It was a scheme in connection with the repayment of the German post-war debts. We tried to link those two problems in a certain way in order to satisfy our people in Germany, to eliminate this point of difference between the two nations without, as I said before, burdening something new on the American budget or the American taxpayer. And at the same time, there was another financial problem which did not concern us but which was of some concern for the United States government.

O'CONNOR: The UN bonds?

GREWE: It was the problem of the UN bonds, yes. In this discussion President Kennedy suddenly said, "Well, I will study your proposal concerning the German assets. I can understand that it gives you some trouble, trouble within the field of domestic politics and so on, and so I will reflect whether or not something can be done. But if we do something about that, your government also could do something which would help me in my own domestic troubles. I have some domestic trouble here with the UN bonds affair, and if the Bonn government would be prepared to sign a certain amount of UN bonds, it would be a very good example and it would strengthen my position here vis á vis the congress." This was a very surprising idea to everybody in the room. Present were Secretary Rusk and Mr.

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Hillenbrand [Martin Hillenbrand], and on my side my counselor, Mr. Schnippenkoetter [Swidbert Schnippenkoetter], who is now the German Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs. Mr. Rusk at once said, "Well, Mr. President, but is there any link between the two problems?" "No, no," the president answered, "there is no link, of course. The only link is that they have some domestic trouble there and I have some domestic trouble here, and therefore this is the only connection between the two problems." Then Secretary Rusk asked me the question, "How much money is involved in the assets problem and how much money is involved in the UN bonds problem?" I think Mr. Hillenbrand gave the answer and it was quite obvious that there was no proportion at all. The President made it quite clear that the proportion between the amount of money needed here and needed there.... There was only the idea of domestic trouble here and there and helping each other. So the conversation ended.

Two days later I had a meeting with Mr. Rusk on another matter and I asked him, "Well, Mr. Secretary, the president had this interesting idea the other day. What do you feel about it? Is there something in it which is serious?" Now Mr. Kohler was present, who did

not participate in the meeting with the president and Kohler said, "What is this strange proposal to link those problems which have nothing to do with each other?" Then Mr. Rusk told him, "Please be quiet. I will explain you later how it happened and why the president had this idea." After having left the room, I talked with Kohler and said, "You see, this was how it happened. It was casually that the president suddenly mentioned the UN bonds affairs and domestic troubles in both countries. I myself feel there is no real link between the two problems, but he mentioned it this way, and if you would like to check how it happened, please have a look into your protocol." Then he said, "That I did and there is no word in the protocol about this whole thing." Now I was very much amazed and I said, "How could this happen? Mr. Schnippenkoetter, who was with me, has written down every word and I can show you what we have written down." Then I said to him, "Please call Mr. Hillenbrand and let's know what he has to say because he was the man to take the notes." Then Hillenbrand was called and I asked the question, "Don't you remember what happened at the president's room when we had this conversation?" Then he said, "Yes, but..."

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[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE II]

GREWE: ...I didn't write down this remark because I thought it was a joke." Well, then I said, "I didn't have the feeling it was a joke and I'm quite sure that Mr. Rusk at that time did not have the feeling it was a joke. Even today Mr. Rusk did not have the feeling it was a joke because he said to Mr. Kohler, 'Be quiet. I will explain it a little later,' and so on. But if this is the situation I have no further comment, but I want to talk again to Mr. Rusk." Next day I came again and talked to Mr. Rusk and said, "Well, let's set the situation. Mr. Hillenbrand didn't write down what was said because he thought it was a joke. Do you too also feel it was a joke?" Then Mr. Rusk said, "How ever that may have been, in any case, I telephoned with the president this morning and he is not aware to have made a proposal linking the two problems together." Then I said, "This is the situation and there's nothing to add. Let's forget about it." This was the end of the negotiations on the German assets.

A little later I was called by Mr. Ball [George W. Ball] and told that there was no longer any prospect to get a positive settlement of this question, and from that time on, it was never again the subject of discussion or negotiation. This was a very mysterious affair. Perhaps it sounds very strange to you or to anybody to whom it is told, but that's what happened. Even today I do not believe there was a joke. But from that day on, I had to read in American newspapers that this man, the German ambassador, lacked a sense of humor because he reported things to his government which were meant only as a joke.

[-END OF INTERVIEW]

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