

**Richard Flood Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 12/12/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Richard Flood

**Interviewer:** Edwin Martin

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**Biographical Note**

Flood was a friend and classmate of Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., at Harvard, 1935–1938, and a friend of John F. Kennedy [JFK]; he also worked on JFK's congressional campaign in 1946 and Senate campaign in 1952. In this interview he discusses his friendship with Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.; the relationship, similarities, and differences between JFK and his older brother while together at Harvard; his interactions with JFK at Harvard, during WWII, and later on up until 1963; his experiences working on JFK's 1946 congressional campaign and 1952 Senate campaign; and his impressions of some of JFK's work as a politician, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

With

RICHARD FLOOD

December 12, 1964  
Boston, Massachusetts

By Edwin Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: Dick, your memory of the Kennedys goes back to when?

FLOOD: Oh, I'd say in the fall of 1935, when I was a freshman at Harvard. At that time I got to know Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.]. The previous year he was the chairman of the Harvard Smoker Committee. And the following year I was chairman, and I called upon him for some help. And from that beginning, why, our friendship gradually grew.

MARTIN: Did you have a rather close relationship with him all the way through Harvard?

FLOOD: Well, he was a year ahead of me at college. He was in the class of '38, and I was in the class of '39. We had a close friendship during undergraduate years—going to the Cape and going out evenings and, oh, a number of things. Then he went to Europe the year following his graduation. Then he returned to law school in '39 and we both roomed together. We were each in the same class at Harvard Law School and lived up at the Bay State Apartments at 1572 Massachusetts Avenue. Through law school, of course, we were very, very close. We lived in the same apartment together and couldn't be much closer.

MARTIN: What type of a student was he, scholastically?

FLOOD: He was a good student. I think he liked the law. He applied himself to it quite diligently, and I think he would have been an excellent lawyer. He rated, you know, pretty high in his class. At that time why, of course, there was pretty stiff competition over at the law school.

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MARTIN: Do you think that was his direction or did he indicate to you what eventual career he might be heading toward? His connection with politics right near the end of his senior year was becoming, I think, a delegate to the National Convention, wasn't it?

FLOOD: Yes, in 1940. Well, he never specifically said to me what his goal was, but he was awfully close to his dad [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] and thought the world of his dad and followed all of his dad's connections with government. Of course, he spent that year, after graduating in '38 in Europe following all the goings-on there leading up to World War II. But he had a great way with meeting people, and it seemed to me that he had the political interest, definitely. I mean, he used to go over to see John F. [John F. Fitzgerald] at the Bellevue every Sunday at least. He got to know everybody around Cambridge, and he met people well—a big smile and, "Hello."

MARTIN: He was an extrovert?

FLOOD: Definitely, definitely. One thing he did which I think might be a pretty good clue, he took up public speaking over at Staley School. I went over there, and we took a course; so that was a tip-off, I think, that he was looking forward to politics.

MARTIN: You knew the father fairly well?

FLOOD: No, I didn't know the father too well. I met him on a couple of occasions, particularly during the first congressional campaign that the President [John F. Kennedy] was involved in. I met him there and you know through Commissioner Timilty [Joseph P. Timilty]. They were in Boston at the time. But I didn't know the dad too, too well.

MARTIN: Well, you know, there's a legend that was persisted that the father always had directions for his oldest son, that he was planning, or going to groom the oldest son to be President. If this is so, this would manifest itself sometime along about his law school career. Was there any indication in your association with him that he had discussed such a plan?

FLOOD: Well, not to me. I know that he followed his dad quite closely. I know that

when Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] came to Massachusetts he went out with John F. to meet him. I know that he ran for delegate. I know that in that Convention out there he held to his pledge to Farley [James A. Farley]. I knew all these things that he was doing. Later on, in reading I think an essay that Harold Laski wrote about him—I think Joe

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was over there before he went to Harvard, and he studied under Harold Laski for about a year. As a matter of fact, I think he went to Moscow with Laski. In his comments I think he said that Joe would never be satisfied with less than, you know, being in the White House. And I think he also ended his remarks by saying “Well, alas, he may not enter the White House, but he’s entering that great immortality where so many people who fought for freedom are entering.” So way back there then, before he was at Harvard, evidently there was some feeling made known to Harold Laski, but I had no indication that that was his ultimate objective.

MARTIN: Dick, you mentioned going down to the Cape with him during those college years....

FLOOD: Yes, we used to love to go down to the Cape, especially in the spring. I guess it’s the old story of pushing the season. We’d probably meet down there at Elliot House and have a hamburg and a cup of coffee and head out for the Cape at about, oh, 8 o’clock, and go down there before the house was opened, and we’d stay up in the quarters over the garage. He loved to go down there, and we went there on many weekends.

MARTIN: What was he like socially?

FLOOD: Well, he was a good-looking, clean-cut chap, good head of hair and broad shoulders, athletic, all-American type, with a wonderful smile. He met everybody well. He knew the yard policemen at Harvard, the valets, and Snowball and everybody. He met them well, and they all liked him. It was the same at law school. I think that he certainly could meet people and make friends quickly and keep them. It seemed to me that most of the friends he had, they stuck with him. I would say that he really could meet people well and make friends, and they liked him. He had a lot of charm. But by the same token, I mean, he had a temper, he could have a hot temper at times, and he wouldn’t take any unnecessary fooling. But for the most part, I’d say he met people very, very well.

MARTIN: Now, Dick, your first occasion, can you recall meeting the President at Harvard?

FLOOD: Yes. I first met him I think in Winthrop House. He lived down there with Torb Macdonald [Torbert H. Macdonald] and there was Charlie Houghton

[Charles G. Houghton] and Ben Smith [Benjamin A. Smith, II] and a group there. Joe lived in Winthrop House, and I lived in Lowell House, which was right next door. I used to go across and frequent them. We ate in the dining room, over

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there at Winthrop House, so my first meeting with him was when he moved into Winthrop House as a sophomore, and I would be a junior, at that time, and Joe would have been a senior.

MARTIN: Now there was an age gap, which would be important, at that time of their lives, between Joe and Jack.

FLOOD: Yes. I don't know exactly what the age gap was, but I think it was three years or so, I'd guess. I'm not sure what the age difference is.

MARTIN: The result of which I should imagine would be that Jack had his own circle of friends which was somewhat younger than Joe's.

FLOOD: Oh, definitely. Joe had been at Harvard for years earlier and had made friends with an older group, his people in his class, and Jack came along later with his circle of friends.

MARTIN: Well, was there any association between the two brothers? I mean, academically or socially at all?

FLOOD: Oh yes, but I think it would be mostly, you know, in personal matters, when they went to the Cape or went to Florida, or when they met with their family, or going over to New York, or elsewhere. But I would think that having dinner at college or around there, for the most part they spent their time with their own friends rather than with one another.

MARTIN: But did Joe have sort of an overseeing attitude toward his brother?

FLOOD: I wouldn't say an overseeing attitude. I think that he was always aware of what Jack was doing. I think that Joe always thought a great deal of his family, his brothers and sisters; and I feel that he had a great sense of responsibility, being the oldest one in the family. I think he was always interested in what Jack was doing and how well he was doing it, but nothing that was obvious—that he was overseeing. But I do feel that he definitely was following what Jack was doing.

MARTIN: Would Jack come to him for counsel?

FLOOD: Well, I know they talked many times, but I think if there was anything that they were coming to talk to one another about—counsel—I think they'd



do that in their own privacy. They didn't do it openly. I think Joe

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could always give you a prod and a needle with a sort of a half smile, and I think if Jack or Torb or some of the boys were doing something that he didn't particularly like, why he would let them know by such a prod.

MARTIN: There has been some belief that Jack kind of walked in the shadow of his older brother through Harvard.

FLOOD: I wouldn't say that. I think Joe was interested in many things there. He was active in freshman affairs; he was on the House Committee there and he was, I think, on the Student Union and involved in his class book—and all those things. He was a real all-round student and he was in many, many things. He played football, and he was interested in that and he was interested in rugby. On the other hand, I don't think that Jack was in his shadow. Jack was a good swimmer—was interested in swimming—and I think Jack was a good student, and he was going along in his own way. I had the impression that everything that Joe did, he really applied himself. He made use of every minute of time, and he had an intense desire and great capacity to work and do things. Jack seemed to take things more easily, and I think things came more easily to Jack. I think that he was a good writer and could convey his feeling probably much more easily than Joe could. I think what things Jack did, came more easily to him. I think everything that Joe got, he worked hard for. It was just applied time and effort and desire and ambition; where I always felt that Jack had a lot of natural talent and could sort of go along happy-go-lucky and do things very easily.

MARTIN: But in many respects they were alike in temperament?

FLOOD: Well, yes and no. I think Joe was more serious, at least at college, than Jack. I think Joe probably could be less tolerant than Jack. On the other hand, I think Jack was much easier-going. Of course, he was younger, and at that time it was probably hard to compare their seriousness. But at school I would say that they both met people well, and I think they both had a host of friends. Everybody liked them. They were very natural and certainly didn't brag about their father's great activity and success—very down to earth—and many of their close friends and keep friends they were very much alike. But it's difficult for me, you know, to compare this characteristic with that. But the two that stand out: Joe was more serious and seemed to apply himself more seriously than Jack did, but on the other hand, Jack excelled in school and otherwise more easily. It seemed to me, he just had the easier approach to it and things came to him more easily.

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MARTIN: And this could be demonstrated in somewhat of a casual attitude?

FLOOD: He definitely had a casual attitude—a happy-go-lucky approach.

MARTIN: Were either of them clothes horses?

FLOOD: I would say no. There was a colored fellow named George Taylor [George H. Taylor] who Joe used to have a lot of fun kidding, and he was quite a character. Joe definitely wasn't a clothes horse. He had a limited wardrobe, but it was always neat, but nothing that was unusually expensive. I think Jack, on the other hand, might have been a little bit more dapper than Joe. How extensive his wardrobe was I don't know, but he certainly gave the outward appearance of being a little more dapper.

MARTIN: Dick, did they manifest a competitive spirit in everything they did?

FLOOD: Oh, definitely. Joe always had a tremendous desire to win. He never was one to take second place in anything, whether it would be playing cards or otherwise. If you were playing cards and had beaten him, why, he was going to come back to beat you in the next game. He would never accept the fact that he couldn't beat you. I think that even in playing golf with Jack—Jack was a more natural golfer. But every time they would go out, I think Joe was just sure he was going to beat Jack, but I don't think he beat him many times.

MARTIN: In your association with Joe, and perhaps with the both of them, was there any occasion when you were able to observe the entire family together, say, at dinner or a meal? Did you sit in with them? Were you invited down?

FLOOD: No, I saw Kick [Kathleen Kennedy Cavendish] many times and Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] and Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] when he was a youngster. That was down the Cape. I think that perhaps on occasion at the movies they used to have in the cellar down at Hyannis Port, I got to see a number of them together. But to sit down in one large gathering with them and notice them all doesn't stand out too clearly in my mind.

MARTIN: What happened to you, Dick, when school ended for you at Harvard?

FLOOD: Well, I was in the Navy, and that might be an interesting note. I did some training down at the Naval Air Station in Newport. At that time, Jack was back at

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the Chelsea Naval Hospital, and I came over here to see him. That was before August of 1944; that was before Joe died.

MARTIN: This was after the episode of the PT-109?

FLOOD: Yes, and Jack was back in Chelsea, and I came to visit him on two or three occasions. Of course the PT Training School was down there in Melville, which is right near Newport, and he was quite interested in the various crews coming in on different PTs. As a matter of fact, I think he left Chelsea and went for further rest to Florida, and he wrote me from Florida keenly interested in some of his old crew that had been with him and whether they were still on the boats or not. As a matter of fact, he was writing some of his officers that he knew in Melville to see that some of his crew who had been on the boat too long would be taken off and given a little change. I think that showed a great feeling that he had for people he had worked with and been associated with. He showed a great feeling. I can't think of the names of the men, but I know there was one officer down there named Bill Rome and he thought he should do something to help these crewmen out.

MARTIN: In your hospital visits can you recall the type of interest, aside from his crew members, that he had at that time? Did he discuss his plans for the future?

FLOOD: No, not at that time. I think that we were all pretty much preoccupied with the way the War was going. He had been out in the Pacific for a long stretch, and he was back here, injured, and I think that we probably spent most of our time talking about friends of ours and families and so forth.

MARTIN: When did you see him next?

FLOOD: Next time I saw him, well, I think it would be sometime in '56 when I was being discharged from the Navy down there in the North Station.

MARTIN: '46 you mean.

FLOOD: Yes, '46. I was being discharged down there, and I think I met him in the Bellevue that very day that I was in there checking out. He told that he was running for Congress. In short, I guess the next day I was down there working in the campaign. Then, of course, I saw a great deal of him during that campaign.

MARTIN: Dick, what did you do in the campaign?

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FLOOD: My time was spent in the Kimball Building, at the headquarters there. I don't know, I gather I spent at least three months there doing all types of work out of that headquarters, and I think I may have had the title of being in charge of that headquarters at that time. Oh, Grace [Grace M. Burke] was there and Dick Conroy [Richard Conroy] and Billy Sutton [William J. Sutton]; Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne

Billings] was over in Central Square; and I recall getting Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.]—he was checking out of the Army, and I heard about it. We got hold of him quite quickly and got him to set up a headquarters over in Somerville. And there was Dave Powers [David F. Powers], of course, who was quite active and he had a friend I think from the same time, a fellow by the name of Coleman. There was a great crew around there that worked out of that one headquarters. We did just about everything. It was interesting to me to see the way Jack started out campaigning in a nice easy approach. But on the other hand, you could just see, I think, a slight change in his attitude. I mean he wasn't the.... Even though his approach was easy and the sell was soft, I think you could see that he was much more serious now. You could see quite a change.

MARTIN: Of course he had direction now. The type of people he gathered around him for his first campaign were somewhat different from what you would see in a normal political campaign in Boston, inasmuch as there weren't too many so-called "pros." These were classmates of his.

FLOOD: Very few, if any, pros. For the most part they were young people. For instance, over in Central Square Lem Billings had that headquarters going, and I think he had, oh, thirty or forty young girls working over there almost every day, doing a tremendous job, getting all kinds of correspondence out. Similarly over in Somerville and other headquarters, they followed the same pattern. There was always activity; there was always some mail going out. There was, I think, an article put out by Hersey [John Hersey] on the PT accident, and that had to be distributed, an excerpt from *Reader's Digest* RD. I would say there were very few of the old pros. I hadn't had too much exposure to politics; but it was interesting to see that those who were a little bit older to see how they all wanted to be sort of close to the candidate. There was a little bit of, I suppose, petty jealousy with one another. That's usual. Yet Jack seemed to handle them all well. He had the support and the interest of all of them and never let any of these petty things, you know, get out of hand.

MARTIN: Did members of his family come in and help him in that first Congressional fight?

FLOOD: Not that I recall. No, I don't believe so. Kick was

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in Europe, and I don't think that Eunice was that far along, and Bobby was, of course, much younger. My first meeting with Bob I think was in the 1952 campaign when he got involved most actively with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]. But back in '46 I think he was pretty much on his own in that campaign with friends that he had known in college and ones that he met around Boston. But he was out picking up new friends by the score every day, and his organization grew and grew and grew. I forget just what time of year that campaign was, but it seemed to me that it wasn't on the regular schedule.

MARTIN: In June.

FLOOD: I think it was in June, and there was a great deal of lethargy. But he got out and got people interested and did a bang-up job.

MARTIN: Well now, you mentioned '52. Of course, his reelections to Congress were pretty much routine after winning the seat.

FLOOD: Yes. I never had much exposure to the congressional campaigns thereafter, but weekends, for many years, he kept coming back to Massachusetts. I know he came to Lowell, on several occasions, to speak at the Chamber of Commerce or a Knights of Columbus breakfast or one thing or another, and he really worked awfully hard. I recall one night that I was playing cards at a friend's home, and I expected him in. He was going to a communion breakfast the next morning; and I think he came over the road from New Bedford and didn't get in until about twelve-thirty. He stayed at my home that night, and we got up the next morning and went to communion, went to the breakfast. But here he was—and at that time his back was bothering him, but he was working hard—coming in late that evening from New Bedford. He spent many many weekends working in preparing himself either for the senatorial fight or the governorship or something else.

MARTIN: Well, when you mention New Bedford and Lowell, it gave an early indication that he was moving then perhaps for a statewide office.

FLOOD: Oh, no doubt about it because he had been working on it. As a matter of fact I think that many of the pros had no conception and didn't realize how much basic work he had done around the state. I recall one trip that made with him. We left and went to Worcester to a number of gatherings there and then out through the Berkshires. Then we came back and stayed overnight in Worcester and covered some further gatherings on Sunday and then headed back to Boston

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Sunday afternoon. During that trip, of course, he was thinking ahead to the 1952 Senatorial fight, and he was feeling his way along on the question of whether he should run for the governorship or to face up and take Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] on. I think he was just sort of getting the feel of different people around the state at the time. But I sort of got the feeling pretty definitely that he had made up his mind well in advance that he was going to run for the senatorship rather than for governor.

MARTIN: Dick, at that time did you think that he had a shot at that, that he could topple Lodge?

FLOOD: Well, I personally did, but I don't think too many other people did. I recall talking to several friends, some of them who had some political savvy, and

I just don't think they understood how much work he had done around the state and how much preparation he had done and how much strength he had statewide. I just don't think they understood how much work he had done. I had some inclination of what he had done and what sort of reaction he was getting, and I personally felt that he was going to win even though it was a tough fight. But there were a lot of pretty intelligent political analysts who couldn't see it at all. This isn't Sunday morning quarterbacking; but I felt that he would.

MARTIN: Well, during that campaign he ran quite an intensive fight. They had statewide coffee and tea klatches, and I think the Kennedy girls came up.

FLOOD: They did a tremendous job. They had these teas all over the state. I know they had a very, very large one in Lowell in the Memorial Auditorium. They had a tremendous outpouring of people and just did a tremendous job all over the state.

MARTIN: What did you do specifically in that campaign?

FLOOD: Well, in that campaign I worked in the Lowell operation and did a great deal of work in and around there. I helped line up a few recruits for him and pointed out to Bobby some of the young people who would be very good to work, particularly on this tea, which was one of the big events they had. There again, a number of young people were recruited. And I think the big thing was to get a large number of people interested in the campaign. So I think my part in that was along that line.

MARTIN: Did you have any trouble getting recruits?

FLOOD: No, none whatsoever. Well, I wouldn't say none

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whatsoever, but it was much easier than to get help for other candidates that I could think of.

MARTIN: Dick, in that campaign can you recall any difficulty or obstacle that had to be overcome insofar as approaching the voters in behalf of then Senator Kennedy—I mean some previous stand he may have taken on some issue, or some attitude, or the fact that he was just a young Congressman running?

FLOOD: I think the big obstacle was his age and that he was young and that Lodge had a pretty good image around the country, and Lodge, I think—of course he was sponsoring Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower], I believe, at that time. Was he not?

MARTIN: Yes, he was.

FLOOD: And Lodge had great strength and a great image, and he had a number of newspapers with him. He was right in the midst of the Eisenhower promotion. So that I think the big thing was to take a—have a young man, who was running on a statewide basis for the first time, taking on the real, big veteran in the state. I don't know of anybody more powerful at the time, at the moment, that could have been taken on.

MARTIN: And the election that year showed that Eisenhower carried the state by a wide margin.

FLOOD: Oh, tremendously.

MARTIN: And yet Jack Kennedy got in by something like seventy thousand votes or so.

FLOOD: I believe the plurality was something in that vicinity.

MARTIN: It would indicate that the support that he had received from Lodge, Lodge's identity with Eisenhower, and the great vote for Ike in this state would normally carry a Lodge through.

FLOOD: That's correct.

MARTIN: And yet, why do you think Jack got by on this one?

FLOOD: Well, I think that it all comes back to his personality, the attention he gave his job as Congressman, and more important the work that he put in around the state. I still say that very few people realize how many times he rode this state, all parts of it, recruiting friends and....

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Well, just a good example are the Chamber of Commerce meetings he would attend after some of his foreign trips. He's come back and have joint meetings of the Service Clubs sponsored by the Chamber. For the most part I would say that they were thinking groups in the community, and many of them were in business and had Republican leanings. I am sure that day in and day out, year in and year out, he made friends and picked up support all along the line. I don't think it was something that was done overnight. I think it was something that was done over a period of four or five years. I think that he won the support of a number of Republicans and independents and businessmen who normally would be voting Republican. And I think he did it by meeting them in their own forums and answering questions that they raised and talking Taft [Robert A. Taft]-Hartley [Fred A. Hartley, Jr.] matters and the international situation and many, many other things.

MARTIN: Now, Dick, after he went down to Washington as a Senator, did you have any occasion when you went down to see him, visit him at his office or meet with him when he came back to the state?

FLOOD: No, I don't recall anything.

[Interruption]

MARTIN: Dick, I should imagine that after his election to the Senate you immersed yourself in your own law business and your associations weren't quite as close, but as he moved from the Senate and on into the White House, did you see any characteristics develop from President Kennedy which would refresh your memory of Joe—that would compare with his older brother?

FLOOD: Well, I think the older he got and the more advanced he got in the Senate and, of course, when he became President... Hearing him speak and seeing him on TV and reading his speeches, why, you just got the feeling that he was much, much more serious now than he had been in earlier life. And I would say that he seemed to be much more aggressive than he had been earlier. Of course, Joe was aggressive in everything he did, and he was intense in his approach, to seek his goals or whatever accomplishments he was trying to attain. So as Jack got older, I could see a greater likeness to Joe coming to the forefront—more seriousness, more intense, more aggressiveness. I think that the older Jack got the more resemblance I could see in the two.

MARTIN: During his term as President, did you ever have occasion to get down to the White House to see him?

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FLOOD: Last October or October of '63, I was in Washington. The occasion of the visit was my admission to the United States Supreme Court. Senator Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] motioned for my admission, and my wife and I went down. We had a nice visit in Washington. While there, we went over to the White House and saw Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] and had occasion to see the President. It was towards the end of the day and his little boy, John-John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.], had run out on the lawn to the rear of his office with a couple of large dogs. They raced into Mrs. Lincoln's office. The President was behind his desk, and little John-John ran in. Then the President came out into Mrs. Lincoln's office. I recall that John was playing with her electric typewriter. The President was having some difficulty getting him to give us a little attention. But Jack was as sharp as ever. He needled me—"Dick-Dick of Edgartown fame"—and brought back some memories that I had long forgotten. It just showed he must have had a tremendous memory and could retain things, because some of the things he brought back to me, I had long forgotten. But we had a very, very nice visit with him. He looked wonderfully well, and frankly, you wouldn't realize that he was the President—the way he talked, the way he met you, the charm he had. And I think during that visit, he brought me back to remember



some of his early days at Harvard when he was happy-go-lucky. I suppose it was the end of the day; it was a pleasant moment for him; and you could just see the way he felt.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-13-]

Richard Flood Oral History Transcript – JFK #1  
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