

Malcolm Kilduff Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 03/15/1976
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Malcolm Kilduff (1927-2003) was the Assistant Press Secretary from 1962 to 1965 and the Information Director of Hubert Humphrey for President. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's [JFK] diplomatic trips to other countries and Kilduff's first-hand account of JFK's assassination, among other topics.

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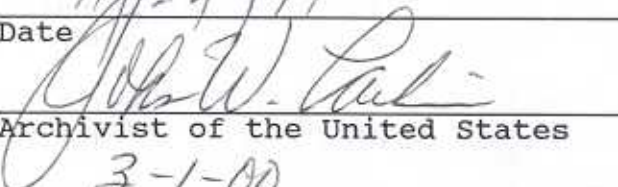
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Malcolm Kilduff– JFK #2

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Second Oral History Interview

with

MALCOLM KILDUFF

March 15, 1976
Washington, DC

By Bill Hartigan

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

HARTIGAN: Mr. Kilduff started his government career in the State Department, and at the time he transferred over to the White House he was in the Public Affairs Bureau of the State Department and entered the White House as an assistant press secretary in 1962 and left the White House in 1965 to enter into private public relations work in the Washington area. He has participated in several presidential campaigns since leaving the White House. Malcolm, Mac as we know you, when did you first meet the Kennedy organization?

KILDUFF: I first came in contact with the Kennedy organization in the early '60s when Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] was going to go abroad, and I was at that time in the passport office at the State Department, and I was requested to go up to their house in Georgetown to take her passport application. That was just, of course, an official meeting for a few moments. It was not until the inauguration of President Kennedy in 1961 that I first met President Kennedy. I was then serving as a volunteer on the governors' reception committee, and I was asked to be one of the escorts and to take care of the needs and desires of one of the governors. At that time I was assigned to no less than Governor John Volpe [Massachusetts]. I was his escort officer and served as the inaugural committee's representative to Governor Volpe who, of course, was the governor of the

president's home state. I stayed with Governor Volpe from the time he hit town until the time he left in that snow storm. It was on that occasion at the governors' reception committee at the Sheraton-Park Hotel that I then met John F. Kennedy.

HARTIGAN: When did you first have dealings with the Kennedy organization?

KILDUFF: I first started to have dealings with the Kennedy organization when I was in the Bureau of Public Affairs of the State Department under Roger Tubby, who was then assistant secretary of State for public affairs. You will recall, Bill, the president held all of his press conferences in the State Department auditorium. My job in connection with his press conferences was to assist Roger Tubby in gathering all the various and sundry briefing papers that were necessary from the State Department for transmittal to the office of the press secretary, namely Pierre Salinger. During the time of the president's press conferences I would make sure that the press conference site, namely the auditorium, was as the president wanted it and as the newsmen needed it. We arranged mostly under my supervision the physical arrangements in the State Department building and in the State Department auditorium for his press conferences.

I would then meet him downstairs in the basement of the State Department, escort him into what was regarded as kind of a ready room where any last-minute information he might have needed would be given to him before he went in to meet with the press. When I say that I mean it would always seem that there would be some situation that would have developed in that morning or in that afternoon on which the president needed some final information. I would have gotten that, gotten it approved by the secretary of state and given it to President Kennedy prior to going in to the press conference. In connection with that, of course, my duties in the hours and day before press conference were always directly with Mr. Salinger or one of his deputies, namely Mr. Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher], of course.

HARTIGAN: You also performed services for the State Department for the Kennedy organization on his first trip to Europe while he was president. Do you want to relate some of your experiences?

KILDUFF: Well, that was in 1961, and I recall it very vividly, Bill. As a matter of fact it was, as you and I both know, the first time I ever met you. It was a Friday afternoon, and I got a telephone call from Pierre Salinger asking me if I'd like to go to Paris on Sunday. I said, "I'd love to go to Paris on Sunday." I quickly got my diplomatic passport all in order, and we left that Sunday evening to go to Paris on one of the president's aircraft out of Andrews Air Force Base. We went over there on what was known, as you will recall, as a survey trip. I went over there for what I thought was three days with three shirts and three pair of socks and three sets of underwear and one suit. I didn't know I was going to be in Europe for six weeks. We got to Paris, and while we were there Mr. Salinger made the decision that I should stay on in Paris and continue with the advance work insofar as it related to the press activities.

My advance work in connection with President Kennedy's visit to de Gaulle [Charles

A. de Gaulle] was primarily that of arranging for adequate press coverage. The problems of press coverage in France, of course, were tremendous due, in many respects, to the lack of cooperation with the French government. They were not awfully cooperative with us. They insisted on everything that we did being handled by what you and I know as a "pool" arrangement. They were highly restrictive as to how many newsmen would be allowed at each place, and with the press attache at the embassy at that time who was a man by the name of Jack Hedges [John L. Hedges]. He and I worked daily on a day-to-day basis with the French officials in order that the president's trip would be adequately covered by the literally hundreds of American newsmen who came not only from the United States to accompany the president but from all over Europe to cover this very historic visit by the president with President de Gaulle.

I stayed on through the visit and then when the president left Paris to go to Vienna to meet with Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] I leapfrogged and went to London because after he met with Khrushchev he was then to meet with Prime Minister Macmillan [Harold Macmillan] in London. But, to be more precise, on the Paris part of it, Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher] came over there towards the very end, and the two of us attempted to work out the various and sundry and multitudinous details which had to be worked out with the French government so that the American people could be adequately kept advised of the activities of the president while he was in France.

As a matter of fact, at one point, they didn't even want to allow American television cameramen in there. They wanted us to use nothing but French equipment, and they didn't even want to give up permits to allow our American television equipment to be imported for the American newsmen's use while they were in Paris, which wouldn't have worked at all because technically you cannot mate a French television camera to an American system because of what's known as the scan lines. It's a rather technical device, but the two are not compatible. They work on a different number of scan lines per frame, and the American public never would have seen John F. Kennedy in Paris if that had been the case. We finally broke through with a mobile unit from American Broadcasting Company [ABC] which they finally did allow in, but after much screaming and yelling between Andy Hatcher and myself, the American embassy and the French ministry of information--a man by the name of ? I'll never forget him if I live to be a thousand. He was just adamant. He didn't understand what a scan line was, anything. But we finally did break through, and we got that mobile unit of ABC's into Paris which was the same mobile unit that then turned around and went clear to Vienna to cover the visit with Khrushchev, because there were very few American taping units in Europe at that time. That happened to be one of them at ABC, came through finally with a mobile unit.

HARTIGAN: Mac, were you privy to any of the discussions that took place in Paris between Kennedy and President de Gaulle?

KILDUFF: No. That was not my function at all, Bill, at that time. Mr. Salinger was resent at those meetings. My function was not one that would be referred to as a position of substance in those meetings. My duties were strictly restricted to

servicing the press, seeing to it that the press got what they needed and serving as a backup to Mr. Salinger since he was involved in the substantive areas of those meetings. I was not.

HARTIGAN: What about the general topics that were discussed? Were you familiar with some of those?

KILDUFF: Well, of course, I was familiar with those especially as they related to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], and I was interested in them. Because I was at that time still in the State Department, I was privy to the cables that went back and forth, the "eyes only" cables. Yes, I did screen those, and I screened those primarily because there were so many of them and Mr. Salinger had to see them, and I'd screen them for him so that I could let him know what cables he should read and should be reading. So to that extent I got into it--but that is in a rather backdoor way certainly not on a firsthand basis--and was present only, I think, once or twice, and those were pro forma meetings between President Kennedy and de Gaulle at the Elysee Palace, but not insofar as the meetings themselves or the substance of those meetings; I was not involved in those at all.

HARTIGAN: As an assistant press secretary, could you relate to us some of the reaction that the press corps had while these meetings were going on with de Gaulle?

KILDUFF: Yes. It was one, I'm afraid, of frustration. As I said before, the French government put very severe restrictions on the press coverage of the meetings. Their French ministry of information are absolute masters at leaking out exactly what they wanted to leak out. At that point we were abiding by the rules. In other words, if President Kennedy and de Gaulle had said and agreed privately what the press would be told after a meeting, and after each meeting there would be a short statement, pro forma statement, the French leaked like mad everything that had been said and, of course, leaked the stories in such a way that they were always favorable to the French. And we were, I'm afraid--and I have to say this--naive enough to believe that they were playing the game. And as such, therefore, we played the game, and a great number of the stories came out and made us look a little foolish, that we were ceding to the French, and indeed we were not.

President Kennedy, as you well know, was very strong with de Gaulle, but he was a gentleman of his word, and we were abiding by our word. It wasn't until much later that we realized that you can't always play that game at foreign meetings. I had run across that with the French before, the meetings on Vietnam that were held in Geneva when I was in the State Department and I was a delegate to the Laotian conference in Geneva. They did the same thing to us there. I don't know what we needed to beat us on the head to get ourselves fully in the position of understanding that we were going to get messed up no matter how we tried to handle it with the French. The French were just not honest about handling the meetings, and de Gaulle's people were not honest in the way they dealt with President Kennedy on what would be told to the press.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall anything specific in terms of the topics that were discussed that

the press [inaudible]
to each other and evaluate amongst themselves?

KILDUFF: Mainly it was the troop level of NATO. Of course, de Gaulle was after getting the French out of NATO to a certain degree at that point and lessening the French commitment to NATO. We were after keeping a strong NATO, and we couldn't very well have done that without French participation. The French were very anxious to lessen their participation in NATO, believing that they could increase a detente with the Soviet Union at that time by lessening their participation since they were more interested in trade with the Soviet Union than they were in lessening tensions. So there they undercut us pretty badly and would indicate that we had agreed to a lessening of French participation in NATO, and, as you well know, NATO eventually had to move from Paris. They went to Belgium. So we had a situation there where that was really the first sign that the French had pulled out and were pulling out of NATO.

HARTIGAN: How do you think the American press evaluated the meetings? Fairly, or do they. . . .

KILDUFF: By and large I think they did. Yes, I would have to say fairly. You had writers such as Mark Childs [Marquis W. Childs] over at that meeting. You had, well, even Clifton Daniel [Elbert Clifton Daniel, Jr.], I think, was over at that meeting. The press evaluated them as well as they could in light of what they were being given, but most of the newsmen who were covering that trip were familiar enough with French tactics that they knew they were not getting the entire story from the French, and they had learned by being burned in the past enough of the French so that they were suspicious of the French line.

Furthermore, Bill--and I don't think we can ever forget this--despite the substance of the talks you still had the glamor of a terribly popular president with a very beautiful wife, and the press were far more interested and there was far more shown of the ceremonial aspects, that great parade through Paris, the luncheon that Mrs. Kennedy had that was given by Madame Couve de Murville [Jacqueline S. Couve de Murville] at Malmaison, at the luncheon when she went to visit the orphanage. All of those things overshadowed to the greatest degree the lack of substantial agreement between de Gaulle and President Kennedy on the issues which they were there to discuss and which was primarily NATO at that point. But we did have a rather bad situation there, but it was corrected by the glamor of the situation. The glamor of the situation prevailed.

HARTIGAN: You think, from what I understand what you're saying, that the meeting was, in your judgment, a success?

KILDUFF: From a public relations point of view it was a total success.

HARTIGAN: Well, I'm speaking now from an international point of view of two leaders

meeting. You hear of meetings at this level being a disaster. We've heard it recently in some of the recent meetings that heads of state have had, but would you consider this to be a successful one from that point of view?

KILDUFF: Yes, because of what it appeared to be on the surface. Yes, I would have to say that. Of course.

HARTIGAN: You went from Paris, then, to London to advance the president's ultimate trip to London before he came back from that swing in Europe and his meeting with Prime Minister Macmillan. Would you like to relate some experiences?

KILDUFF: Well, I was only over there a couple of days, Bill. After you all had left and gone to Vienna, I went to London where he was to meet with Prime Minister Macmillan, as you mention. I was there for just two days before I had a family situation which caused me to come home immediately. I had to fly back immediately from London, but the advance work that had been done in London was very good, and, of course, the only thing I ever really participated in in London was to see to it that. . . .

HARTIGAN: Mac, excuse the interruption. We'll continue. You were telling us about your preparing Kennedy's trip to London to meet with Prime Minister Macmillan.

KILDUFF: Well, there it had been handled very, very well. The advance group that was in there had done their work well, Bill, and the British were so used to handling visits of this sort that it was not that much of a problem. So the trip into London confined itself mostly--before I had to leave--to meetings with embassy officials, and when I left it appeared to me to have been in good control, and I really can't say much more than that because I didn't have that much time to stay there, Bill.

HARTIGAN: You participated in the arrangements for the baptism over there of Prince Radziwill's [Stanislas Radziwill] youngster [Anna Christina Radziwill].

KILDUFF: That's right.

HARTIGAN: I know you were familiar with that because I was there with you.

KILDUFF: Right.

HARTIGAN: Would you want to relate some of the problems that they. . . .

KILDUFF: Which part of it are you referring to?

HARTIGAN: Did you participate in the making of the arrangements at the church?

KILDUFF: At the church, yeah. My memory on that one is not too clear, Bill.

HARTIGAN: When my turn come to give a history I'll . . .

KILDUFF: All right, then you'll have to do that one for me then.

HARTIGAN: After that first European swing in 1961 you returned to the State Department, Did you?

KILDUFF: That's correct. It was not until the following year that I joined the White House staff when I was appointed assistant press secretary to President Kennedy. After that we, together with Andrew Hatcher and myself and Pierre that was the press team right up until the day President Kennedy died. During that time, of course, I traveled to Costa Rica, Mexico, Did one of the great advance trips of all times. I don't know whether you were on this trip or not, Bill. Did you go to Brazil?

HARTIGAN: No. I was in the Post Office [Post Office Department] at that point, but I was in the areas you went to. I was in Central America. . . .

KILDUFF: That was one of the great advance trips of all time. We went to Brazil. We thoroughly advanced a trip that never happened.

HARTIGAN: Why don't you tell us about that.

KILDUFF: Well, I suppose history's . . . Enough time has gone by so that it doesn't really make too much difference. At that time the president of Brazil was Goulart [Joao Goulart] for whom President Kennedy had little or no use, but he was under a great deal of pressure to visit Goulart. So we went through, together with Tish Baldrige [Letitia Baldrige] and Pam Turnure [Pamela Turnure] and myself and a full group of secret service agents. We went to Brasilia, we went to Rio [Rio de Janeiro], we went to Sao Paulo. We did a dry run on how the president was going to go every place in Brazil, and we went every place in Brazil on one of the president's planes, and knowing full well that he had absolutely no intention of ever making the trip. That was supposed to have been in November of 1962 he would have made that trip. No intention at all. We did the whole advance trip, and we went up to Recife where President Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] had been in 1940 where they kept his jeep, and they wanted President Kennedy to ride the parade route in President Roosevelt's old jeep. Can you imagine John F. Kennedy riding a parade in a jeep? And we went to a witchcraft party which they wanted to throw for him outside of Rio. I can just imagine John F. Kennedy at a witchcraft party.

HARTIGAN: What was the strategy behind the advance of the trip that never was to take place?

KILDUFF: The strategy at that point was President Kennedy--it was always my understanding--was not yet ready to. . . . Well, I guess you have to call a spade a spade on this one. He was not ready to slap Goulart in the face enough to say that he would not make the trip. The timing was off. So we had to go through all the motions and machinations. And also this was at the time when the Cuban missile crisis was just breaking. So that the president really had a good reason for not going. He probably wouldn't have gone anyway, because at that point in October--after all those were the days of October when the Cuban missile crisis was breaking. So we had the situation, and to have canceled the trip at that point, in addition to the president not wanting to go in the first place--he couldn't very well have left the country in view of what was going on in Cuba. And we did not want to tip our hand that we knew that much about it that he would cancel an important international visit. So we went through the whole rigamarole of setting up motorcade routes just as if the president were going, knowing full well--a few of us knew--that we were doing an advance for a trip that was never to happen.

HARTIGAN: What was your activity during the Cuban missile crisis?

KILDUFF: We stayed at the White House in the press office. We kept the press office open 24 hours a day. Between Pierre Salinger, Andrew Hatcher, and myself, one of us was always physically in the White House on a 24-hour basis. We changed our clothes, slept in the downstairs in the basement and were always on call 24 hours a day for the press in case anything developed, because there was not enough time for any one of us to have gotten back if something had broken suddenly. So that Pierre either was there 24 hours a day, and it was every third day it was our turn to sleep at the White House, and we literally stayed there 24 hours a day. Sometimes all three of us would stay there 24 hours a day, keep ourselves apprised of what was going on in McGeorge Bundy's office downstairs in the White House in the situation room where they were plotting the course of the various ships that we knew were carrying missiles as they were heading for Cuba, and also receiving information when those ships turned about and went back, those ships that appeared to have missiles aboard.

HARTIGAN: Can you describe the atmosphere within the White House during this crisis?

KILDUFF: Well, Bill, you know it all started--and I'll be very frank; this sounds rather supercilious on my part--it all started at first, it was kind of like a bunch of kids were playing games. But what really brought it home to me was when General Clifton's [Chester V. Clifton] office gave me my instructions on where me and my family were to report in the case of an atomic attack, where the out-of-the-city White House would be, where I would be picked up by helicopter to be taken to a relocation site in the event of a nuclear attack. I don't think it was until that point that I realized how close to a nuclear confrontation, or how close that we were in fact in a nuclear confrontation, with the Soviet Union over this. But when you're told where you're to go to get picked up by a helicopter and where your family is to go to be hidden up in the mountains in the event of a nuclear attack, it

kind of makes you realize that, you know, the game is over. This is for real.

HARTIGAN: How would you describe the composure of the president during this crisis, from your point of view?

KILDUFF? In total command. In total command of the situation despite the fact that some advisors to him had. . . . If you will recall, Bill, one of the conditions that the Soviet Union put down was that we would move our missiles from Turkey, and on that one decision the president refused to budge. He was not about to take our missiles out of Turkey because he felt that that would have been the first sign of weakness, and the Soviet Union would have recognized that as a sign of weakness. Those missiles could very easily have been removed. One of his closest advisors who was then ambassador to the UN [United Nations], Adlai Stevenson, recommended that we remove the missiles from Turkey to placate the Soviet Union, and President Kennedy went right through the roof on that one. He was not about to remove those missiles from Turkey, and in fact they were not removed.

HARTIGAN: So in other words, it was not that those missiles were so strategically placed as it was that he was playing the same game that the Russians were playing.

KILDUFF: Absolutely right. They were not important at that point, really, to our defense except for what they represented, and that was our presence on the border of. . .

HARTIGAN: And also keeping them there displayed our strength and our determination.

KILDUFF: Our determination. That's the key word. The president was totally committed to showing our determination to stand by our commitment.

HARTIGAN: What about your impression of the others who participated in the crisis?

KILDUFF: For those few meetings of that very small group that met that I did attend--with the exception of Ambassador Stevenson, and that was on the business of the missiles in Turkey--they all stood by the president one hundred percent. But none of them. . . . I've heard a lot of stories in years after that it was this person's idea and that person's idea that that would be the course of action to follow, and so far as I was ever able to determine or observe myself, it was purely the president's own personal determination that this would be the course to follow, and no one else's.

HARTIGAN: In other words, he was actually calling the shots.

KILDUFF: He was in complete charge, and he called the shots. He was helped a great deal by George Ball, who was a member of that group, and by McGeorge Bundy, Secretary Rusk [Dean Rusk]. If I recall correctly, Secretary Rusk was out of

the country for part of that, but with Ball and Bundy they were in total agreement with what the president was doing. But, I reiterate, it was the president's decision. [Interruption]

HARTIGAN: The last question I was starting to ask you was, in recapping what you just said, would you say that the president was in total command and charge of the situation and probably as well versed in the details of this as the people that were there as official experts?

KILDUFF: He was in total charge and total command as anyone I ever have seen in my entire life, and that goes for secretaries of state in whose staff meetings I sat while I was in the State Department. He knew exactly the facts. He knew far more about what was going on then, say poor Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] did at the time of the U-2. He didn't even know we were flying the missions. President Kennedy knew precisely what the situation was and knew exactly what he wanted to do, and he didn't need any advice from some of the pantywaist foreign service officers who would have laid down and probably have given those Thor missiles to the Soviet Union as a birthday present for Khrushchev. That's exactly the way I feel about it, and I say that after having spent twenty years in the State Department. But they were always looking for the easy way out, and President Kennedy realized that there was no easy way out. It's just that simple.

HARTIGAN: He had done his homework on this, is what you're . . .

KILDUFF: He had done his homework one hundred percent. He knew exactly, he had all the aerial photographs. They sat right up there on the easels in the cabinet room for days on end. We knew exactly where the missiles were, what kind of missiles they were. We watched them being put up from the U-2 photographs. We watched them being taken down. They went out like a spider web, and they came right back like a spider web. We saw them put up and dismantled.

HARTIGAN: You mentioned that Secretary of State Rusk was out of the country part of the time that this took place.

KILDUFF: I believe he was, Bill, because George Ball attended a great number of those meetings for him. The group I was trying to think of, it was referred to as the National Security Council working group.

HARTIGAN: What about Secretary of Defense McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] at the time?

KILDUFF: He was in those meetings. He was in all of them. He stood pretty well toe to toe with President Kennedy on his decisions. But here again, it's easy to agree with the president, and I have to come back at you again with the fact that the one person in that room that always seemed to have done his homework and to have known

exactly, number one, what the situation was and, number two, what he wanted to do was the president himself. It wasn't Adlai Stevenson; it wasn't George Ball; it wasn't Robert McNamara; it certainly wasn't Allen Dulles.

HARTIGAN: Were you with the president or in the group when the news came that the ships turned around in that missile crisis?

KILDUFF: No, I was not, Bill. As a matter of fact that day I was down in the situation room, down in the basement of the White House when we finally got word on that.

HARTIGAN: What was the next event that you had responsibility in after the missile crisis?

KILDUFF: Well, aside from the day-to-day responsibility of anything, you know, on all the president's trips, practically all of them. . . .

HARTIGAN: What was the next trip you advanced for him, then?

KILDUFF: Oh, let's see. Gee, I don't recall, Bill.

HARTIGAN: Did you cover any particular issue that was not at the time in terms of domestic affairs or international affairs?

KILDUFF: No, mostly it was day-to-day operations: the rail strike and, oh, the threat of a steel strike. But those became, you know, rather mundane, day-to-day issues with which we had to deal.

HARTIGAN: Then I would assume the next big advance that you made for the president was his trip to Ireland?

KILDUFF: That's right, Bill, and that, of course, that was a . . .

HARTIGAN: That was the last trip he made before he went to Dallas.

KILDUFF: That's correct. There I spent close to a month in Ireland, and I can frankly say that I . . . Well, it may sound like I had more fun than I did work, and part of that's true. But the Irish, they were just absolutely fantastic. I never had more fun in my life. The biggest trip that they'd had since Saint Patrick got rid of the snakes or whatever it was he got rid of, was the visit of Grace Kelly [Grace, Princess of Monaco] and that was the only visit that they had to go on as to the protocol of a major state visit. And the idea of a fleet of helicopters going from Dublin to New Ross to Wexford to Dunganstown was absolutely unheard of, and to Limerick. And with Ambassador Matt McCloskey [Matthew H. McCloskey], who was our ambassador there then we flew all over Ireland by

helicopter, because that was the only way to get around in Ireland, doing the advance work for the president's trip there.

Of course, it was absolutely an outstanding success. The people of Ireland were thoroughly devoted to him, and they felt that he was one of theirs and that he was really coming home to the extent that they did everything that they possibly could to make him feel at home, which included putting concrete on pastures in the south of Ireland in a little place called Dunganstown where the Kennedys are supposed to have originated; that was Mary Ryan's home, in Wexford, in New Ross.

It was a happy trip. He was happy on that trip. I saw a great deal of him on that trip. He went and he spoke to the parliament, the Dail, which is the Gaelic word for the parliament. And when he met with Eamon De Valera, the president, and Sean Lemass, the prime minister, it was a happy trip. He thoroughly enjoyed himself on that trip. His back was bothering him a bit, but he took all the jousting, including getting knocked over in his own car one time down in New Ross, literally just got swept right off his feet. He was standing up in the car, got knocked down on his back. But the people of Ireland loved him. I dare say that it was perhaps one of the hardest trips to handle because the Irish were not anywhere near ready for anything of this sort. They didn't have the police or the army or anything else in sufficient numbers to handle it. I don't know how many millions of people there are in Ireland, but I do believe that the crowd estimates when he came there were reported by the Irish press to have been twice the population of Ireland. It was really funny because there couldn't have been anyone else left in the whole country. But it was totally packed every time he went any place. There was nothing he did the whole time while he was in Ireland when. . . . It was just one long national holiday the whole time he was there.

HARTIGAN: You would say that that was a low risk. . . .

KILDUFF: That was definitely a low risk. Decidedly. The secret service could definitely have stayed home on that one, Bill.

HARTIGAN: Did you have anything to do with the Berlin trip?

KILDUFF: No, I did not. No. I was hop-skipping on that one. I by-passed the Berlin.

HARTIGAN: He returned from Ireland to Washington. . . .

KILDUFF: Oh, by the way, in connection with that Berlin trip, all the bars in Ireland--if you recall, he came to Ireland from Berlin--all the bars in Ireland, they had on their Telefis Eireann, Irish television, showed his departure. And this was in the bar of the Gresham Hotel they had his departure from Germany, Berlin, on television. And as soon as the plane departed from Berlin--and this would have been hours later he was going to arrive in Ireland--as soon as he departed, the plane took off, everybody left the bar and went out to the airport. [Laughter] Me along with them.

HARTIGAN: The president returned to Washington after the Ireland trip, and a short time after that he went to Dallas. Now, if my memory serves me correctly, Pierre Salinger did not go to Dallas. You covered Dallas for that trip. Is that correct?

KILDUFF: That's correct. If you will recall, the next foreign trip President Kennedy was to have made would have been to Japan. That would have been in December of 1963. Pierre was in Japan with, I believe, the secretary of state, and at the time Pierre was advancing the Japanese trip so that. . . . And Andrew Hatcher had other duties he had to perform. So I was the acting press secretary on the trip to Dallas, although I had not advanced it. I never was on that trip.

HARTIGAN: In other words, you went on the trip with the president, but you weren't with the advance team.

KILDUFF: That's correct. No, I did not go on the advance on that one.

HARTIGAN: Would you care to start at the beginning on that trip, and relate to us your trip to Dallas?

KILDUFF: Well, of course, the first night, the night before, we were in Fort Worth. And he was very, very well received in Fort Worth. And, as you will recall, there was always a question as to how he would be received in Texas, how he would be received by Governor Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.] and also there was quite a row going on then between Lyndon Johnson and John Connally. And President Kennedy, I recall, very, very explicitly [said to] make very sure that the then Vice President Lyndon Johnson and John Connally participate together in all of the functions in which the president was to become involved. And it got a little hairy at times getting some of Governor Connally's people to agree to this. But eventually they did, down to a man, including Governor Connally. He recognized the practical need to show the solidarity--after all, we were only a year away from an election and the president's own reelection--and the president was, from the standpoint of looking at it as a practical politician, he wanted to show Democratic [party] solidarity in the state of Texas.

HARTIGAN: What about the peacemaking efforts between the Kennedy, Connally and Yarborough [Ralph W. Yarborough] organizations?

KILDUFF: Well, that came off pretty well. Yarborough, he and Johnson, of course. . . . There again, you had the situation where he and Johnson had no use for each other, but on that one Johnson did cede to the president's wishes and, you know, they were all together and there was the show of party solidarity and Democratic party solidarity between the forces of John Connally, Lyndon Johnson, Ralph Yarborough and the president. So we did have a good show of solidarity. Now whether or not that would have held up until election time, you know, there's no sense in sucking your thumb over that one.

You can't tell. But at least it was good on that trip. That trip was going well. Darn well.

The president went to the breakfast that morning at the Texas Hotel in Fort Worth before we flew to Dallas. That went off well. Mrs. Kennedy was with him. They just loved her. Everything had gone well the day before, and the trip was going very, very well. We were all sitting on pins and needles for fear that someone would have his nose out of joint somewhere. The fact that Ralph Yarborough agreed to ride in the car with Lyndon Johnson, which you recall he did do in the motorcade in Dallas the next day. Ralph was in the car with him. We never thought we'd be able to pull that one off, but we did. That was pulled off, and there was the show of Democratic solidarity because the president felt that he needed Texas in the forthcoming election of 1964--it would have been '64. So Yarborough did turn around on that one mainly because he did truly--and I've talked to Ralph since then, in the ensuing years--he was terribly fond of President Kennedy, a great feeling for President Kennedy. And I dare say if it had been for any other reason Ralph probably wouldn't have done it.

HARTIGAN: So you proceeded from Fort Worth after a successful visit there.

KILDUFF: That's right. Had a very successful visit there.

HARTIGAN: And you proceeded on to Dallas.

KILDUFF: That's right. As a matter of fact, I have in my own personal files, Bill, which I'll be glad to give to you,--because better you have them than someone else--some of the pictures of Yarborough and Johnson and President Kennedy and Connally all in a group at the Texas Hotel, an informal group, talking, and you never would have thought that you would have gotten the four of those talking together. And they're very amusing, because if you know the background, to see the four of them talking like they were four fraternity brothers who hadn't met in twenty years, it's very amusing.

The trip was going just beautifully, and Merriman Smith, the late United Press [United Press International] reporter, and Jack Bell of the Associated Press, and Bob Clark [Robert E. Clark] of ABC [American Broadcasting Corporation] and Bob Baskin [Robert E. Baskin] of the *Dallas Morning News*, we were riding in the car right behind the vice president's car in Dallas, in the motorcade in Dallas. I think it was Merriman Smith had just finished mentioning the fact that we were really getting off well and getting off easily on this, because they were all aware of the party fight in Texas. You know, you couldn't hide something like that. And Merriman Smith, if I recall--and I was sitting next to him in the car--had just finished mentioning that, you know, "You guys have really pulled off a real coup here," when suddenly we heard what we thought was the backfire of a car or a firecracker.

HARTIGAN: The car you were in was ahead of the president's. . . .

KILDUFF: No, no. It was two cars behind.

HARTIGAN: Two cars behind.

KILDUFF: That's right.

HARTIGAN: Would you mind telling us what your reaction was to. . . .

KILDUFF: Well, a reconstruction of the motorcade. There was the president's car, then the follow-up car, then the vice president's car, then the press pool car. I was in the press pool car sitting in the right-hand front seat. On reconstruction of that motorcade we were directly under the window in the Texas School Book Depository, and it being late November, when the first--what turned out to be a shot--was fired, Merriman Smith said, "What was that?" And I recall very clearly saying, "It sounded to me like a firecracker," 'cause it was my first thought that it was a firecracker. Because it was around the holiday season, and in Texas they sell fireworks. And I remember that--why I remember it, but I do remember it--as going through my mind that's exactly what it was. And it was not until the second shot was fired--and there was enough time in there for me to say, "What was that?"--rather, Merriman Smith saying, "What was that?" and my saying, "It sounded to me like a firecracker." And that takes up about four seconds--we've timed it since then--before we realized it was a gunshot because we saw the secret service agents all look up and to the right and to the rear which would have been directly above my right shoulder. Now, I'll be very frank with you, Bill. I cannot say in all truthfulness and honesty that I realized there was a shot coming right over my own head, because there was a slight bowl there at that underpass at Dealey Plaza, and the reverberations of the echoes just. . . . I looked to my right, instinctively I looked to my right, but I did not know where to look, and I did not look up to that window. I'll be frank with you. I did not, because I could not place where that noise was coming from, but I knew it was off to my right. And, of course, we now know that it was right directly in my right ear.

HARTIGAN: Are you saying that you only heard two shots?

KILDUFF: No, no. No, no. No, no. I heard the first one. There was a longer pause between the first and the second than there was between the second and the third.

HARTIGAN: So you're of the school of thought that you heard three shots.

KILDUFF: Oh, I know I heard three shots. Nobody's going to tell me I didn't hear three shots. I mean I know that there was a long pause because there was that little interchange of conversation between Merriman Smith and me between the first and the second shot. Then the third shot got off very quickly.

HARTIGAN: At what point did you realize the president was shot when you were in the car with the. . . .

KILDUFF: Not until we got to the hospital. Now there have been stories printed that the

people in the pool car realized the president had been shot. That's a lot of foolishness. We were too far away from the president. The motorcade pulled off fast, but none of us thought that that was unusual because in any sort of an emergency we knew that the conditioned reflex was to get out of there if there was trouble. It was not until we pulled up right behind the president's car in Parkland Hospital [Parkland Memorial Hospital] and we saw the president lying in the seat in the car. . . .

HARTIGAN: In other words, the press were not aware of the fact that the president was shot until you got to the hospital.

KILDUFF: Absolutely not. The first United Press reports--and it is a United Press bulletin, and there was a series of about eight of them put out by United Press in a book--will show that shots--it's clearly documented--were fired at the presidential motorcade. Merriman Smith sat there on the telephone, 'cause our pool car was Southwest Bell Telephone, and he picked it up and he started to file into the UPI offices in Dallas, and they put out the bulletins. Then there's nothing in any of those bulletins that will indicate that anyone had the slightest idea that the president had been shot until after we got to Parkland Hospital.

HARTIGAN: Now what was the conversation between these pool reporters after the shots were fired and then till the time they found out that the president was shot, out in front of Parkland Hospital?

KILDUFF: How long a period of time?

HARTIGAN: What was the conversation that took place between the reporters in the pool car?

KILDUFF: Could it have been the president? Could it have been Mrs. Kennedy? Could it have been Connally or one of the secret service agents? The one thing that I do remember about that conversation, very clearly, is that none of us dreamed that the president himself had been shot, and I would have to make an assumption that that was so totally beyond the realm of possibility that we didn't even entertain the idea. We didn't know where we were going. But as we were speeding along, the driver of the Southwest Bell Telephone car, we said, "Where are we going?" He says, "It looks to me like we're going to Parkland Hospital." We didn't know where we were going. We were just following the cars, and then we pulled into Parkland Hospital. We then realized that somebody must have been hurt, but I'll be frank with you, it didn't occur to anybody in that press pool car that it was the president. And the UPI wire service bulletins will not indicate in any way that there was any idea that the president himself had been the one that had been shot.

HARTIGAN: Did you observe the president's body before he went into the hospital while he was still in the car?

KILDUFF: Yes.

HARTIGAN: And you observed them removing the president's body?

KILDUFF: Yes, I did.

HARTIGAN: Would you care to describe that to us?

KILDUFF: Well, it's been described so many times. The left side of his head was just a bloody mass is all you can say. The only thing I did look for was some signs of life, and I could tell from under his shirt around his waist he was breathing. But his head was such a mess that I could not tell what the extent of the injuries were. Ralph Yarborough ran up to the car, and he was almost semi-hysterical, and a secret service agent had to kind of lead him away because he was so hysterical.

HARTIGAN: What about Mrs. Kennedy? How did you observe her?

KILDUFF: Mrs. Kennedy appeared to me to be in almost a complete state of shock, and she did throughout the time she was in the hospital and on the plane ride back. Because I did come back with her on the plane.

HARTIGAN: Whom on the staff did you converse with, if anybody, at that time?

KILDUFF: Well, after I'd gone in, and I don't know why I did this, Bill, I never have figured it out. The first thing I did was find out where there was a room to hold, where the press could go. I found an instruction room up on the next floor, the floor above where the president was. It was used as a classroom. We used that, and I told all the press to gather there, that any announcement concerning the president would be made in that room by me and by no one else. I then asked the switchboard operator at the hospital to contact Southwest Bell Telephone to see if we could get any extra phone lines. By that time Merriman Smith and Jack Bell had both gotten commercial lines. Jack Bell had not been able to file his story or any Associated Press bulletin from the car because Merriman Smith kept the. . . . That was a fight between Merriman Smith and Jack Bell in the car over the telephone, but that's another story. And then I went downstairs, and I saw Kenny [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]. And from the look on Kenny's face I knew that the president was dead. And I walked in, and I asked one of the agents--and I don't remember which one it is; I think it was Roy Kellerman--who told me that the president was dead.

HARTIGAN: Did you have any conversation with Kenny O'Donnell?

KILDUFF: Yes. I did not make the announcement until Kenny told me to.

HARTIGAN: I mean any conversation with him when you first met him after you got to the

hospital?

KILDUFF: I asked him, after I saw the look on his face, if the president was dead, and he said, "Yes," just plain yes. Kenny was equally shocked and quite justifiably. We both know how totally devoted Kenny's whole life was to John F. Kennedy, and there was no sense in saying anything more. Than I had a very peculiar thought, and I don't know why, but I did recall that on the assassination of Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln]--why I delved back into that, I don't know--where they attempted to get the whole cabinet and everyone else after Lincoln was shot, or there was talk of it, they had hidden or taken the then vice president, Lyndon Johnson, into another room, into another trauma room, and. . . .

Oh, wait a minute, Kenny did tell me when I asked him about the announcement he said, "Well, you'd better check with the secret service and you'd better ask President Johnson." Mr. Johnson. I think it was "Mr. Johnson." I don't think Kenny was at that point ready to call him the president, because he wasn't, really, but. . . . Well, you know what I mean on that. So I did speak to Lyndon Johnson. Now Johnson's reaction was going back to Lincoln, too, and he said, "Well, wait a minute." He said, "No, I don't think you ought to make that announcement yet." He said, "I think you ought to wait until I get out of here and back to the plane." And, in fact, we all then went out. Roy Kellerman made the arrangements with the secret service. We took Johnson out of the hospital, put him in his car, and got him away from Parkland Hospital before I actually made the announcement. From the time the first shot was fired until I made the announcement a few minutes after one, it was almost a half hour between the time shots were fired until I made the announcement of the death. Most of that was to get Lyndon Johnson out of the hospital and get him back to the safety of *Air Force One*. And after that I went up, and I made the announcement of the president's death.

HARTIGAN: Did you come back to Washington on the late President Kennedy's plane or on the plane that Johnson was on? How did you get back?

KILDUFF: Well, we came back on the same aircraft. . . .

HARTIGAN: *Air Force One*. Everybody came back on *Air Force One*.

KILDUFF: Johnson was on that, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Kennedy, and the casket.

HARTIGAN: You were on that plane?

KILDUFF: Yes, I was on that plane.

HARTIGAN: Are there any other details you would like to relate with reference to that day in Dallas?

KILDUFF: No. I've said this before, and I'll say it again. There have been a spate of stories at one point, Bill, that Lyndon Johnson acted rather, oh, grossly on the

plane coming back. I'll be very frank with you and very honest about it. He did not, in my opinion. He didn't know quite what to do. He knew that he was. . . . He got on the phone, he talked to Mrs. Kennedy, to Rose Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] by phone. Mrs. John F. Kennedy, Jacqueline Kennedy, stayed back with the casket as did Kenny and Dave [David F. Powers]. They all stayed back there with the casket, because they'd removed those seats in the back of the plane, and the rest of the party more or less stayed up front. Johnson and his people stayed up in the front of the aircraft, whereas Kenny and Mrs. Kennedy stayed back with the casket which was in the four seats, if you'll recall right to the rear of the bedroom there were those four seats. They'd removed those four seats to put the casket there so that the president's body was taken out of that side door.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall any other the incidents surrounding the removal of the president's body from the hospital?

KILDUFF: From the hospital?

HARTIGAN: From the hospital.

KILDUFF: No. They had the casket which had been delivered by that time.

HARTIGAN: There was an incident in terms of the legalities of removing the. . . .

KILDUFF: Oh, that was. . . . Oh, there was a detective from the Dallas police who insisted that the body remain there until the coroner had performed an autopsy on the president, and he came racing down the hall, saying. . . . [Interruption]

HARTIGAN: Mac, we ran out of tape, and we'll be finishing in just a few minutes. Now you were just, as we ran out of tape, describing the situation where the Dallas police detective wanted to hold the president's body for

KILDUFF: For autopsy.

HARTIGAN: . . . autopsy.

KILDUFF: That's right. In compliance with Texas state law, and one of the secret service agents would have absolutely no part of that. The president was dead, and that's all there was to it. And he attempted to stop the loading of the casket containing the body of the president into the ambulance outside the loading dock at the back of the hospital, and the guy got in the way a little bit too much and he was decked.

HARTIGAN: You mean he physically. . . .

KILDUFF: He physically belted him. That's all I can tell you. I can't say he gently nudged

him or anything else.

HARTIGAN: There was an incident also with an undertaker. Is that true? Do you recall that?

KILDUFF: Oh, you're talking about the undertaker who wanted to charge some exorbitant amount, whatever it was, eleven thousand dollars or something of that sort?

HARTIGAN: Well, there was an incident, I know, where the undertaker was involved in it.

KILDUFF: Well, he was involved in it. He wanted to know who was going to pay for the casket. Yeah. I was out of the room. I think Kenny handled that one. I don't remember who handled that one, but I know that he wasn't a very popular fellow. I was not present during that, let's call it, a negotiation.

HARTIGAN: Well, you are right because that's where I got the story from, Kenny O'Donnell.

KILDUFF: Oh, yeah.

HARTIGAN: Mac, are there any other incidents or situations that you'd like to relate to us in recapping our discussion here this morning? [Interruption] Mac, while you're reflecting, how long did you stay in the White House after the president's assassination?

KILDUFF: Until 1965. I went through the presidential elections with President Johnson of 1964, did practically all of the press advance work for him, for his election--not re-election, but his election--in 1964. And it was not until 1965 that I went into public relations.

HARTIGAN: Any other observations you'd like to make before we close the interview?

KILDUFF: No. The only observation that I'd have is sort of a personal observation that in this day and this time in this country--I've said this many, many times--it seems a shame, more than a shame, it seems a tragedy that a person such as John F. Kennedy should be taken from us, certainly when we needed him the most, and that there doesn't really seem today on the American scene, or anyplace else in the world, as far as that goes, anyone who has the ability to give that feeling of hope to people that he was able to give. I don't say that his administration was perfect. No administration can be perfect. I don't say the man himself was perfect. No person is perfect. But he exuded confidence, and he gave confidence to people. He was interested in people, and he cared about people, and you just don't seem to find that anymore. We've become mired down in the same old way of doing things that we did before John F. Kennedy. We're mired in them today. I don't know if there's

another John F. Kennedy on the scene or whether there ever will be, but I know that they were days which all Americans should remember with a great deal of pride for the courage he showed--considering the fact that he was in pain a great deal of time due to his back--and the political courage he showed as evidenced by his actions in the Cuban missile crisis. If we could only get just a small scintilla of that courage back into the American political scene, then the word politics would no longer be dirty. In it wasn't dirty under John F. Kennedy. He made it a profession of high calling which I wish we could have back in the American way of life today.

HARTIGAN: Thank you, Mac, for the time you've given us today. Before we close up, I wonder if you would sort of give some thought to looking over your papers that you've had or memorabilia that you've had or memorabilia that you've collected during your experience in the Kennedy administration, and if you'd be kind enough to let us know any of this material that you'd be willing to donate, the library will have it evaluated and then put into the library for posterity. Do you have any such things?

KILDUFF: I've got some notes, a great number of notes, that we made as briefing notes for his press conferences which I would be only too happy to turn over to the library.

HARTIGAN: Would you let me know when we could have it picked up and we'll give it an appropriate place in the library. All this is fitting. Would you care, inasmuch as we're in an election year, want to make a prediction for the future? Who's going to win the next election, Mac? See, a hundred years from now some student's going to be studying this. . . .

KILDUFF: I don't know. I have a sentimental favorite. I guess my sentimental favorite has to be Hubert [Hubert H. Humphrey].

HARTIGAN: Do you think he's going to be the next president?

KILDUFF: I just said that that's my sentimental favorite. No, I'm afraid. . . . You've got to remember that the last incumbent president to have been beaten was forty-eight years ago, and that was Herbert Hoover. Incumbency has an awful lot of clout. Whether or not we can overcome nearly a half a century of precedent in beating a man in office, I don't know. I would like to think we would be able to change it.

HARTIGAN: Mac, thank you for that uncommitted prediction.