

**Robert J. Manning Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 06/19/1967**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Robert J. Manning  
**Interviewer:** Joseph E. O'Connor  
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**Biographical Note**

Robert J. Manning (1919-2012) was a journalist and the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs from 1962 to 1964. This interview focuses on the role of public affairs in the Kennedy administration and the Kennedy administration's relationship with the press during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War, among other topics.

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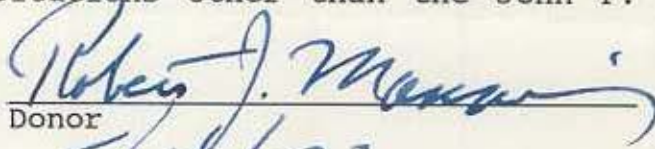
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Robert J. Manning– JFK #1  
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Working on Aldai Stevenson’s 1952 campaign
2	Profiles on Stewart Udall and Robert F. Kennedy
3	Invitation to join the Kennedy administration
5	Dean Rusk’s lack of understanding of public affairs
6	Answering criticisms of the United States by Prime Minister Diefenbaker of Canada
7	Helping prepare for press conferences
8	John F. Kennedy’s [JFK] attitude towards business
10	Receiving guidance from the White House staff and JFK
11	Impression of Dean Rusk
13	Cuban Missile Crisis
14	Deciding whether or not to inform the public
16	Requirement that officials would have to make note of reporters they had talked to
17	The State Department’s openness to the press
19	Mishandling the press during Vietnam
20	Press’s growing distrust over Vietnam
22	Change in public affairs personnel
23	Politicization of the journalism in Vietnam

Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT MANNING

June 19, 1967

Boston, Massachusetts

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Mr. Manning, I think we might as well begin this by my asking you what your first contact or your first impressions of John Kennedy or the Kennedy family were.

MANNING: My contact came late in the game rather than early. I was living outside the United States in '58 and '59 until election day in 1960 and wasn't involved with John Kennedy or any of the others before. My only involvement in politics came through the Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] period as did so many of the other people who wound up in the Kennedy administration. And even there my involvement--I was primarily a journalist, although in 1952 I had taken leave from *Time* to work with the Stevenson campaign in Springfield and traveling with him, and through him I met a lot of the people who later associated with President Kennedy: Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] and Ken Galbraith [John Kenneth Galbraith], Dave Bell [David E. Bell], and that whole group that were around Stevenson in '52 and '56 and then joined President Kennedy. Well, still that left me without any association with the Kennedy family itself. I did not join the administration until 1962, and really the invitation to come into the Department of State under President Kennedy was my first actual contact with the president or those around him.

O'CONNOR: Were you still working with the Stevenson group or still connected with Stevenson...

MANNING: No, the '52 campaign. In '56, except for a little work in my area in Long Island, I did not take leave as I had in '52. Really that '52 campaign was my only political experience. It

[-1-]

was the one that kept me.... You know, it developed friendships and relationships and also pegged me automatically. I'm a Democrat, and as the Kennedy movement began, I got caught up in a great deal of that excitement, too. But when I came back from London, even then I came back as a journalist to Washington. I left Time, Incorporated, and moved to Washington as a free-lance writer.

I made a mistake a moment ago when I said that I had no contact before '62. In fact, as a writer, I went into the new Washington and began what would be a journalistic contact. That's not a personal relationship at all. I was free lance, which meant that it took a little bit of working out and arranging to get in and out of places. It wasn't until some specific assignments came along, like *Saturday Evening Post* and *Saturday Review*, that I began to establish a journalistic contact. But I have presumed that what we were talking about earlier was a personal relationship.

O'CONNOR: Sure, sure.

MANNING: I did a profile of Stewart Udall [Stewart L. Udall], for example, and out of that he brought me into.... Before he took over, he was going over to Interior [Department of the Interior] to sort of get the feel of the ground. He let me in on all his meetings and his interviews with people who were going to be working for him in his attempt to get oriented to the place he was going to run. Through that I got a great deal of sense of what the administration was beginning to do.

Then I did a profile on Bob Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] for the *New York Times Magazine* in this period, and that, of course, gave me my first contact with him. But I wouldn't altogether say--it wasn't a contact that led to any close personal relationship. I went out to Hickory Hill and met Kennedy himself there and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] but it wasn't a profile that was necessarily going to generate any warm friendship because, if I do say so, it was really a pretty objective look at him and a lot of the talk about him and the way he handled himself, and he was known to be a pretty tough fellow.

O'CONNOR: Did he ever comment to you about that profile?

MANNING: Never heard any comment on it, no. I don't think that Mrs. Kennedy, Ethel Kennedy, altogether liked it; she didn't like, as a good wife shouldn't, anything that contained elements of criticism. All in all, I think it came out all right.... Since I felt that he was a remarkable fellow, that plainly showed

through what I wrote about him, so it must have come out as something that would have to be considered an asset in anybody's clippings.

I then left Washington after a year and went to work as editor of the *Sunday Herald Tribune* [*New York Herald Tribune*]. And while I missed Washington, this really took me right out of that. So that was the

[-2-]

briefest sort of acquaintanceship with the Kennedys and some of the people around them. Then out of the blue at the end of '61 came an invitation to come down to the White House and talk about possibly coming into the government.

O'CONNOR: Through whom did that come?

MANNING: Well, the phone call came from Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan]. I still don't know just who.... I know that in this job of Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs some problems had developed. The original appointment, for some reason or other--and there could be dozens of reasons for this--had not worked out. It wasn't working out satisfactorily. Of course, we know the President was very sensitive himself to the conduct of this public aspect of diplomacy, very sensitive, I think more so than any president before or since. Plainly the White House was dissatisfied with the way this was working, and I think it became evident to me after I came down. I didn't know when I came down what job was being talked about. But when I came down and that was mentioned, it became apparent to me early that it wasn't felt either at the White House or the State Department that it was working out. Why, I don't know.

O'CONNOR: I was going to say I'm surprised when you say you don't know; because I would have thought.... Roger Tubby [Roger W. Tubby] was your predecessor in that. I have talked to him a little bit about the troubles that he had, and it has been mentioned in various books that he, first of all, was not the first choice of Dean Rusk for the job, and therefore never really gained complete confidence of Dean Rusk, and as a result didn't quite have the confidence of the press men that he was talking to.

MANNING: There are elements of this. I can tell you what the talk was, and maybe it'll all sift down when all these tapes are edited together.

O'CONNOR: That's for the historians to figure out.

MANNING: Roger had a lot of friends around government and in the press corps and in the political area. He'd worked very hard for Stevenson. He was a very good information man in government when I was a correspondent down there at the end of the war right on up through. I think it is true, the talk I had heard, that Dean Rusk's first choice was someone--Doug Cater [S. Douglas Cater, Jr.]--

whom a lot of daily journalists, according to what I have heard--and this all I heard after I came to Washington and long after this had happened--that a group of them had gone to the Secretary, apparently, and said that they felt this man didn't have the experience in daily and wire service journalism to make him the right man for this job. I don't think it was a personal thing; I think it was a professional feeling that a man who worked for a bi-weekly magazine was bound to

[ -3- ]

have a metabolism which would make it very difficult for them to get the day-by-day, even hour-by-hour attention they needed.

I think probably Roger Tubby was imposed from the White House. I think probably Pierre [Pierre Salinger] in setting this up figured Roger would be very good, and he would be. He knew Pierre, they knew each other, they had worked together. So I think probably that was imposed on a man, to be frank, Dean Rusk doesn't have a very good sense of what the news function is, anyway--I don't think he ever will--who, therefore, would need someone in whom he felt either a very deep sense of confidence, which wouldn't produce many confidences either. But someone just imposed on him from outside wouldn't work very well, particularly if it was imposed in what he might take as a political way. The fact is, an awful lot of the other important jobs were imposed in that sense too. I don't think he picked a very large number of the top people in the State Department.

O'CONNOR: Sure, some of the top people under him were named before he was named, which put him in a rather strange position.

MANNING: That's right. But in any event, when I got there, it was plain that this discontent existed in both places. It hadn't worked out, it was important that it work out. Well, discontent I think in three places. I don't think the press was feeling that it was.... They didn't feel that Roger had the Secretary's confidence or was involved enough. It's getting through those closed doors in the Department of State that's crucial.

It isn't only a secretary of state--in this case Rusk was not inclined to push the doors open for someone else--but the career foreign service people and diplomatists, they are always averse to having anybody dealing with the outside. Their reaction is that a man, even though he works for the government, if he's dealing with the press, must be speaking and leaking to the press, and probably represents the journalists in these counsels. Well, that hadn't happened, and the press wasn't getting what it needed. And I don't think the Secretary and the people upstairs felt that.... I mean, after bumping into closed doors for a while, a man even as savvy and as aggressive as Roger Tubby was is going to say, "The hell with it." Which he must have done. I don't think he was happy about leaving. At the same time, he wouldn't have been happy staying.

So, now as to how I wound up in this, I'm not sure. I'm sure that some of the old.... I think George Ball [George W. Ball] must have had something to do with it, because I had worked very closely with him in the '52 campaign, and we had gotten along quite well



together. Whether he mentioned the name, whether somebody--I'm told that two or three people in the Washington press corps mentioned it, including one whom I think had approached for the job, Elie Abel. I think he was then with a Detroit paper; he hadn't joined NBC [National

[-4-]

Broadcasting Company, Inc.] yet. Elie had been approached for the Sylvester [Arthur Sylvester] job, I know, and whether for the State one, I don't know, but Elie had told me that he was one of two or three newspapermen who mentioned my name as a possibility. Someone talked to Salinger.

In the upshot, I got a call from Dungan. The invitation was to come and talk about a variety of things. In fact, this was the only thing we ever talked about. I particularly liked what I was doing in New York, to try to start a new Sunday paper, which I thought I had the go-ahead on, which in fact I didn't. So this came at an interesting time, and I was fascinated by the Kennedy administration, by what I had seen in my short stretch as a freelancer.

So I looked this over, and after a lot of talks at the White House and with Rusk and with George Ball in which I tried to work out a real understanding about access--the big question of whether this job would work or not was access to the proper meetings and to the proper papers--I got what I considered to be sufficient assurances on that, and I took it. It led to a fascinating two and a half years.

O'CONNOR: Did you talk to Roger Tubby at all before you took the job? In other words, what I'm interested to know is whether or not the access that you were able to achieve, the agreement, sort of, regarding access, was an improvement over what Roger Tubby had been granted.

MANNING: I talked with Roger briefly. I had talked to so many people, and he was aware of whom I'd talked to and said, "I think you've cased this thoroughly. I don't think there's much I can tell you on the basis of what I hear about you. You're perfectly right in pressing your one point, which I should have, which is that if I can't come into the meetings and make the decisions as to what to recommend be done, if I can't be accepted as one of the group, if I can't be a participant at conferences with the secretary and under secretary, I won't take it. I should have done that. It seems to me, whether the agreements hold is another matter, but you've gotten agreements that I should have gotten in advance. I didn't assume from having been in the government so long that one would have to renegotiate."

Well, it was always a struggle, but two things made it work really. First, I've got great respect for Rusk as an individual even though his attitude toward my function, as an explainer, was hostile. Still, when it was pressed on him hard on individual cases, I could bring him around to what I felt had to be done about ninety-nine percent of the time. But each case had to be reargued. It was like having to go to the Supreme Court every six months and reargue the integration case, for example. The other two things that made it work were

the fact that George Ball had a real sense of the function, and Ball promised that if I ever had a real problem of access or getting the sensible, by my

[-5-]

standards sensible, decision made or getting the appointment I needed or that extra bit of manpower, I could go to Ball and he'd put the pressure on and make it work. I suppose a secretary of state shouldn't be bothered with too many of these details.

The other thing that made it work was the White House's appreciation of this problem, and that was the crucial thing. Not only the President, but Salinger had a good savvy sense. Salinger considered that his operation was the center of one big information operation rather than being one of several separate little productions around Washington. That, from my standpoint, rather than representing oppressive direction, represented day to day, hour by hour contact. I was quite willing at times to be cocky about foreign affairs and say, "Pierre, you don't know about this. Let me handle it." If it were done in the right way, he accepted it which not too many people would do.

But the President himself and Mac Bundy [McGeorge Bundy]--Mac Bundy also was very important in this because he sensed, too, the importance of this and frequently the importance of moving very fast. There were important moments when we had to know and decide in a half hour what we were going to say at noon on where we stood on a given thing. I couldn't go through the normal process of clearing, sometimes even through just the Secretary of State who was busy, and I would have to take my chances. Well, I always knew that I could call over there and say, "I'm going to go with this unless you tell me right now there's something wrong with it."

I think that, while we made our mistakes, that procedure eliminated dozens and dozens of instances that could have been very similar to the recent one in which Bob McCloskey [Robert J. McCloskey] went out and said, "We're neutral in the Israel-Arab war." That was done by avoiding the very process of step-by-step clearing. Well, that couldn't have happened. Mac couldn't have done that on his own without having the same sense that I had, that the President wanted here a streamlined operation in which the White House and State Department were dovetailed, even if that meant eliminating a lot of the clearance process and even meant stepping on the toes of the people above the two men involved, myself and Pierre, say, or myself and Mac Bundy.

O'CONNOR: That can be a very dangerous process if you don't have a real understanding between the people involved and a real sense of obligation, particularly on the part of the press officer.

MANNING: Well, to show that it can be dangerous--although the result of this was one that pleased several of us, I think--Mac and I had to make a very quick decision on the question of answering an on the U.S. by Diefenbaker [John G. Diefenbaker], who was then the Prime Minister of Canada,

[-6-]

shortly before the Canadian elections. Well, this operation that I have just described went into effect then. We drafted a statement that we felt could be made, and we didn't have time for all the clearances although we did get some top Canadian desk people to join us in the clearances, we got quite a few clearances on this piece of paper. But it was one that went fast, and it brought down the Diefenbaker government, in effect. Mac and I have been quite glad to take the blame for that. [Laughter] But it did. Suppose that the fall of the Diefenbaker government had been hurtful to United States interests rather than beneficial, then we wouldn't be...

O'CONNOR: Then you wouldn't be so anxious to take the blame.

MANNING: Well, we were so anxious to take the credit, but we'd have to take the blame.

O'CONNOR: Well, Salinger said Robert Manning built up the most efficient press operation the State Department had ever known and apparently this...

MANNING: Well, I think....

O'CONNOR: I was going to ask you to justify this, but apparently you had.

MANNING: What built it up, as you can see, is the receptivity in the right places, an acceptance of the fact that the public affairs aspect of politics, and particularly foreign affairs, today, can be as important as the private aspect of it. In many, many things in that period, this proved to be the case.

O'CONNOR: Okay. Why don't we move into some of the specific things that you might have been involved in. One of the earliest that comes to my mind, because of my talk with Frank Sieverts, though this may not be the earliest that you can think of, is the steel crisis, which is not a State Department crisis at all but which you happened to be involved in.

MANNING: "Involved" would be too strong a word.

O'CONNOR: An observer.

MANNING: But it's an interesting illustration of the way this job worked and the relationship between individuals such as myself in certain positions, and the President, in that shortly after I came there in 1962, we found that in the process of preparing for the President's press conferences which were being held almost every Wednesday, once-a-week frequency....

We would have meetings in Pierre's office on Tuesday afternoon--

Sylvester, myself, and the information directors, or whatever their titles were, from all the other major areas of government. We would all come with briefing papers on questions that we thought might be coming up in the press conference and suggestions of what might be said and needed to be said, and then background research in case the President wanted more facts and figures. We would, for an hour or so, discuss all these and leave all the material with Pierre. I don't know whether Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] had anything quite that elaborate, but certainly before Hagerty and the Eisenhower presidency there was never anything that coherent and substantial in preparation for presidential news conferences.

It developed through most of that period that, as much as fifty to eighty percent of these press conferences, barring an occasional domestic crisis, was being devoted to foreign affairs questions of one sort or the other. The proportion of these questions, and the proportion of the most difficult questions, related to foreign affairs were growing as time went on. The President was finding that it made sense to broaden slightly the little briefing function he had on Wednesday mornings. So at whose suggestion, I'm not quite sure--whether it was the Secretary of State's or whether it was Mac Bundy's or Pierre's or whether it simply grew out of a conversation one day--it was decided that I should come each Wednesday morning to these breakfasts upstairs in the White House with the President, Mac Bundy, Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen]. You probably have the list of those who went to those breakfasts--the Vice President, Rusk, Salinger, myself, Mike Feldman [Myer Feldman]. We were the regulars. Then, depending on what was going on, there would be others.

Well, the very first one of those that I attended happened to be the morning after the steel price rise so that the.... So the very first one I go to--and I was fascinated with all these things--was the morning of the steel crisis. Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg] was then the Secretary of Labor so of course, he was there, and I think I've got somewhere in my notes the group who were at that meeting. If the other tapes don't show this, this could be found out. It's one of the few entries I made in what was going to be a diary but never came to be one. But the whole morning was devoted to getting on the phone--Walter Heller [Walter W. Heller] was there, I remember, and maybe Kermit Gordon, too, I think he was--and phone calls. "Call Senator So-and-so." There was the chance to see the cold fury--cold isn't quite the word, though--with which the President was reacting to this, he was collected but really mad as frozen hell, and yet determined to get this fouled up machinery that he'd already put into operation quickly back into place.

O'CONNOR: Wasn't that particularly personalities, do you recall, or was this a general feeling on his part toward business?

MANNING: No, I think it was the way in which Blough [Roger M. Blough] and company had acted, just after the negotiations. I think the administration had put quite a bit of its own stomach

lining in currency on behalf of business against the union. I've always had the feeling that it was not the President's attitude toward business, that it was, in fact, his feeling that he had shown an understanding of business interests and needs on this thing, and then to have business act, in this way. I think it was the manner of its being done that caused him to decide that he was going to.... Maybe his decision would have been the same anyway as to what had to be done, but the toughness and the directness of it and the fact that, "By God, this is now what we're going to do," I think was guaranteed by the way in which Roger Blough had handled it.

O'CONNOR: Were you able to witness Robert Kennedy's reaction to this at all? Did he participate in this...

MANNING: I don't think he was at that meeting. No, I don't think he was there. I don't think I could tell you of any personal observation of what his reaction was.

O'CONNOR: The reason I asked was because you mentioned cold fury, and that perhaps is characteristic of John Kennedy, but Robert Kennedy has been described as a kind of warm fury. I didn't know whether you had witnessed that or were aware of that or in agreement with it or not.

MANNING: I haven't seen him under fire, I mean involved directly. I've read and heard about it. Most of the stories I've heard of this grow out of the campaign rather than later, although one can presume, if you were given to that, that may be what inspired the FBI thing, which I think everyone agrees was a serious mistake, sending the FBI people to various places at two or three in the morning. But I just had no observation of him in any of these events. Certainly in the one case later where I had a chance to watch him, in the Cuban missile crisis, he was as collected, certainly as collected as anyone involved.

O'CONNOR: Okay, another problem. I'll simply have to mention a few problems that you might have been involved in. Another problem that would have come up shortly after you were on was the American decision to test atomic weapons once again. I don't know whether you were involved in that or have any particular recollection of that or not.

MANNING: Not a great deal.

O'CONNOR: It occurred in April of 1962, shortly after you...

MANNING: It was actually very soon. I'm not sure I had quite been sworn in. I had started work. I came down as early as the end of February and worked

as a consultant until the whole process of Roger's reassignment, my nomination and confirmation came,

[-9-]

and I'm not sure that I'd even been sworn in. I know that I was not involved in any of the secret meetings or discussions because I hadn't gotten sufficient clearance for the nuclear question. So I'm afraid I'm pretty much out of that except that I was made aware early in the game that we were going to have here a public affairs problem. I pretty much went by the guidance there that was given me by the Secretary and by the White House.

O'CONNOR: I just threw that out because I didn't know whether you, you know, were involved in that yet or not. Another problem that occurred later in the summer was the problem over West Irian, the Dutch-Indonesian problem. I don't know whether you were involved in that or not.

MANNING: Involved, but in a peripheral way. Again, some of the outlines of the movement, the positions we were going to take were discussed, strangely enough, at these Wednesday morning press conference breakfasts just to raise the question of, How are we going to deal with this one today? when the press asked it--the answer for these several weeks was pretty much the same. It was a relatively noncommittal answer, but the discussion of what we, in fact, were doing and what our position was going to be and the fact that we were going to get into the middle of this in an attempt to be the honest broker was discussed in these meetings, but in a way in which, again, I was a member of the audience rather than a commentator.

O'CONNOR: Well, in most of these situations, though, where did the guidance come from? Were you providing your own guidance, or was this agreed on ahead of time, or did the guidance come from Secretary Rusk or from President Kennedy or someone else?

MANNING: On the day-to-day things, those things that were not the issue or one of the two or three issues of the moment, the process really would be each morning.... Well, there were three mornings a week on which there was a secretary's staff meeting--all the assistant secretaries and equivalents were there--and if I had anything that I thought was going to be a pressing problem, that was a very good opportunity three mornings a week for me to just throw it onto the table. There the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs might say, in the case of the West Irian dispute, "Look, if you say this, it's going to interfere here." But then Harlan Cleveland of International Organizations might say, "Yes, but if you don't say that, that's going to jeopardize what we're trying to do in the UN." We could get it argued out right there.

That was a wonderful place because it was right at the top level, and, while there weren't minutes, there was a record of that meeting. I could go back to my people and say,

“Well, the upshot, the Secretary said after this discussion that we ought to do this. And then maybe on

[-10-]

background we can add that, but don't put that on the record.” That's one way. Frequently, it wasn't that convenient.

If it were, as I say, a question that was important but kind of at a routine level, my people would go out to their opposite members. In other words, the director of the office of news, who was called the spokesman, would call the information people from each of the areas of the department together, and he would have them go back to their offices in the course of the morning and come back with suggested papers from their sections. If they coincided, we would blend them into an answer. If there were conflicts, then usually I'd have to take it up, or one of my deputy assistant secretaries, at the assistant secretary level and try to straighten it out. If there was still a dispute, I would then go to Rusk or to Ball. Or if time was short, I would perhaps leave word with the Secretary; I'd say, "I think we're agreed on this. I'm going to clear it with the White House."

Then I would call Mac Bundy or Salinger, depending on the complication of the question. That White House call could be the thing that would move us toward a decision. Once in a while Mac or Pierre would say, "Let me check with the President on this question." As a situation heated up, the more important it got, the more grew the likelihood that the President himself might call to give his directions. One of the things that made the job interesting and exciting was that Kennedy himself would occasionally phone over. If I'd average it out over a two-year period to a couple of times a week--calls to suggest what we were going to say, or to ascertain what our tone of voice should be.

O'CONNOR: Sure, more frequently than you'd suspect, at any rate.

MANNING: Far more than you'd think the President could find time to exert an interest in that sort of thing. There were periods when those might be two or three times a day and other periods where there was nothing. The Berlin situation was one in which he was interested constantly. We had a great deal of personal contact over that. That's one in which he was playing the violin all the time, wanting to make sure that we weren't going to be too strident here, or that we were going to be emphatic enough on this one. I think he devoted as much attention to the tenor of his or the government's public comments on that as he did to any of the private movements.

O'CONNOR: You mentioned Secretary Rusk and these three mornings-a-week meetings. Well, the comment has often been made about Secretary Rusk that he's not terribly decisive. I wondered what the impression was that you had in connection with these meetings.

MANNING: I think very few impulses of decision came out of these meetings. It was possible to leave them with a sense of what was on his mind and which way his mind was working.

[-11-]

I would go back, in my case--and I'm sure other assistant secretaries must have been able to go back--and on the basis of the way the meeting felt, you know, "Well, I don't have a decision, but I think if I go to him with this and put it this way, that might clinch it." So I'd say that very little sense of, "The decision is this," came out of those meetings. I'm not sure they were designed to be decisive. I think Rusk was inclined to be indecisive in all those things that came up on a given day that weren't related to the one or two things that were most on his mind. He was inclined to push other things away, and that could very well be one of the reasons why some other problems built up over a period of time.

I've always felt that one of the reasons we got so far into the Vietnam situation as we did in a military way--that is decisions based on military considerations or calculations or a military way of trying to decide what we should do or not do--were not because of positive "decisions" on Rusk's part but because he was concentrating for a great deal of that buildup time on Europe and Berlin and the so-called rapprochement with the Russians, and he paid too little, or no attention to Vietnam.

Now there's an inconsistency in what I'm saying and in what some of the judgments of Rusk in, well, in Arthur Schlesinger's book and to a lesser degree in Ted Sorensen's and some of the other judgments that have been made of Rusk. There was a long period in which these very people were accusing him of inaction, of indecisiveness, of not having policies, and then something changed after we got deeply in Vietnam. The accusation against him then became that, well, it's because of Rusk's policy that we got caught, we got deeper and deeper into this. The first is true. I think he was guilty of what he was charged with in the first instance--not paying enough attention to Vietnam. But I don't think, now these same people can't turn around and historically prove--they can't prove both the things they've said, charging him with being an architect of our Vietnam policy. It was one or the other, and I think it was the former. The indecisiveness, the letting other things go along their own way while he concentrated on one or two other problems will prove to be a fair indictment of Rusk.

I didn't know Dean Rusk well to be sure that he harbored the Munich analogy all along, or that it became a part of his thinking after we were well launched into the Vietnam misadventure. I don't know, but I suspect that he found himself caught in that analogy when he began, after two years or so of neglecting the issue, to preoccupy himself with the Vietnam situation. The entire State Department probably could be said to have gone through the same experience. The Defense Department engineered Vietnam. State didn't get sufficiently involved before it had grown into an American war. So I believe, in any case.

No wonder then that those people over in the Pentagon who for two or even three and four years, day to day, had been involved in this and building up all their notions of how it should be done and making



most of the political contact out in the countryside should be the ones who dominated, and they have dominated ever since our attitude toward the Indo-China conflict.

O'CONNOR: Okay, we can move on to a crisis that I know you were involved in--that was the Cuban missile crisis. You might begin by telling us how you first heard about it or how you first became involved.

MANNING: I think this is approximately true with Sylvester, too. I think the timing here is that we were brought into this about, I think, Thursday night of the... Thursday night, late Thursday night, was the first that I knew that something serious was up. That means that I came into it rather late. A great deal of the discussion of what came to be called the EXCOMM [Executive Committee of the National Security Council], had taken place. A great deal of the sense of what we were going to do, just what... I think all the dimensions of what the government's decision was going to be had been pretty much settled, had been talked out.

Again, the President with his... I'm sure that it was his decision to bring in the information people. I think he brought Pierre in a little sooner, but not a hell of a lot. Pierre's own book, I think, says that he came in pretty late. Shortly after that, Sylvester and I were brought in. I was not brought in directly and consciously by the White House until Saturday, but on Thursday night I was given the word as to what was going on and was told to stand by--in fact, was told to go ahead and go up to the Eastern Shore as planned on Friday morning. Jim Greenfield [James L. Greenfield], my deputy, I was able to fill him, and we alerted to a kind of standby basis.

I came back on Saturday night. On Saturday night and Sunday and Monday we prepared what we had to prepare in the area of news presentation of this whole thing. Again, it was the President's decision, one I think he would make more instinctively than a lot of other people, and I think more quickly than the Secretary of State or McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] would have made, to get these information fellows in and start reviving, getting them ready to handle this. I was not in on the discussion in which, for example, Bob Kennedy said, "My brother will not be the Tojo of the American government." I was not in on the discussion of the Joint Chiefs' alternatives or the discussion of how you take out the missiles, if you bomb them, and so on.

We began at the State Department on Saturday night preparing an idea of what kind of briefing conferences we would recommend and the press briefings we would recommend to the President, and various other things--what we would recommend in terms of handling the photographs, which was almost a fiasco because of the release in London, as you recall. Then on Sunday morning we had the chance to hear the President go over the whole thing, saying, "Here's what's been discussed. I know some people feel that perhaps we should

have taken this other course, but this is the course we're going to follow." So it was a chance to get a good, again, the field background of what it was we were going to have to deal with that Monday night. So the operative days then are Saturday night, Sunday, and Monday, two and a half or three more days than the public had.

O'CONNOR: But certain problems arise, though, because you knew about it several days ahead of time. You've been quoted a number of times as saying, "It's not necessary for a public relations figure or for a man who has to deal with the press to lie regarding foreign policy." Well, what do you do when you're faced with a crisis such as this where to release very much information might jeopardize the operation? What sort of problems did this present for you?

MANNING: Well, it seems to me there's no conflict here. I would say that when you're confronted with.... The first decision here was not whether to state a mistruth; it was whether to tell people that something was going on or not. That's not lying. That's a question of withholding for purposes of national interest or national or individual security: the very security of troops you're moving or ships you're moving, and so on, is involved there. The difference between that and actually stating something that is not true seems to me a tremendous difference. I would argue very strongly for the government's right and for the necessity of government withholding certain kinds of information until it can be released without jeopardy to the public or to persons or to the policies involved.

I would also maintain that if the time comes, if something starts to break loose, you still have the choice of saying, "No comment," or, "I will have nothing to say on this," or of stating a mistruth. I see no reason why the mistruth has to be stated. I don't agree with Arthur Sylvester if he indeed said it could be acceptable to lie. I think he's been misrepresented greatly on this. I don't believe that it's at all necessary. I see no situation where it's necessary to lie. It may be tough sometimes to avoid it. I think that when your back is against the wall, to say "No comment" in a society in which "No comment" is taken as confirmation is very risky. But I think that an intelligent person....

I think the President left Salinger in a position where Salinger did not have to lie on the matter of the President's cold. Salinger thought the president had a cold. Well, someone told him he did have a slight cold, you see. But I think if Pierre had been told, "Look, he doesn't really have a cold, but he has got a temperature and you can justify it," I think he would have been in a much more difficult position than, in fact, he was on the basis of what he was told.

O'CONNOR: I would imagine, though, that this particular crisis would have tested that principle or that feeling on your part to the utmost because, well, I'm thinking in particular of

the time I believe it was Donald May caught you and Pierre Salinger and Arthur Sylvester in your office in the State Department prior to the crisis.

MANNING: But he didn't.... He saved us. He didn't say.... All he did was look through an open door and then run off and file a story. Now if he'd stopped and said, "What are you fellows doing?" that would have been the beginning of a dilemma that he never imposed on us. He went out and dictated a bulletin and, failing to identify Sylvester, said, "Manning, Salinger, and a man from USIA [United States Information Agency] were meeting...." So he wasn't even correct on that. But if he had said, "What are you fellows doing there?" we'd have to say, "None of your business." And if he persisted, we'd still have to say, "None of your business." Now that wouldn't be lying. It would have left him puzzling, but everybody in town knew something was up then. That's why he ran off in excitement instead of bothering to find out what it was.

If he had said, "Are you guys talking about Cuba?" that would have indicated to us that something is out now, that there's something in the wind about Cuba. Nobody knew for sure. A lot of people thought we were meeting over Berlin. And the uncertainty made it impossible for them.... The security on this held, not because the town didn't know something was going on, but because nobody could be quite sure what it was. I think a couple of the papers right near the end, the *Times* [*New York Times*] and maybe the *Washington Post* finally nailed down where they were pretty sure it involved Cuba, but they weren't altogether sure.

O'CONNOR: This requires in a situation like this a great sense of responsibility on the part of the press men. I wondered if you've had any difficulties in this crisis or another crisis with a press man wanting to publish a story that you preferred not to be published at that point.

MANNING: No. I don't recall any important situation in which when.... Of course, there weren't too many of these situations anyway. But when we discovered that someone was about to come out with a story that would really jeopardize a policy, we found it possible to go to them and say, "Look, if you do this now, the consequences are going to be bad. Anyway you haven't got it quite right. We can't guarantee to give it to you exclusively, because when it comes it's going to be public, but I can guarantee to fill you in on a little bit more of the background and also help you avoid the error, the minor error, you're about to make, if you hold it back." Sometimes I couldn't do it. Sometimes it would take the Secretary of State or maybe the President himself.

O'CONNOR: Can you recall any specific instance of that sort of thing?

MANNING: Gee, I know there's one. What is it? What is it? Some of these things seemed so important then, and they fade in importance now. Let me try to recollect it and add it at

another time, will you, because I think there are at least two, and I know I can.... It would just be a mistake for me to try to remember them now.

O'CONNOR: Sure, you can add them any time you want.

MANNING: I'll make a note to check back. They're good illustrations. They're not vital, but they're good illustrations of what I mean.

O'CONNOR: One controversial decision that came out of this Cuban missile crisis was the decision that officials in the State Department and in the Pentagon would be requested, or required perhaps, to note in a memorandum to the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense what reporters they had talked to in the State Department or in the Pentagon in their offices, and what they had talked about and that sort of thing. You know what order I'm talking about?

MANNING: Yes, I do. There were two, and they were quite different. The one in Defense was different and somewhat more stringent than the one at State. Well, these grew out of...

O'CONNOR: Was this the President's decision?

MANNING: Yes. The President sent word that, you know, this whole matter of leaks and unofficial assumption of the information function and so on had to be stopped. Both Arthur and I resisted considerably and, I think, toned down somewhat what he was after. It was unrealistic. The Secretary and the Under Secretary on his behalf were constantly pressing this restriction, too.

The Defense regulation was actually quite a bit more stringent. It required that anyone who was seeing a newspaperman would have to either send a report immediately of whom he had seen and what the subject discussed was, or have someone from Sylvester's operation sit in on the interview. He had an alternative.

We didn't require either of those things at State. I sent out at the request, well of the Secretary--but I know it came from the President--a stipulation that the persons who see newspapermen merely indicate to their information people--each bureau of the Department of State has two or three public information officers who actually report to their assistant secretaries, although the policy guidance and coordination responsibility over them was in my office, a rather dual relationship--that they simply, after the fact, indicate to their, provide a list to their people of the newspapermen they had talked to. They didn't have to mention subjects, although the subjects would be obvious by the story the person wrote. At the end of each week--I'm not sure we stipulated a week, but at the end of given periods--the information people would pass on the lists to my office.

This could be justified I think. I didn't like any of the business, but I felt it could be justified, and still do, as a perfectly ordinary and sensible inventory of what the news and interview traffic is. And my job.... We had this policy at the State Department: Unlike the Pentagon, State was wide open in the sense that no newspaperman had to arrange any appointment with any official through my office. He could do it on the basis of his personal contact.... The Secretary of State used to see newspapermen without my knowledge occasionally.

O'CONNOR: Was that true before you got there, or was it true simply after you got there?

MANNING: No, it was true before. He always felt that if Scotty Reston [James B. Reston] gave him a call and said he was in the building, there was no reason why Scotty couldn't drop in. He was good about letting me know it. He wasn't trying to do it behind my back. All I mean by this is that he didn't feel....

Well, the whole department for years has been wide open, but it was I think wider open in our period than not. For example, the experts in the intelligence and research section, which was run by Roger Hilsman and now by Tom Hughes [Thomas L. Hughes] worked on an understanding from us, at our request, on the basis that if they got a request from a newspaperman for background information on West Irian or on Indonesia or on Indochina or any of things that, at our request, would their expert see these men and give them background? Now what it was supposed to be was background. And where the problems could come was if one of these fellows who's really an expert on just everything you can know about Hong Kong starts also to give the fellow an intimation of his idea of what our policy is going to be vis-a-vis Hong Kong, then you can get into difficulty. Well, these are pretty smart guys, and they made the separation and so did the newspapermen.

Since there was a widespread understanding that the building was wide open--the first thing a correspondent was given in the State Department when he came to start covering was a phone book with everybody's phone number in and the home numbers of all the important people--I found myself almost intrigued by the chance to get some sense of what is the traffic, how many people do this. So it wasn't with a hundred percent resistance or disapproval on my part that I put this request of Mr. Rusk and the President into effect. I thought it was going to cause some trouble, and indeed it did. It was badly misrepresented as a blatant attempt at "news management." I don't think you'll find a single correspondent of any importance at the State Department who would say that he subsequently sensed a single inhibition that was imposed on him.

It was, as you can see from the way I'm describing it, far less stringent than the Defense one. Sylvester protested the procedure imposed on him, said this is going to cause real difficulty, but McNamara insisted

[-17-]

that he do it. He did it under protest, but then, by God.... He was a loyal man, Sylvester was, all through this. Later when the heat was on and the President sort of said, "Maybe you'd

better take that thing off over at State." Well, as far as I was concerned, I would have left it on or taken it off. I didn't care; it was doing so little to change the pattern of things at State. So I took it off. Sylvester said, "You forced me to do this, now, by God, we're going to stick with it." And as far as I know, it's still on the book in Defense, but it's been honored more in the breach than in the observance.

O'CONNOR: I would have suspected that the reason it was less stringent at State was because of your actions and your efforts against it, your efforts to restrict it, rather than because of the particular problems at State or the particular problems at the Pentagon. Apparently Arthur Sylvester opposed it just as much as you did, didn't he?

MANNING: Yes, although I think what he had to oppose was more formidable. In other words, I think that what was being imposed there was far more forceful.... I would not, I simply could not have carried through an order to impose that. I mean, I would have felt obliged to say that, "This represents something that I can't in good conscience impose or promise to carry out. I would even urge people in the State Department to disregard it. Therefore, you'd better get another assistant secretary of state."

It was never put to me. It never got to that. I was allowed to argue against it and was told that something had to be done and came up with this recommendation which, to be perfectly frank, the two or three practical minded people in the State Department, like George Ball, whom I talked with said, "Well, look, if you can live with this, I think it might satisfy the President's state of mind at the moment. So let's do it." I said, "Well, I'll do it because I don't think it's going to change the pattern of things." I didn't even do it on paper. I did it orally. If somebody in one of these secretaries' staff meetings hadn't run to a newspaperman and said, "They're trying to sit on me."--he happened to be one of the most garrulous people in the State Department--it never would have caused any storm at all.

O'CONNOR: Who was that? I don't know who you're talking about. [Laughter]

MANNING: It's not important. It's a perfect example of the freedom, as I say, with which these contacts with the press were conducted. He had been sat on two or three times for briefing groups of correspondents on things that didn't relate to his particular area at all, and some of these had produced stories that indicated policy trends that really weren't as he portrayed them; they were just off beam. I think he felt that this request to report press interviews was being directed at inhibiting his relations with the press which happened to be fairly extensive. In fact, it didn't inhibit him at all.

O'CONNOR: Okay, another thing I want to get to before we have to break this up is the Vietnamese problem which you were very much

involved in. That jumps, of course, another year. There were problems in Vietnam, well, beginning in '62. The famous Cable 1006, I believe, was sent out just before you got there or just about the time you got there.

MANNING:               Actually, I arrived there the week, I think, that it was being drafted and went out, because I know that Roger Tubby had left, and I think Carl Rowan [Carl T. Rowan] as deputy, was then involved in riding herd on that one so that he unfairly had his name on it, where it was actually the work of about fifteen people.

O'CONNOR:              Well, what do you think was the problem really between the press and the United States, or the State Department particularly, State Department officials, as a visitor there?

MANNING:               It was a problem between the correspondents in Vietnam on the one hand and the U.S. military and diplomats, Defense and State, at the other end. I frankly think that a great deal of it could have been avoided by sharper handling of it on the part of our government people there. The relations were never going to be ideal because we were trying to be involved there above and beyond what we publicly admitted was our involvement. Pierre in his book quotes from a memo I eventually wrote. I think the opening part of that is--frankly, I'd rather put it the way it's put there than to try to recapitulate it--we were trying to operate under a certain shroud there in a way that made it unrealistic.

That meant that, at the other end of this, in our embassy there and on the part of our military information people, some effort had to go into cultivating in the best sense of this work; I don't mean doing anything byzantine or wrong a kind of relationship with the men who were covering this, so that when they were asked to take certain public statements as the only official statement that was going to be made about whether we were or were not flying helicopters, whether they were or were not returning fire when they were fired upon, that it could be done in a relationship of confidence and understanding of, "Look, I trust you enough not to insult you by trying to say to you, 'Joe, we're not involved here at all. Those shots you heard were, you know, just backfires of a truck.'" A kind of relationship in which these fellows thought, "Well, they've got a problem. I'm not going to lie, I'm not going to fail to report the news as I see it, but I understand." Somehow, I can't tell you in practical illustrations why this would lead to different results than prevailed over there, but I know it would.

Well, somehow the military and our embassy decided that these guys were irritants, troublemakers, and they were going to treat them as outsiders and mischief makers, and they became really the "enemy" in a sense. This caused government officials to constrict more and more and to hold back on what would be legitimate information and, therefore, make their naked little statements seem to be outright lies on their face. These

newsmen could go out in the field and pick up from disgruntled field commanders and so on information to contradict the very stuff they were being told.

Well, as this went on, the reaction of our official people was to treat these people to the point of insulting them. Now many happened to be young and impressionable to a high degree, but our officials also mishandled the professionals, the veterans, fellows like Homer Bigart from the *New York Times* who were over there. They mishandled them because they'd say, "Well, you guys have been covering these old fashioned wars, and this is different. This is entirely different from what you've covered before." These guys came back and had these pretty bad stories to tell about the way the military were misrepresenting the military situation, and the way our political representatives were misrepresenting what Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem] was doing and not doing, and what kind of regime he ran. Then the veterans gradually began to be replaced by new, young guys like Halberstam [David Halberstam] and Malcom Browne [Malcom W. Browne] and so on.

Then the official story began to change. "Well, these kids are wet behind the ears. They don't know how to cover this sort of thing." The officers couldn't have it both ways, but they tried to. These kids were young and impressionable. There's no question that they're good reporters and quite courageous, but no question either that they were young and were inclined to go off half-cocked. Well, you bring them into this already hostile situation and they find themselves.... Again, when you get a new man in, it's a new opportunity. If you're an ambassador or deputy ambassador, or the colonel in charge of information, it's a new opportunity to make your case. But somehow it was handled as, "Gee, another enemy is foisted on us."

These guys were not invited to embassy functions, they were not.... When I went over there, I found it had been a year since anybody in the embassy had had any newspapermen to lunch or had invited a couple of correspondents to one of their thirty-person dinners or to their hundred-and-fifty-person cocktail parties, these simple little acts are things not aimed at buying anybody's loyalty, or trying to create a willingness to misrepresent, but just to establish a relationship. Any diplomat has to establish a relationship with the people in the government in whose capital he goes to serve. Common sense, it seems to me, would have told them to try these newsmen, work out some human relationship, and see if they don't turn out to be just as "civilized" as you are, this sort of thing. Well, relations between U.S. officials and the U.S. press had become a mess by the time the Buddhist riots, or the Buddhist demonstrations, began to develop.

The tension that was to grow into what we now experienced here in this country, this whole sense of never being told the truth about what's going on in Vietnam, was beginning to build then, and the sense that something was terribly wrong there and that we're in

[-20-]

this more deeply than anybody knows was beginning to dawn on the public here. The result was that, as this began to dawn, the dispatches from these disgruntled people became more emotional, but also became more acceptable back here because they took on a greater



credibility--and greater in many cases, I think, than they deserved, although again I think these fellows in general did a remarkable job. I think they began to indulge, however, in a self-canonization process.

By the time the demonstrations came, and then Diem's police started kicking four or five of these people around--and I'm sure they scared them, I have no question they scared them. But they didn't hurt anybody very much, but that created.... Again President Kennedy sensed that this thing is really getting out of hand and something's got to be done about developing a relationship between the government and the U.S. public in this thing, which meant first trying to do something about the relationship between the government and the U.S. press in Vietnam. So after these three or four were roughed up by Diem's police and after the first Buddhist monk burned himself to death, Pierre called and said that the President wanted someone to go over and look into this whole matter of the relationship between the U.S. government, the embassy and the military, and the press, and I was dispatched to go over--again, I think another illustration of President Kennedy's sense of the importance of this whole part of the problem, the public relations problem. Here was a case of a president not only providing an information officer with access, but also providing, in a sense, an invitation to direct involvement in the problem.

Well, I went over. I don't know what I accomplished. I think it may have helped just to have somebody go over there. I wound up talking with Nhu [Ngo Dinh Nhu] for three and a half hours, and with President Diem for two and a half hours, and got them to agree to readmit an American correspondent they had kicked out--Robinson [James Robinson] of NBC--for some broadcasts which they didn't like because of references to family dynasty. They did not admit that their police had done wrong, but they did agree that they would urge the police to use all sorts of discretion. They agreed also that they would make themselves available to some of these resident correspondents. When they gave interviews, which was rarely, they would give them only to visiting correspondents, someone like Marguerite Higgins. They would pick out those they think would be sympathetic, but they wouldn't give them to the resident correspondents, like Halberstam of the *Times* and two or three others. They agreed they now would make themselves available.

I went back to the correspondents and told them this. By this time they were so resentful they said, in effect, "To hell with it. If we just go to him, he'll tell us lies and we'll have to print them." So I found myself throwing up my hands and becoming quite impatient

[-21-]

with the correspondents. They had gone so far by then that very few of them were ever going to establish good relations with Diem, with Nhu, with Ambassador Nolting [Frederick E. Nolting, Jr.] or with General Harkins [Paul Harkins]. They despised each other. I never said personalities had to be changed, but I was aware that a change in ambassadors was in the making when I went. So I came back and said, "These people are never going to have any respect for Harkins. They consider him a liar. They laugh at him." I recall one incident in which a correspondent was driving by Harkins's residence and shook his fist and said, "We'll get that son of a bitch." Things had gone that far.

Fortunately, a change in personnel was in the works. I did a long memo for Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] who was announced as new ambassador just about the time I came back, that he was going to go as ambassador, in which I recited at some length what I'm, you know, telling you here. Lodge, who always had a fairly good public relations sense, I think, went over, and he at least began to mend that part of the problem. But then, as you know, things for other reasons than press relations were on the downhill slide, and that whole explosion that eliminated Diem and Nhu and carried us into the next phase of this was under way. But there were the seeds of the so-called credibility problem vis-a-vis Vietnam which we've never.... I mean they've since come to bloom, and it's going to be a long time, I think, before the harm will disappear.

O'CONNOR: The way you presented it, it's difficult to see the onus on any particular group there. Is that....

MANNING: I think that's fair enough. I'm not trying to dodge it. I do say that I think there probably was a point back earlier in this when just a bit more common sense on the part of our embassy there and our military people in Saigon alone could have averted much bitterness, the depth of bitterness, between our own press and our own spokesmen there. It might have kept us from going as far as it's gone. I think there was a point.

Therefore, I guess, if there's an onus, it goes--I've got to be fair here now--on the way in which the people at that end carried out rather impossible orders. So then that means transfer.... I'm putting the onus more on the government, but I don't think it can be left entirely on our officials in Saigon. I think it has to be partly distributed back in Washington because of--and this goes right to the White House itself--the unrealistic attitude they insisted on maintaining about whether we were or were not involved and the extent of that involvement. Again I go back to the first two or three paragraphs of that memo which there's no reason, it seems to me, to put on tape here.

O'CONNOR: Yes, sure, I understand what you're referring to specifically, though.

MANNING: There's no reason why a whole copy of that memo couldn't be in this record at some point.

[-22-]

O'CONNOR: Well, I'm sure it is. Not necessarily in this tape, but it should be in the papers.

MANNING: You know, it's been arranged to.... I don't know whether the President ever got to read it, because it was one of those things that Pierre was planning to have a meeting about, and it just never came about. I forget the date of it. Was it spring of '63? Does that sound right?

O'CONNOR: I think it would have been later than that.

MANNING: Later than that, because not too much time transpired before the President's death. In any event, I think as far as the origins of today's credibility problem have gone, I think a great deal of research ought to be done on the period we've just been talking about.

O'CONNOR: Did you have much feeling that the journalists in Vietnam, the American journalists, were going beyond their own journalism into the realm of politics?

MANNING: I think by the time I went over there, I think everybody involved was going beyond in terms of emotionalism, self-commitment and, to repeat a certain self-canonization. I think a great deal of the journalism coming out of Saigon in this period in the last several months of the Diem regime was journalism of emotion as much as of reportage. I think it had some of the virtues and all the faults of that kind of journalism. It was self advocacy; it was self-fulfilling in a sense. It was designed to say, "We told you so." I think a part of the reason Americans are misinformed--that's why I find it so difficult to place all the onus in one direction--was the direction that our own journalism took for several important months.

END OF INTERVIEW