

**Thomas J. Quigley Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 6/08/1964**  
**Administrative Information**

**Creator:** Thomas J. Quigley

**Interviewer:** Ed Martin

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**Biographical Note**

Thomas J. Quigley was the director of the outpatient clinic at Veterans Administration Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's 1946 campaign for Congress and his efforts on behalf of disabled veterans throughout his political career, among other topics.

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Thomas J. Quigley– JFK #1  
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Oral History Interview

with

THOMAS J. QUIGLEY

June 8, 1964  
Boston, Massachusetts

By Ed Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: The following interview is with Dr. Thomas J. Quigley, Director of the Outpatient Clinic, Veterans' Administration, in Boston. The interviewer is Ed Martin. The date, June 8, 1964.

Doctor, can you tell me about your first association with the late President Kennedy, the circumstances surrounding it, and the purpose of the meeting?

QUIGLEY: My first association with the President was part of his running for the Congress. I was called up by, whether it was [James] Jim O'Brien, [William F.] Bill Connors, or [Thomas P.] Tom Broderick, I'm not certain. There was going to be a meeting over in the Federal Building. I don't recall exactly what room it was, and go over there because you're going to meet John Kennedy; he's going to run for Congress and just wanted to get certain things straightened out about the districts. I didn't particularly know what the district meant at the time.

MARTIN: This must have been in 1946.

QUIGLEY: Yes, it was in about '46 there. He had just come out of the service, and he was just beginning to go out for Congress over in Charlestown. So I went to the meeting. Jimmy O'Brien was there. There was Tom Broderick and Bill Connors. I don't know if [David F.] Dave Powers was there. [Robert] Bob Morey, I think, was there, and John Kennedy was there.

MARTIN: What was your title then, Doctor?

QUIGLEY: At that time, I was assistant to the chief medical officer in this clinic here, at 17 Court Street, Veterans' Administration. I met these young political fellows. They were talking about wards here and wards there, and they had to go out and get a list of names. Jim O'Brien, I remember, had the West End area. Jim reported that he'd got lots of good names; he'd got plenty of names; and he was going to continue at it. He was quite sure that he could accomplish the necessary number of names to help towards getting John Kennedy on the ballot. The same thing was going with Tom Broderick. Only Tom, I think, was out of his district. Tom came from out of the Charlestown district. Tom came from Brighton. Of course, Tom Broderick's mother was the head of the Democratic Women's Committee up in that whole area of Brighton which had, I think, 25,000 good votes up there. But Tom was talking about how he was out helping Jack and trying to get the names. There was no question in both O'Brien's mind or Broderick's mind that they had got the accomplished number without too much difficulty. I said to Jim O'Brien, "Well, why do you think it's so easy to get the names?" He said, "Because of the Kennedy name. Honey Fitz [John F. Fitzgerald] is his grandfather, and [Joseph P.] Joe Kennedy is known so well by everybody that we have no problem at all." I said, "The fact that he's wealthy won't have nothing to do with it." "All the better," says Jim, "because people are looking towards something new in politics, and some fellow who doesn't need money . . . . He's not running for money." This gave Jim a lot of confidence. I, of course, being an employee of the government, couldn't enter or participate actively in the thing. I think [Joseph E.] Joe Rosetti was there. Joe was probably his first secretary over there as assistant to Grace Burke. You know, he was always there helping. Anytime we needed anything, you'd go to Joe, and Joe certainly always went through for anything. . . . He had some veteran that needed some help that he called me on. When I'd be in the office of Grace Burke, there was always someone there that wanted something done. This is the way I worked into the organization.

MARTIN: Doctor, at that time at this meeting, what did they specifically want you to do since you were under the Hatch Act and couldn't openly participate in the campaign?

QUIGLEY: Well, really, it was Jim O'Brien who was in the Yankee Division with me in the 101st Infantry. Jim says, "You'd better come over and just meet him so he'll know who you are." It was no thought of participation in actual politics on my part. It was simply a friendly meeting with John Kennedy.

MARTIN: During that first meeting, Doctor, it became apparent, of course, that the returning veterans would be a major factor in his first congressional fight. Did you discuss any veterans' problems where you were associated with them?

QUIGLEY: Oh, yes. I thought that I'd bring this up because I had just been participating in this type of thing. I said to the potential Congressman, "There's one thing I don't like. I don't like to see a GI Joe, anybody who's discharged medically below the rank of an officer, where he'll receive fifty per cent disability compensation. He's reexamined every six months by the VA, and the first thing you know, he's down to probably ten per cent. Occasionally, he goes up to seventy or eighty, maybe a hundred. But in most instances, I find that he is being reduced in his compensation. There is no sense in it when an officer retires for medical disability, as an officer, he's never reexamined, and his compensation always remains the same as far as I could ever see." He turned to me, and he said, "You know, I'm a disabled veteran myself." "Oh", I said. "I didn't know that." "Yes", he says. "I was knocked out of a boat over in the Pacific."

MARTIN: During the campaign, as it progressed, did you have any contact with him in that first fight?



QUIGLEY: No, I didn't have any contact with him at all. Personally, I didn't meet him anymore until after he was elected President. But in the interim all contacts that were with Kennedy were indirect mostly through Dave Powers or Tom Broderick and Joe Rosetti, and Grace Burke, his immediate secretary.

MARTIN: What did they contact you for?

QUIGLEY: Many, many occasions came to the attention of Mr. Kennedy's office, as soon as he became Congressman, that many veterans really were being by-passed. There was such a load of work in Veterans' Administration; everything was being stream-lined and run through fast. Many errors were made in compensation, all sorts of loans, home-loans. I wasn't directly connected with home loans, but especially in disability; that's where I was connected. It was only on justifiable grounds that they thought, sort of, a protest should be made because the veteran wasn't being treated fairly for results or residuals of gunshot wounds, trauma in the service, or diseases in the service, tropical diseases. It was a continuous thing with them, for, oh, ten years until most of the stuff was all straightened out, and the veterans had received their honest and proper gradation, if it was money involved or services involved. This way it was always happy working with these men I just mentioned.

MARTIN: Do you feel that the fact that he was a World War II veteran himself that he would obviously attract more than his share of requests for veterans' services?

QUIGLEY: Oh, I think it's absolutely certain, especially when the story began to go around how he received his disability. They knew that he was one fellow that would pay attention to them and help them out. I know this was inculcated in Grace Burke, his secretary, and Joe Rosetti, the other secretary. I'm quite sure Dave Powers had a great deal of feeling along these lines. I think this is true. Yes.

MARTIN: Well, how about some of the legislation he promoted as a congressman in behalf of the veterans? Was he the type of person that . . . . Was he the guy that most of your requests would be directed towards legislation to improve the lot of the returning servicemen?

QUIGLEY: I didn't participate in this because usually this goes through a higher echelon. I never personally got into his office on legislative matters. Around here, service organizations certainly knew Jack Kennedy's office was the place to get things through. This is the line of thinking they usually followed. Not that other congressmen and senators hadn't done well, but you could get direct action, it seemed to us, through John Kennedy.

MARTIN: That also applied while he was senator, too?

QUIGLEY: This applied while he was a senator, and, also, while he was a President in the White House.

MARTIN: Doctor, did you ever get down to see him at all in Washington as a congressman or as a senator?

QUIGLEY: He was an awfully busy fellow while congressman and senator. I didn't get down to see him. I did get down to see him when he was President. As I say, he was so busy news came back that he might see you, and he had this to do and that to do. And I didn't think it was absolutely necessary for me to see him for anything personal because there was always Dave Powers or [P. Kenneth] Kenny O'Donnell that could do the thing; if I needed anything done for a veteran, they'd do it for me. I never saw him until I visited him after he was President.

MARTIN: About that visit while he was President, what are some of the details of that?

QUIGLEY: Well, when I went in there, he was busy as usual. Bill Connors was with me. We went in and saw Davey Powers. I said to Dave, "Gee whiz, how did

you ever make this here? It's certainly a beautiful place." "Well, it's the luck of the Irish," says Dave. Then he says "Come on, sit in the Cabinet Room here. I want you to look around." He showed me President John Adams' first letter while he was in the White House there. Adams' wife wrote home to her sister about what a tough place to live in the White House was in those days. I said, "Well, where's the President's chair?" Dave Powers was called out. He said, "Sit down there where you want to." So I sat there in the President's chair in the room where the Cabinet sits, Cabinet Room. Then I thought I'd change to Mr. [Robert S.] McNamara's chair, just to say that I did it. Then I pulled the drawer out of the President's desk where he sits, and there were some nice cigars there. Of course, I said, "They look good." Dave Powers poked his nose in and says, "Take a couple of cigars, Doc." Then I certainly took them. Then he says, "The President wants to see you." So we went in there, and the first thing he says is, "How is that campaign going to come out up there in Massachusetts?" That gives you an idea how he was thinking politically, all the time. We were going in to say, "Hello." "Nice day." "Glad to see you." "How is that campaign doing up there in Massachusetts?" Of course, we knew he was referring to his brother, Ted [Edward M. Kennedy]. I said, "There's no race at all. There's no question about it. We're getting in." I think most of the thinking people of Massachusetts had the same idea. So, I'm in the President's office, and he's called out for General [Maxwell D.] Taylor, Chief of Staff, I guess. Dave says, "Well, make yourself at home." So I went over and sat down in that rocking chair, and I rocked there for about five minutes. Then he showed me the blotter that [Charles] DeGaulle sent him on the desk there. He showed me the coconut shell. The President didn't want us to leave; he was very cordial. He said, "For the first time I've been President, first visit, Grace Burke, my favorite secretary made it today. . . ." Grace was outside. We talked to the President and Grace; just a few old times and how things were in Boston. We didn't hang around too long because he was always busy, moving fast. That's how I saw him then.

MARTIN: Doctor, what other memories do you recall of the late President?

QUIGLEY: The latest thing that was very interesting was that the Disabled American Veterans changed the name of their local Boston chapter just about two months ago and called it the John F. Kennedy chapter 44 of Massachusetts, a new chapter. There's a Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., post of Veterans of Foreign Wars. That's been in Boston for a long time, but this is the first time a John F. Kennedy chapter of Disabled American Veterans, any veterans organization, around here was called John F. Kennedy chapter. I had the honor of receiving a citation for distinguished service in behalf of disabled American veterans presented to me at their annual meeting here at the Hotel Bradford. This is a cherished citation that I hang on my wall below the President's picture. I don't know why they gave it to me, but maybe I was the next one in line. I certainly cherish this because of its originality.

MARTIN: This has been an interview with Dr. Thomas J. Quigley, Director of the Outpatient Clinic of the Veterans Administration at 17 Court Street in Boston. The interviewer was Ed Martin. The date, June 8, 1964.