

**Courtney Evans Oral History Interview –RFK#3, 12/18/1970**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Courtney Evans

**Interviewer:** James A. Oesterle

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**Biographical Note**

Evans, Assistant Director, Special Investigative Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Liaison to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy [RFK], discusses investigating Kennedy administration appointments, FBI investigations of civil rights issues, and RFK's personal relationships, among other issues.

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By Courtney Evans

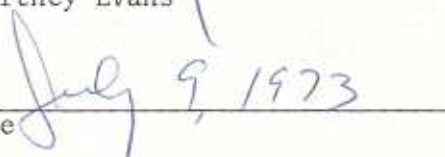
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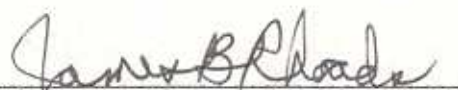
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Courtney Evans – RFK #3

Table of Contents

| <u>Page</u> | <u>Topic</u>   |
|-------------|--|
| 45          | Secret agents  |
| 46          | Investigating Kennedy administration appointments                          |
| 50          | African Americans on staff   |
| 52          | FBI investigations of civil rights issues                                  |
| 54          | Evacuation drills  |
| 55          | Robert F. Kennedy's [RFK] personal security                                |
| 58          | RFK's personal relationships   |
| 60          | Steel price investigation  |
| 62          | The new FBI building   |
| 62          | Office of Criminal Justice   |
| 63          | President Kennedy's assassination and its impact on the Justice Department |
| 65          | RFK leaving the Justice Department   |

Third Oral History Interview

with

COURTNEY EVANS

December 18, 1970  
Washington, D.C.

By James A. Oesterle

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

OESTERLE: Mr. Evans, would you comment on the highly visible, so-called secret KGB [Komitet Gossundarstevnnoi Bezopastnost (Russian Secret Police)] type agents like Georgi Bolshikov and the more clandestine operators perhaps working as a third secretary in a Soviet embassy? Bolshakov had what might be called a fairly close relationship with the attorney general, and there's been a great deal of comment about the role that he played in helping to ease certain situations such as the Cuban missile crisis.

EVANS: Well, actually, the amount of personal knowledge that I have in this area is somewhat limited. I do know that from time to time the attorney general was called upon to interview persons in this category. It's my recollection that these interviews were conducted at the request of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or the State Department rather than something that originated with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]. I mention it and we will go into this in more detail when we discuss the matter of wiretapping because it illustrates one of the points that I want to make with regard to the attorney general's attitude and his real lack of total sophistication in this area. So I think that perhaps we should discuss this in relation to the wiretap issue rather than exploring it fully at this time, if that's all right.

OESTERLE: Oh, that's fine. The last time we met you made some remarks in regard to the early staffing of the Justice Department during the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] administration, and these remarks were made off the record. I wonder if we might pick up at this point?

EVANS: Oh, yes, because this is illustrative of the attorney general's insistence on doing the best possible job that he could do as attorney general. I had a rather close association in this

[-45-]

regard because of the fact that the FBI was investigating all of the high level appointees for the Kennedy administration. This was not something new; it's historic. Certainly it was done in the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] administration, and even before that.

These investigations covered all appointments, including the president's cabinet. An interesting little sidelight is that all of the cabinet officers were investigated, and these requests came from the White House, initially from Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], later from Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]. All of the cabinet officers appointed by President Kennedy were investigated with the exception of Robert Kennedy. When Kenny O'Donnell brought up the question of conducting an investigation of Robert Kennedy, I asked if the president didn't know him better than anybody that we could interview and would a real purpose be served in doing this. So they reconsidered, and I got the word, no, it wouldn't be necessary to conduct a formal investigation of Robert Kennedy. It just seemed to me that people might get the wrong idea if the president sent the FBI out to investigate his own brother.

But when the confirmation hearing was held in the Senate, the chairman of the Committee [Judicial Committee] asked the White House representative who was there, "What about the results of the investigation?" It ended up with the FBI having to submit a letter type report, which as I recall went directly to the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, saying that Robert Kennedy had been investigated in the past, which was true – I think the investigation was conducted at the time he first became a departmental attorney – and that subsequent to that time no unfavorable information had come to the attention of the FBI. This letter was accepted, but it was a rather unusual situation.

But to get to the point that I really want to make. As investigations of subcabinet level officers were being conducted – these were assistant secretaries and assistant attorneys general – I noted a pattern that existed with regard to those who were being considered for appointment to the Department of Justice. On the average, these appointees are individuals having a political background, but with the Department of Justice, names were coming up and people were being investigated who had absolutely no political background whatsoever. All of them seemed to fall into this pattern: they were men who had outstanding reputations as lawyers, but with some very limited exceptions they'd had no experience in political or public life at all. Burke Marshall who was subsequently named as assistant attorney general in charge of the Civil Rights Division, Herbert J. Miller who headed the Criminal Division – and there were others, but these are two examples of individuals who had outstanding reputations as lawyers and none as public figures.

I jokingly remarked to the attorney general one time that he didn't seem to be paying off any of his brother's political obligations with appointments in his own department. And, as was typical of the attorney general when remarks of that kind were made, he just passed it off with a little laugh. And really no answer was expected. But to me it was very evident

[-46-]

that Robert Kennedy was selecting his principal assistants from a group of very highly qualified people. I think he probably had a reason for this. He recognized that his own legal experience was very limited. It was, I think, appropriate, and certainly there was a large measure of truth in it when the president facetiously remarked at some press conference, with regard to Robert Kennedy's appointment as attorney general, that he couldn't see anything wrong with his brother gaining some legal experience in public life. Robert Kennedy knew the type of help that he had to have, and he went out and he got that kind of help. They were, as a group, as capable lawyers as I've seen in any one location at any one time.

OESTERLE: What role did Bryon White play in assisting the attorney general in terms of staffing?

EVANS: Oh, I don't think there was any question that Byron White was Robert Kennedy's chief talent recruiter. Mr. White had as fine a legal mind as any person I've known. He was highly regarded in legal academic circles, had broad acquaintance among the leading members of the bar, and was in a position to tap sources of exceptional talent in the legal area probably better than any other person that I knew at the time. I don't think there's any question that he was the man that recruited talent. I have no personal knowledge as to his mandate from Robert Kennedy, but the results seem to show that his mandate must have been to get the best possible individual, irrespective of any political connections.

OESTERLE: Do you recall any particular problems in regard to appointments either in the Justice Department or in the new administration regarding the reports that were coming in from the bureau and the desire of someone in the administration that a certain person be appointed?

EVANS: I don't think that there were any specific incidents when information was developed that by itself was disqualifying. I remember we had one appointment, and my recollection is that after the appointment was made or perhaps while it was pending confirmation, information was developed that this individual had had some tax difficulties. As a result of that, for the first time and on direct orders from the White House, information concerning the tax status of an individual being considered for appointment was reported. This information was highly confidential. It wasn't available to the FBI, but it's my understanding that the Internal Revenue Service made their reports directly to the White House as to whether or not an individual being considered for appointment had any record with the Internal Revenue Service that would be pertinent to a decision as to his serving in a public capacity.

OESTERLE: Did political activity on the part of some politicians that were being considered for appointments in the new administration ever present a problem in terms of evaluation?

[-47-]

EVANS: Not as far as the FBI was concerned, because there was no evaluation factor there. We developed facts regarding the candidate for appointment with regard to his background, his educational and employment history, his position in the community where he had lived. This was strictly a factual report, and the evaluation was a matter for the employing agency, cabinet officer, or the White House. This presented no problem as far as the FBI was concerned. That it was a factor in appointments is just a way of life in Washington.

OESTERLE: Oh, oh, sure. No, I meant that often a man that's very active politically in one of the major cities often knows the better known or more successful restaurateurs, perhaps gamblers even, men about town; and association with these people might be brought to a point of questioning what the liaison might have been at a particular time.

EVANS: The investigations were difficult because we had to be absolutely certain that we were impartial and that we delved completely into allegations that were made regarding just such associations as you mention. It required long investigations, in many instances, and a good deal of fact and diplomacy to run this kind of thing out. [Interruption]

Another difficulty in conducting these investigations was that in many instances the person being investigated soon found out about the investigation, at least the fact that the investigation was underway. When you're investigating a prominent person, the FBI can assure everybody that the investigation is being conducted in connection with a possible appointment to a federal office. This has to be done, because otherwise the mere fact that an investigation is being conducted might reflect unfavorably upon a person, or at least some people might interpret it that way. Despite all the disclaimers of the FBI that investigations are conducted for many purposes and the mere fact that inquiries are being made doesn't imply that there's anything wrong, some people will make this assumption.

If the fact is known that an individual is being considered for appointment, knowledgeable people can surmise what the appointment is going to be, what the office that this man is being considered for is. As a consequence, people will tend sometimes to give or withhold information which they feel might benefit them personally in the future in relations with this man who is being considered for appointment.

These are problems when it comes to handling this type of investigation. It's often been suggested that it's better for a president to have the investigation conducted before he makes even a tentative judgment as to appointment. On the other hand, speculation arises predicated upon the investigation. Many times the press picks it up. And this, in turn, puts pressure on both the executive branch of the government, the White House, and on the



individual who is being considered, because word becomes known that he is being investigated and people speculate as to the position that he's being considered for. And then if for perfectly innocent reasons, a decision is made not to make the appointment, the individual has a little

[-48-]

explaining to do among his own circle of friends and acquaintances. So there are problems here.

Perhaps the information that can be developed is not as thorough or as complete if the fact that the appointment is to be made has already been announced. On the other hand, there are certain benefits that accrue to an investigative agency when the fact is known that a man is being considered for a specific position. People who have pertinent information will come forward. There might not be any logical way to identify that person as a possible source of information and so his volunteering and coming forward really helps the investigation. It's a two-pronged affair and you can't win both ways.

OESTERLE: Any report, a bureau report, on an individual has to begin with a request for such a report, and yet it would seem to me that the bureau would probably have files on every potential presidential candidate, for instance, and other well-known people, mayors, governors, so forth. Who would request such reports? Could the director of the bureau instigate an investigation not for any particular reason, but just because this person is becoming very prominent and will be perhaps a leading contender in the next election?

EVANS: This is a matter that has been widely discussed, the so-called dossiers in the files of the FBI that contain information on highly placed people. In one way, this is true. They have information on people who have had public careers and about whom a great deal has been published, just as any good university library has this same information. It's a matter of public record. Any large newspaper in its morgue is going to have a great deal of such information. But in reply to your specific question, no. The FBI, in my long history there, would never conduct an investigation of a person in public life in the absence of a request from a responsible official in the government to conduct the investigation, ordinarily for a stated purpose: the president is considering him for appointment to high office; a cabinet level official is considering this individual for appointment to an advisory commission of some type. The only other reason for investigating a person prominent in public life is the same reason that exists for investigating any person, namely, that there is a specific allegation of a violation of a federal statute that falls within the jurisdiction of the FBI.

I would hope that this would clarify these nebulous allegations of dossiers in the files of the FBI on all prominent people. To my knowledge, that is the extent of the information that's there: investigations openly conducted or material that is a matter of public record that has been retained for background purposes, for the development of leads in the event a future investigation is requested. The only other information that could be there, to my knowledge at any rate, would be information that perhaps is not a public record but something that

somebody has sent into the FBI, a letter that was written to the FBI. This letter was volunteered. It didn't require that any action be taken. Any good investigative agency will keep

[-49-]

such a letter in the file; at a subsequent date, if there is a need to investigate the person, the person who wrote the letter may have information that perhaps should be developed. The lead is there because of the letter he wrote. Now, that's the extent of information that is in the files there, as far as I know.

OESTERLE: I was just thinking that recently President Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] appointed Governor Connally [John B. Connally, Jr.] as secretary of the Treasury [Department]. If prior to considering him as a candidate for this position, President Nixon requested an FBI investigation on a prominent Democrat such as Connally is, this could be widely misunderstood if word got back to Connally through friends and former associates that the FBI was conducting an investigation on him.

EVANS: Yes, it could be. I don't know what the practice is now. In my time in the FBI I think presidents ordinarily handled this by making the announcement that they were considering appointing a person to a specific office. Here I would speculate that the president announced his intention of appointing Governor Connally to the Treasury post. This would leave ample time for an investigation, and the investigation can't be misunderstood because the announcement has been made. With cabinet level appointments most presidents have thought that this was almost a mandatory way to proceed. It does present some of the difficulties that we've discussed.

OESTERLE: Getting back to the staffing of the Justice Department, the question of the number of blacks, Negroes, in the bureau became something of an issue between the director of the bureau [J. Edgar Hoover] and the attorney general. Will you comment on that?

EVANS: Yes. I think that the issue here has been enlarged. There has been a good deal of speculation. Statements have been made which would indicate that it was an issue of some intensity. I do know that when Robert Kennedy was attorney general, he repeatedly raised the question of the employment of blacks in the FBI, as he did in many other agencies. There was public comment, for example, that President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy noted the lack of blacks in honorary color guards that appeared at ceremonies at the White House and elsewhere.

With regard to the FBI, the attorney general did raise this issue on many occasions. It's my recollection that a series of memoranda were sent from the FBI to the attorney general reporting on the progress being made in increasing the number of blacks employed by the FBI. In some areas, the attorney general's insistence that there be a broader black representation among those employed in all divisions of his department has been interpreted

as a pressure to reduce the standards of the qualifications required for employment. To my knowledge, the attorney general never raised this as an issue. Certainly, he was putting pressure on his subordinates, including the FBI, to employ black people where possible, but I never heard him say anything and I never saw anything that he ever wrote which would

[-50-]

indicate that qualifications should be changed or that people who didn't possess qualifications should be hired.

If this is researched thoroughly, I think that the record which the FBI made and which was contained in this series of reports that went to the attorney general will show progress in the employment of blacks; that is, the number in the FBI went up. This is particularly true in the area of clerical type employees. Here progress could be made faster because the qualifications for positions of this type were lower and the number of applicants available for employment was relatively high. In the area of professional employees, particularly special agents, the number of qualified applicants was much more limited. All of this occurred at a time when government agencies were trying to hire blacks, when private industry felt it was to their advantage to hire more qualified black people; and as a result, among those qualified to be special agents, the number of blacks available was limited. By the same token – we're talking about shaving qualifications – I really don't have any facts to back this up because this is an area in the FBI I had nothing to do with. But it's my opinion that if the matter were thoroughly researched, it would be discovered that there were a number of black employees who, because of a long history of employment by the FBI, were promoted to the position of special agent, and that the qualifications these men had was this long experience in the FBI rather than the usual academic qualifications that were demanded of people being employed from the outside as special agents.

OESTERLE:                Would this also include in some instances some chauffeurs that had long been in the employ of the bureau?

EVANS:                    On the record, I think – it's my recollection – the FBI didn't employ a single chauffeur. They had some employees that were classified as drivers. These positions were actually drivers. They were men who drove buses taking groups of trainees to the training facility at Quantico, drove the mail trucks, this kind of thing. They actually were drivers. There weren't any chauffeurs in the ordinary sense that the word is used, and none would have appeared on the payroll.

The FBI was most meticulous in the use of automotive equipment. The one thing that would get an agent fired faster than anything else, other than a gross moral dereliction or activity of a criminal nature, was the misuse of a government automobile. And this was a rule that was religiously followed by agents. They would not use a car for personal purposes. Oh, I'm sure that there were some violations, but the standard of compliance was 99 percent.

It's a matter of public record that, following the assassination, the director made available an armored vehicle for the use of the White House. The FBI has had these armored vehicles for years. To the person on the street seeing one go by it looks much like a big limousine. And that's what it is: a limousine with bulletproofed facilities, special protective

devices, special communications equipment. That's what it is. This type of

[-51-]

vehicle was ordinarily driven by an agent. Some of those agents were black. In that sense, I guess you could say that they were chauffeurs.

At the same time you have to recognize that the director of the FBI – and he's the only person that ever uses this car – was and is a well-known personality. He's recognized on sight by millions of people. He's been threatened; his life has been threatened. He had no bodyguard ever assigned to him. So I would think that perhaps this could be rationalized a bit, that in the conduct of business within his own office in the Department of Justice the use of an agent would be justified. And when it was necessary for him to leave the office and he used this armored vehicle. Under those circumstances, once again, perhaps we can justify the use of agent personnel. I would think this is how he rationalized it. It's really mere supposition on my part. So the employees were black. They were agents. And to my way of thinking at least, they were something more than just being a chauffeur.

OESTERLE: Did they benefit from further training also and being moved up to the position of an SA [special agent]? Would they perhaps take a training course as marksmen or in use of firearms and so forth?

EVANS: I, frankly, don't know. Your question is a good one. This would indicate that they are agents, in fact.

OESTERLE: Especially if they're going to double as a guard if there was a threat against the director's life.

EVANS: I don't know. I never heard of them going to school. I never recall seeing them in any classes that I taught myself, but then I taught very few classes. I don't think I ever taught in the new agents' school. I may have, but it was very limited. Most of the instructing I did was in the advanced courses where experienced agents would come back for two weeks in-service type training. I just don't know. I would think, however, that this has to be reflected in the files there.

OESTERLE: The Justice Department during the Kennedy administration actively solicited blacks through law school deans. Did the bureau also parallel this effort during this period, do you know?

EVANS: Well, I don't have any personal knowledge. I wasn't involved in that kind of activity, but historically the bureau has recruited at law schools. That's how I happened to join the FBI; they were recruiting at my law school. It's my understanding that this continued. With the exception of that period of time immediately following the end of World War II when there was a temporary decline in the number of agents, recruitment activities were continued; and I think this included law schools.

OESTERLE: Mr. Evans, there have been some allegations that in some specific cases the bureau did not fully investigate some of

[-52-]

the civil rights issues in the South. Will you comment on that?

EVANS: I can do so generally, because I never had responsibility for the investigation or supervision of the investigation of civil rights cases. But I did talk with the attorney general and with Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall on many occasions with regard to the investigation of civil rights cases. A good deal of the criticism of the FBI that appeared publicly in this period with regard to civil rights cases centered around the fact that a violation would occur – some type of violence would take place – and this would be in the presence of FBI agents who had been assigned to investigate possible civil rights violations. The FBI's position was that it was an investigative agency, that if its agents participated in what essentially was enforcing a state or local law – namely, preserving the peace – the FBI agents would thus destroy their impartial investigative stance and the FBI agents would not be able to investigate as disinterested people rather than as direct participants. The federal government has no police type organization to enforce the law. Generally, both the attorney general and Burke Marshall were in accord that the FBI's position should be the impartial investigative arm of the Department of Justice.

We talked earlier about different types of cases and the different position that the FBI had with regard to taking initiative in beginning investigations. We noted then that in the ordinary criminal case the FBI investigated strictly on its own without any request from anyone. The other extreme was antitrust cases where the only investigation conducted was that actually requested by the Antitrust Division of the department and the reasons for this. Civil rights fell into this category. As I recall – and the policy here is a matter of written record – early in the Kennedy administration, the only investigation conducted was that requested by the Civil Rights Division. Subsequently, I think this changed in that if a complaint were received alleging a violation of the civil rights statutes, the FBI would on its own conduct a limited preliminary investigation to round out the complaint. Experience had shown that the complaint alone lacked sufficient information to enable the Civil Rights Division and ultimately the attorney general to reach a valid judgment as to whether further action was required.

I think that's about what I can contribute in relation to civil rights cases. As I said, the attorney general accepted this premise because really the alternative was some kind of a national police organization. And if such an organization is going to be created, it will only be after a very thorough public discussion of all of the issues here and a high level decision made by act of Congress, I would presume. This would superimpose upon the state authorities, who have primary responsibility for preserving the peace and protecting property, an added federal force. Such a decision to do this has never been made. And from this then I think it was rather natural that the

attorney general would accept independent investigation as a proper role for the FBI. There have been all kinds of allegations about agents having to work with local police officers in their day-to-day activities, and that this put them in a biased position when it came to investigating the police officers in civil rights cases. I don't suppose any man sitting in Washington can delve into the minds of agents and say with absolute certainty that there's never been any shading of investigative responsibility. But, by and large, it was my experience that the agents performed an honest, valid service as American citizens by conducting these investigations in a thorough and impartial manner when they were assigned to do so. Past relationships didn't enter into the picture. And as I say, there may have been situations of personal friendship between agents and local police officers that interfered, but this was the exception rather than the rule. The FBI was alert to these kinds of allegations. They tried to counter it by assigning agents who had been born and brought up in the North or in the Midwest to southern offices. But actually, it was my feeling that they were maligning the agents from the South. I think they were equally dedicated law enforcement officers and that civil rights cases against police may have been distasteful, but it was a duty and the duty was performed honestly.

Some of the problems, of course, were the notorious cases: the bombing of the Negro church in which the three little girls were killed; the kidnapping and murder of the three civil rights leaders from the North. In these cases there was a great public demand that they be solved, that those responsible be brought to justice. And there was some criticism of the FBI because some of these cases were not solved. I think we can understand the public demand for action, but there are cases in which you can do everything that human ingenuity and dedication will suggest, and still the case won't be solved.

The case involving the bombing of the Negro church and the killing of the little girls I don't think ever was solved, to my knowledge. The one involving the three young civil rights leaders was solved, and I think prosecution subsequently followed. I can't recall definitely through very exceptional investigative work done primarily by agents of southern background.

So in all fairness, while I can't say that the FBI was completely blameless here or that there wasn't any basis whatsoever for the allegations that had been made, I think, in balance, that the allegations weren't fair. There wasn't enough evidence to back up the allegations or to prove them to make any discerning citizen say that there was a just basis for criticism. Some criticism perhaps, but nothing to the extent that resulted. There were intemperances on both sides, and it got into a name-calling, shouting kind of match which was unfortunate. It would have been much better if these public passions hadn't come up and the situation could be judged on the basis of the facts. I've told you what I think the facts are.

OESTERLE: Did the FBI play a role in any of the evacuation drills planned and conducted by the Office of Emergency Planning during the Kennedy administration?

EVANS: I would assume so, but I don't have any knowledge myself as to what that was. I do know that the FBI was actively involved in the whole civil defense setup, the plans to evacuate Washington and all this kind of thing in great detail. But beyond that, I don't have any knowledge.

OESTERLE: And the Justice Department did not participate in any of these drills during the tenure of the Kennedy administration?

EVANS: I just don't know. If the drills took place and they were this type, I assume that they had to.

OESTERLE: You didn't find yourself in an automobile headed out West to...

EVANS: No, but I carried all kinds of cards about. Under this set of circumstances, I was supposed to do this, and that set of circumstances, I was supposed to do that. And I had addresses and telephone numbers. It was down to a very fine point as to what was to be done under a given set of circumstances. If that's what you mean, then there was great participation.

OESTERLE: What were the problems and what was the attitude of the attorney general regarding his own security – security of Hickory Hill and his own person?

EVANS: Insofar as Robert Kennedy himself was concerned, he just totally disregarded any security measures. I think he believed that he could take care of himself. He was concerned about his family. From time to time there were allegations that some action might be taken against his children. In one instance, I recall, the situation was sufficiently serious that he permitted Jim McShane [James J.P. McShane], who was in charge of all the U.S. marshals, to detail some assistant deputy marshals at Hickory Hill for a short period of time.

During the course of the attorney general's travels around the country he would regularly be asked to be met at the airport by an FBI agent, but this wasn't a matter of protection. It was really a means of facilitating the business that he had to perform. The agent knew the town; he knew how to get places in the shortest period of time. And this was the reason for those requests rather than any desire on the part of Robert Kennedy for physical protection from anybody or anything. Other than some security checks that were made with regard to his communications at Hickory Hill and in the Justice Department

[-55-]

office, that's the only protection I know of that was ever afforded him.

Obviously, the attorney general's office followed standard procedure on classifying documents. Many to and from the FBI were top secret communications. These were handled in line with the standard government security precautions that are attached to such documents. I'm sure that many times he received "eyes only" documents from the White

House. And these too were handled in line with the procedures established for handling these documents.

Robert Kennedy was a relatively young man. Certainly he was very active physically. He thought nothing at all of walking out of the hotel in a strange city and going for a long walk because he just wanted to take a walk; and he'd do it all by himself. It surprised me sometimes, and in the beginning I was a little concerned about it. There were one or two instances when specific information had been received by one of our field offices that something might occur as far as the attorney general's visit was concerned. I knew better than to ask Robert Kennedy about giving him protection. We just went ahead and did it, and we were sufficiently discreet about it that most of the time I don't think he even knew it was being done. He used to kid me that you could always recognize agents because they had hats on. And I told him, "Don't be too sure." I'm convinced there were many instances where we had lots of agents around and he never knew it.

OESTERLE: You didn't have direct charge of that? For instance, you said you're convinced that there were many occasions when there were agents around. Would you not have known?

EVANS: Oh, I knew that. I knew that for a fact. There were incidents when there were agents around and Bob Kennedy didn't know it.

OESTERLE: And sometimes they were there because you requested them?

EVANS: Yes, when one of our field offices would develop information indicating that there might be some kind of an incident, I thought it only prudent that we have enough manpower available to handle that kind of a situation. Fortunately, we never had one develop.

OESTERLE: And sometimes you used men without hats?

EVANS: Yes. [Laughter]

OESTERLE: The director of the bureau would not think of walking four or five blocks to a restaurant or so, would he then, during the day?

EVANS: Of course he would. He regularly walked at least part of the way to work in Washington. I never traveled with him. I don't

[-56-]

know what he did when he was out of Washington. But certainly there was no hesitancy about walking on the street here in Washington.

OESTERLE: Surely he would have to have had some protection for his house during periods when he's not there.



EVANS: I think he had servants that lived in. I do know that the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington used what they call the standard patrol, but for prominent individuals I think maybe that standard is, shall we say, a little higher than average. Certainly, all the police in the precinct knew where the house was. It's just that kind of a neighborhood.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

OESTERLE: In connection with the attorney general's travels, was William Barry in charge of security and did you know him as a former bureau agent?

EVANS: Yes, I knew William Barry. The attorney general went to New York more often than any other one place. In the course of his travels the attorney general got to know a lot of agents. I think almost without exception he respected them. But he probably knew Bill Barry better than any other one agent because, as I said, he went to New York so often and generally Barry would be assigned to meet the attorney general at the airport and to see that he got his business in New York taken care of.

Barry is a former New York City police officer. He'd been a bureau agent for many years, in addition. He was a native of the city, knew how to get around, knew people. He was a very pleasant Irishman who knew how to talk with the attorney general. All the times that I happened to be present when Bill Barry and Robert Kennedy were together, they never discussed matters of great substance. Barry was not a policy-making type official, but he had a knack of relieving tensions. Robert Kennedy would come out of a meeting obviously keyed up about what had transpired. Barry had the ability to relieve that with his Irish wit. Actually, it was two Irish wits getting together, because Bob Kennedy was very much the Irish wit too. So they got along famously together. I think Barry got to know other members of the Kennedy family through contacts that were made, but he wasn't in charge of security or anymore concerned about security than agents elsewhere during the course of the Kennedy travels.

Incidentally, this applied only to domestic travel. When the attorney general went abroad, whatever arrangements were made were handled from the State Department or the military agencies that had people and facilities overseas. The fact that Barry got to know the attorney general and his family I think is illustrative of one facet of Bob Kennedy's character and his method of operation. Bill Barry got to be what I call an official friend of Robert Kennedy. I was an official friend.

[-57-]

OESTERLE: An official friend as opposed to an old...

EVANS: Old, personal friend.

OESTERLE: ...school friend or personal friend?

EVANS: And there was a real distinction, at least in my mind, between official friends and personal friends. Robert Kennedy would invite people to Hickory Hill. He took all the U.S. attorneys out there, for example, for lunch when they would have meetings in Washington. He would sometimes hold his staff conferences at Hickory Hill, particularly when the weather was good. He liked to have an outdoor picnic type lunch in conjunction with some of these staff meetings. These meetings, and even on social affairs, were a kind of official family group. It was always very friendly. People were on a first-name basis, and the children of these assistants would be invited to Hickory Hill when they had an affair for children, but I always felt that there was a distinction between official friends and personal friends.

You got down to a point as an official friend; you never got over the line and assumed the same relationship that one of these old personal friends did. And it's hard to define just where that line of demarcation was, but I always had the feeling that it was there. A sense of friendship and loyalty went to official friends just as it went to personal friends. I can't tell you what the difference was, and the line may have been very small, but I always had the feeling that it was there, that you were not involved with Robert Kennedy on a personal basis. Perhaps the distinction might be made, the difference between a family relationship and one outside the family. Obviously, the Kennedys were a very close-knit family group. Immediately surrounding them were old-line personal friends, not quite as close as the family but most. Then, the third concentric circle which was, of course, the much larger one, was made up of these so-called official friends.

OESTERLE: Can you recall any particular examples or instances, especially when you were traveling with the attorney general, some of the long trips? Your trip to California, for instance.

EVANS: It was an amazing thing, traveling with Bob Kennedy. First of all, he didn't believe in traveling during working hours. We always used to have a joke that the wheels on the airplane had to be up at 6:15 in the morning because we were going three hundred miles and we had to be there to start the business day not later than nine o'clock. We ate together; we...Staff, people who were traveling with him, were all in adjoining hotel rooms. Bob Kennedy was not one for any ostentation. He didn't believe in big suites. [Interruption] Sometimes hotels would give him a suite anyhow, but he didn't go out of his way or really want it.

I remember one incident in New York. Ed Guthman [Edwin O. Guthman], John Reilly [John R. Reilly], Robert Kennedy and I were all in Kennedy's room in the hotel – and it was just a small, ordinary hotel room – working on a

[-58-]

speech that the attorney general was going to give that night. The attorney general's father, the ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.], came in. And quite frankly, to get over to the corner where Robert Kennedy was sitting at a desk working, he had to wend his way between us and the suitcases and the beds to get over to talk to his son. As the ambassador left, he

turned back and looked and said, "Ah, the last part of the big spenders." But this was typical of Bob Kennedy.

But to get back to the official-personal relationship. Ordinarily, we would eat together, work together. I said you started at 6:15 in the morning and we would ordinarily quit at nine or ten o'clock at night, and then have dinner. So we were, in effect, living together during these trips.

On one trip to California Robert Kennedy took one night and went out to see his sister [Patricia Kennedy Lawford], who had invited in some of these personal friends. The rest of us that were traveling with the attorney general were asked to stop in and have a drink, but it was quite obvious that our part in that evening's activity was limited and we left. Nothing was said. It was just an impression. We didn't want to cross that line, because it was something special he had. He shared his family and his friends, but they were still his. They weren't yours.

OESTERLE: Who else was there that evening, do you recall?

EVANS: Well, I know Guthman was there and Reilly was there. I was there.

OESTERLE: Were the Fays [Paul B. Fay, Jr. and Anita Fay] some of the personal friends that were there?

EVANS: I don't really recall whether the Fays were there. Some of the sister's motion picture people acquaintances were there.

OESTERLE: And her husband, Peter Lawford, was there I guess.

EVANS: I don't remember for sure. I think he was traveling then. I don't think he was there. The children were there, the Lawford children. And I suppose there were eight or ten people, but I'm not much of a motion picture fan and I don't know these personalities, except I remember at the time that they were well known in the motion picture field.

OESTERLE: You mentioned that on this one occasion in the hotel room in New York the ambassador walked into the room and visited with the attorney general for a few minutes. Were there several occasions when you met the ambassador?

EVANS: Not very often. He didn't appear frequently. I think this was probably a calculated move on the part of the ambassador. He stayed in the background. I do get the impression that Robert Kennedy talked with him, at least by phone, with great regularity

[-59-]

and that there were very frequent visits either at Hyannis or in Palm Beach. But those were

family affairs, and I just never got involved in it.

OESTERLE: What was your impression of the ambassador? Was he a very active person? Did he seem to be in good health?

EVANS: I didn't ever see the ambassador after he had his stroke and became invalided. Before that, on the few occasions when I did see him, I got the impression that he was a very active and a very capable man, very knowledgeable. I can't remember what issue was covered in the speech in New York, but the ambassador came by to look at it, because I'm certain in my own mind Robert Kennedy had asked him to do so. Obviously, he was a man who had had a great background in government as well as in business, and I can understand why the Kennedy boys looked to him for advice and counsel.

OESTERLE: Did you, on occasion, assist the attorney general in preparing a speech, especially if it was a speech that he might be making to law enforcement officers or bureau employees? Or were most of those remarks...

EVANS: Well, most of these were extemporaneous. Once in a while, I guess with some degree of frequency, I would talk with him about what he was going to say on a particular subject. More often I would talk with Ed Guthman who did most of the preliminary research and writing for the attorney general. He would often ask me about things, both facts and policy. Generally I'd say, however, that Robert Kennedy made up his own mind about these things. He would take advice and he would listen, but then ordinarily he'd decide for himself.

OESTERLE: Did you ever visit Hyannis Port or Palm Beach?

EVANS: I never did. I think many other of his aides may have, but ordinarily when he would go to either place, the purpose was primarily personal and I just never happened to go.

OESTERLE: You were involved in the steel price investigation. Would you comment on that?

EVANS: Oh yes, that's one of the biggest mistakes that I made. It's important, however, because it does show Robert Kennedy's sense of responsibility. As I recall this incident, the price of steel, at least as to one company, had been announced. In any event, the president of this particular steel company was quoted as having said certain things. I gather that whether or not this was accurate was important. I received a call – I think it was from the deputy attorney general – very late in the day immediately following a televised press conference which the president had had. I was asked whether I had seen the press conference on TV. When I said that I had, the deputy attorney general indicated, "Well, then, I guess you know what's needed, and I

need it for a meeting at nine

[-60-]

o'clock tomorrow morning in the White House."

To establish the accuracy of this news report we had to talk to the participants, and the only one publicly identified was the president of the steel company. The first thing that we had the agents do was interview the president of the steel company. He wasn't immediately available and as I recall it, it was eleven o'clock or so at night when they finally located him and he agreed to be interviewed and to furnish the information. He also furnished the identities of three newspaper reporters who were present at the earlier time.

I received a telephone call from the agents on duty at the FBI in Washington about two o'clock in the morning. It woke me up out of a sound sleep. The question asked was whether these reporters should be interviewed at once or whether this could be put off till the following day. Unfortunately, I didn't check with anybody. I just made a decision predicated on the fact that if we could interview the president of a steel company at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, perhaps we could at least call three reporters on the phone, recognizing that we would have to wake them up but asking if they would furnish information.

This created a terrific furor. I concluded that it's all right for the press to call you at two o'clock in the morning, as has happened to me on many occasions, but I was not supposed to call them. At least if you're in the FBI, you're not supposed to call them. The furor resulted in charges of gestapo type activities and that we were trying to intimidate the press. The president, when asked about it at a news conference the next day or so, turned it off by saying that he didn't know that newspaper reporters ever objected when somebody called them up and gave them a good story.

The important thing is that while it was an error on my part, the attorney general accepted full responsibility. This was something that had happened in his department. It was embarrassing to the department and to the White House, but it was his department and he said he was responsible.

I think this is what a good administrator would do. If you have responsibility, then you pick your aides as best you can and try to guide them, but when they do something that falls within their jurisdiction, you have to accept that as being your responsibility, too. And here there wasn't any question. Robert Kennedy didn't try to wiggle out of this by saying: "Somebody - a minor FBI official - made that decision. I didn't have anything to do with it." Not Robert Kennedy. He indicated that this was a decision of the department and was his responsibility. Of course, he didn't know anything about it. Nobody knew about it until 8:30 or nine o'clock the next morning when I called the deputy at the White House and said, "This is what's happened." That's the first they knew about it.

OESTERLE: Did the director call you in on that?

EVANS: Oh, yes. He was a little disturbed about it. He said he thought

[-61-]

it was a mistake and shouldn't have been done. But he's a good administrator, too. He accepted responsibility. It was his bureau. Just as it was Robert Kennedy's department. But what you accept publicly and what you say privately to the person who actually did it are two different things. He was disturbed about this. But it's an amazing thing about Mr. Hoover. If you say as I said, "It's my decision, mine alone; I made it; if it was wrong, it was wrong," it kind of ends the conversation.

OESTERLE: By the way, how long has the new building that's been constructed to house the FBI been in the works? And was this something that came up in the course of the Kennedy administration – congressional approval for funding and approval of plans and so forth?

EVANS: I don't have any firsthand knowledge. I do know that the Department of Justice – many of the divisions that are housed in the main building have needed additional space for years. The FBI had offices scattered all over Washington and has had for years, dating back to at least the 1940s. It was my understanding that plans for a building to centralize FBI activities had been in the planning stages at least since the late forties. It's my recollection that late in the Kennedy administration perhaps this had reached a point where a decision was made to go forward with a building. The location was picked, directly across the street from the main Justice building, and perhaps an initial appropriation may have been passed to enable condemnation proceedings to begin. I'm not positive. The actual work to acquire the site and to begin construction was either toward the end of the Kennedy administration or the first part of the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] administration.

OESTERLE: Did the attorney general have any particular interest in the matter of corrections?

EVANS: Yes, and I think this grew as his tenure in office progressed. When he came in as attorney general, he was well acquainted with police activities and law enforcement investigations. But when he became attorney general, his field of activity broadened. He had jurisdiction over all prosecutions through the U.S. attorneys and the attorneys assigned in the divisions of the department in Washington, plus a tremendous responsibility for all federal prisons and correctional institutions. In his travels, whenever it was possible, he wanted to visit all parts of the Department of Justice. He visited with the courts also, but, of course, the courts are not part of the Department of Justice. He visited with the U.S. attorneys, the U.S. marshals, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the FBI field offices, and also with the Bureau of Prisons. Now, this did not happen too frequently with the Bureau of Prisons people because they are located at penal institutions.

He was greatly interested in what the federal prisons were doing. I recall that on one occasion we made a visit to the federal penitentiary at

Atlanta. Typical of Bob Kennedy's approach, it's not the superficial come in and talk to the warden type of thing. He visited the warden and his professionals first, then he talked to the clerical staff, and then he went out into the cell block to talk with the prisoners. This interest grew, and I think his getting to know something about corrections may have been a factor in his creating the Office of Criminal Justice in the department, which I believe was the last thing he did before he left his position as attorney general. This centralized in one office in the department action to improve all facets of criminal justice operations. He knew that corrections and prison activities, rehabilitation programs, vocational training, and everything else that goes into corrections was an important part of the administration of criminal justice.

The new Office of Criminal Justice was first headed by James Vorenberg, professor of law at Harvard [University]. As I recall, initially he handled the Office of Criminal Justice on a part-time basis because he had to maintain his teaching schedule at Harvard. This allowed him about three days a week in Washington to work with the Office of Criminal Justice. If I remember, one of his immediate assignments was Henry Ruth, who later became a professor of law at Pennsylvania [University of Pennsylvania], I believe, and who's now in New York City with one of the criminal justice programs there.

The purpose in setting up the Office of Criminal Justice was to have an overview of the whole criminal justice administration, involving the process from investigation by the police, prosecution in court, the verdict of guilty or not guilty, the subsequent sentence, incarceration, rehabilitation, and release of a sentenced offender back to normal society. It was this overview that the office was looking at. I'm not well acquainted with what was done specifically in the way of programs, but the thinking and the work that went into this office was undoubtedly a factor later in the Johnson administration when the president's commission on crime and the administration when the president's commission on crime and the administration of justice [Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice] was formed. Vorenberg became the executive director of that commission.

OESTERLE: What can you recall about the impact of President Kennedy's assassination on the Justice Department and on the attorney general?

EVANS: It was a tremendous shock to everybody within the department, just as it was to the nation as a whole. There's the old saying that if something impresses you, you will always remember where you were and what you were doing when you first heard about it. I'll never forget that I was in the FBI field office in Seattle when one of the secretaries came in and said there was word on the radio that the president had been assassinated. I immediately got the first plane I could to return to Washington. But it was still a day later when I got back. By this time some of the work that was required in connection with the assassination was already underway. There was a very intensive investigation by the FBI of the assassination.

[-63-]

I didn't see the attorney general for days and weeks after the assassination. There are probably others who can better document its effect on him. When he did return to the office

and I saw him, he was still in a period of adjustment. He obviously wasn't the man that he was before. I often admired the rapidity at which Robert Kennedy matured. The assassination didn't literally turn the man hair's gray overnight, but it seemed to have that type of an impact on him, on the inner man at any rate.

OESTERLE: Did everyone expect him to resign shortly? Did he seem to have lost interest in the ongoing work of the department after this blow?

EVANS: I don't think that "to lose interest" is quite the way to express it. Obviously, he didn't have the same drive and enthusiasm that he'd had before, but I don't think that he'd lost interest. As time went on, during the rest of this tenure as attorney general, the pace quickened and things got back closer to what they had been before. I don't think they ever got back all the way, however. The relationship that I had after the assassination was different than it was before. When I got back to Washington, the word was already down within the FBI that it wouldn't be necessary for me to go to the White House anymore, that another official was going to take this responsibility.

OESTERLE: Who was that other official? Was that...

EVANS: That was Cartha DeLoach.

OESTERLE: ...Mr. DeLoach?

EVANS: This may well have been predicated upon the fact that he knew Walter Jenkins who was President Johnson's closest adviser at the White House. I don't know. This seems a logical reason for the change. I continued to see the attorney general as long as he was in office on a fairly regular basis. But he was no longer as involved in affairs of government generally as he had been before. The pace seemed just a little different.

OESTERLE: Is there any immediate difference in relations between the director of the bureau and the attorney general now that Lyndon Johnson was president, and the director therefore had a different relationship with the president? It wasn't as if they were working for the president's brother.

EVANS: On the surface there was no big incident that I recall. It was a very gradual thing. The FBI was dealing directly with the White House. The attorney general wasn't a conduit anymore. He never was fully, even when President Kennedy was alive. There were scores of memos that went to the White House, but if it was of interest to the attorney general, he would always see it. After President Johnson came in, the material going to the White House from the FBI no longer was automatically



brought to the attention of the attorney general. This, I think, provided for a more strained relationship. And gradually things seemed to deteriorate. There was just less and less contact.

OESTERLE: Were you aware that the attorney general, once he'd made up his mind that he was going to leave Justice, was interested in backing the appointment of Nicholas Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach]?

EVANS: It was my understanding at the time that he wanted Katzenbach to succeed him as attorney general. He had been deputy attorney general ever since Mr. White was appointed to the Supreme Court. He was a close adviser to Kennedy, a very capable individual, and it was my understanding that Robert Kennedy wanted him to be the succeeding attorney general. The specific answer to your question, Robert Kennedy never discussed this with me because this was a political matter and we seldom talked about political matters.

OESTERLE: Do you recall the last day that Robert Kennedy was in the Justice Department? Was there a party for him or was there a goodbye on the part of many of the employees?

EVANS: I think that there was. Robert Kennedy had a reception in his office and he gave all of his principal assistants a very fine set of gold cuff links with the seal of the Department of Justice engraved on them. I frankly can't remember whether that was the last day in office or not. I was very privileged to get a pair of the cuff links myself and I was the only one below the level of assistant attorney general or division head that did. I know there was a set of cuff links for Hoover. I can't remember whether he was there and he got them, or whether they were sent around to him. I just don't remember what happened that last day.

Courtney Evans Oral History Transcript – RFK #3  
Name List

**B**

Barry, William 57  
Bolshikov, Georgi 45

**C**

Connally, John B., Jr. 50

**D**

DeLoach, Cartha Dekle 64

**E**

Eisenhower, Dwight D. 46

**F**

Fay, Anita 59  
Fay, Paul B., Jr. 59

**G**

Guthman, Edwin O. 58-60

**H**

Hoover, J. Edgar 50,62,65

**J**

Jenkins, Walter W. 64  
Johnson, Lyndon B. 62-64

**K**

Katzenbach, Nicholas deB. 65

Kennedy, John F. 45,46,50,52,53,55,62-64  
Kennedy, Joseph P., Sr. 59  
Kennedy, Robert F. 46,47,50,55-65

**L**

Lawford, Patricia Kennedy 59  
Lawford, Peter 59

**M**

Marshall, Burke 46,53  
McShane, James J.P. 55  
Miller, Herbert J., Jr. 46

**N**

Nixon, Richard M. 50

**O**

O'Brien, Lawrence F. 46  
O'Donnell, Kenneth P. 46

**R**

Reilly, John R. 58,59  
Ruth, Henry 63

**V**

Vorenberg, James 63

**W**

White, Byron R. 47,65