

Christine Camp Oral History Interview—JFK#2, 1/14/1966
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Biographical Note

Camp, a John F. Kennedy (JFK) Senate and campaign staff member (1959-1960) and Assistant White House Press Secretary (1961-1963), discusses the card file that the 1960 Kennedy campaign kept of potential supporters and Democratic National Convention delegates, the operations of JFK's press secretary's office during the campaign and White House years, and campaign trips and later state visits that Camp did advance work for, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Christine Camp

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Christine Camp—JFK #2

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Second of Four Oral History Interviews*

with

Christine Camp

Washington, D.C.
January 14, 1966

By Ronald J. Grele

For the John F. Kennedy Library

CAMP: I joined the staff in February, 1959.

GRELE: How did you join the staff? In what capacity?

CAMP: Well, I joined in the capacity of an assistant to Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] who had been asked to set up an annex of the then-Senator Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] office in the Esso Building which is at the foot of Capitol Hill. We started out in the Esso Building with Steve—myself and Jean Lewis and Pauline Fluet [Pauline T. Fluet].

GRELE: Had you known anybody in the Kennedy organization prior to your...

CAMP: No, my introduction to this particular job was through a mutual friend of mine and Mike Feldman's [Myer Feldman]. His name is Ray Jacobson [Raymond Jacobson] and he let me know that the Kennedy staff was being expanded at this particular time and possibly I might want to be interviewed for it. Ray arranged that I would be interviewed by Mr. Feldman, whom I not met before. During the course of that interview I was also interviewed by Ted Sorenson [Theodore C. Sorenson] and I met Mr.

* Numerous additions have been inserted in the text

Smith at that time. This was in November, 1958. But between November and February that's all I knew.

GRELE: Do you recall your first impression of the members of the Senator's staff when you met them?

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CAMP: Well, I was intrigued by the way the interview itself was conducted by Feldman and Sorensen. I had a lengthy career in the executive department of the government before, but I had never been interviewed along these lines for a job. This was a stenographic job, secretarial. They were really not terribly concerned with my secretarial skills, per se. They acknowledged that, "All right, if you say you can type and take shorthand, fine and dandy." But that's all they needed to know. They were more interested in my background: where I had been, who I had worked for, how could this be an enhancing feature to the Senator's staff at that time; my political leanings, if any.

GRELE: What were they at that time? Do you recall?

CAMP: Well, they were undefined because I had lived abroad for five years. I was then married to a foreign service officer so I'd really not come to grips with any politics at all except for the brief time that I had worked for the National Committee [Democratic National Committee] as a secretary for Clayton Fritchey, deputy chairman of the DNC and editor of the Democratic Digest in 1956. But I was rather inclined to the Democratic Party, but not certainly to Senator Kennedy because I didn't know him or know much of his record, having been out of the country most of those years.

GRELE: Did they tell you that that was either an asset or a hindrance? Neither?

CAMP: No, they didn't really indicate one way or the other but I was impressed with the fact that they were really interested in knowing how I felt philosophically. We got into a general discussion, as I recall, on the ADA [Americans for Democratic Action], how I felt about the ADA and was I inclined to that strong liberal wing of the party or was I more conservative in my view, and how I felt about the Senator and his public record. By admission I knew nothing of it other than a couple of books I had read and articles and so fourth, but that's the extent of it. But I was interested from the standpoint that they wanted to know more about how I felt about issues and people and my country rather than whether I could just type.

GRELE: Did they ever tell you why?

CAMP: No, I think they were curious too. It's the makeup of the men, themselves. I came to later understand this approach because the whole staff really took this approach after I started working there, and this went through all levels of the organization.

GRELE: What did you do when you worked for Mr. Smith?

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CAMP: Well, at the time I joined the staff it was undefined—even with Steve—because this was at a stage when Sorensen was handling all the speaking engagements. Of course, this was a year before the announcement of candidacy. The mail had become such that it was almost impossible for the Senate staff to handle. They needed extra help but, without defining it to me or to anybody in the Esso Building, it really was a *sub rosa* campaign office. We got the message early that this was a step toward the announcement of candidacy, without out ever being told. My particular assignment to start with, generally, was to try to get some nationwide reading of what kind of public relations base could be established for the Senator should he announce his candidacy. This would then lead into what primary campaigns could be taken on and conducted.

GRELE: How did you do this?

CAMP: One of the first things we did was to take subscriptions to the major daily newspapers in every state of the union, and I had to review these daily papers.

GRELE: Every day?

CAMP: Every day. And you can't imagine the newspapers that came into that office! This had the effect of several things. We weren't scanning the papers or the magazines for any information we could gather on the Senator necessarily, but more at to what the issues were because we had no base in any of the states outside Massachusetts on which to call upon. We could not work through the party. But we wanted to gain some idea of the cross-section of the issues in every state; labor and educational and editorial policies, et cetera. Then if anything came to light in reviewing the papers I would clip what I considered to be of interest. For instance, if I ran across an item in a society column that Democratic precinct commissioner X was married, why, by Jove, three days later he'd get a personal letter from Senator Kennedy saying that he had come to learn that he was recently married and wanted to extend his congratulations.

GRELE: You say it was assumed that you couldn't work through the party. Why?

CAMP: Well, not for the type of thing we were trying to learn. We were trying to develop an independent idea of the general feeling about Senator Kennedy, number one; number two, to see in what ways we could go in order to introduce the Senator into these states via public speaking engagements or to meet the leadership within the party. The national committee, of course, could not supply

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one potential candidate with that kind of information without supplying it to all. We wanted to set our own separate course. That's what we wanted to do.

GRELE: You say that this was background for the primaries. As I understand it there has been a lot of discussion about why particular primaries were chosen. Now, did the origins of the choice come from your work?

CAMP: No, I couldn't say that. I would think that actually this project, I later recommended to Steve—it was in three or four months—that it be disbanded. It was just too all-embracing. It was not yielding the potential results. We didn't have the time for it because his (the Senator's) engagements were taking up too much of the time and Steve was working generally on those. I think it helped get a picture of the political situation cross-country at that particular stage which helped his advisers and the Senator to determine which primaries he could go into. I think it may have helped a little, but it certainly wasn't all that good.

GRELE: Do you recall any of the discussions about the particular primaries?

CAMP: Well, I would not have gotten into those discussions at all. I was really in a support situation where Steve would be the one to feed it into the pipeline on the Hill.

GRELE: Did you work on finances at all?

CAMP: No, I never did.

GRELE: Did you work on that famous card catalogue of all the delegates?

CAMP: Yes, yes, indeed. That was very much refined by Steve, by Jean Lewis and me in that particular office.

GRELE: How did that operate?

CAMP: It actually was a growth from the card file that was established in the senatorial campaigns in Massachusetts. When we first went into the Esso Building, Jean and I devised a file system by card where we would extract from every letter we got information as to the people he had met or who were coming in and/or those complimenting him on something (and also our answer back). This could be anybody. It could be the mayor; it could be just John Citizen writing him. Every time he would go on an out of town engagement, Steve would bring back a list of people who the Senator met.

Then when we would write letters of thanks and ask them to give us their view from time to time. At this early stage there was never any direction to us on the staff level that we should be on the lookout for possible delegates, but we were given to understand that we wanted to know who it was in each state whom we would count on or whom we could call upon if we needed any information or something to be done. That's the way the card file started and it then naturally led into the other stages. So once we got to the Convention we had a pretty accurate file on all of these people.

GRELE: They were used at the Convention?

CAMP: Oh, yes. We would take out the West Virginia card file, for example—developed in early '59 before the announcement of candidacy and up through the West Virginia primary—and we'd go through all of those. Then we would choose, on the basis of the information we had at that time, the key people whom we could rely upon for organization or fundraising or for speeches, or voter registration or what-have-you. We had a very good idea of who was who.

GRELE: Did it get right down to political background or religious orientation?

CAMP: Absolutely, because you'd be surprised how much people volunteer about themselves. This was particularly true in the early stages. People would say, "I'm all for you because you're young, and I'm young and I want to do this. I'm a lawyer in Cincinnati and...." So I think, all right, he's a lawyer so then he has legal contacts. "I think you're great because you're a Catholic and I'd like to see the first Catholic president." So you extract all this so that when you put a card file together you could pretty much tell who was who and what was what.

GRELE: Do you know if there were any other candidates doing anything like this?

CAMP: I've never heard of it being done by any other candidate.

GRELE: I haven't either.

CAMP: And it was a very refined system although it wasn't a calculated system. It fell naturally into place. We could discard people, or not discard people—discard fringe people who were not necessary and did not take any development, per se. But it was a handy way to keep it going right on up the line. I think it was one of the most extraordinary developments in political procedure that

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I have ever known about.

GRELE: To your knowledge, when the delegates were chosen, were they already in the file or did you get the list of the Oregon delegates and say, "My God, we don't

have any of these people on the file.” Or were they all there already?

CAMP: Well, that happened generally because by the time that we got to.... Now, you’re talking about the delegation that went to the Convention?

GRELE: No, when they were chosen in the states. Were there any surprises?

CAMP: No, generally I would say not.

GRELE: They are already in it?

CAMP: Well, I wouldn’t say all of them were in there. There may have been some surprises. But by that time we had developed our own local contact in the state who kept us advised—informally, over the weeks and months—of who would be likely chosen. And then they in turn would send information to us.

GRELE: Without going through all of the fifty states, can you recall who were some of the particularly useful local contacts in some of the bigger states, say, New York, California, Illinois?

CAMP: Well, now your talking about before the primary?

GRELE: Yes.

CAMP: Or during the primaries, before the Convention? Before the announcement of candidacy? Well, if I had to define who they were, a fine cross-section would be young, untested civic leaders. It could be a young lawyer, a young precinct captain, or some independent businessman. It was mostly a voluntary kind of thing. It was always the general liberal strain of thinking. They were generally all Democrats, of course. There was a particular kind of rapport that was built up along this line, and it dealt equally as much with women; young businesswomen, leaders in civic projects and that sort of thing.

GRELE: Do you recall anything interesting or significant about the garnering of delegation votes in some of the larger states?

CAMP: What do you mean?

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GRELE: You may not have been privy to this kind of information, but did anyone ever discuss, say, Ohio with you, picking up the Ohio cards saying, “Well, they’re working for us, they’re not working for us, we’ve got this problem worked out...”?

CAMP: Yes, let me talk about Ohio because this was one of my assigned states. I

might add here that along about—let’s see, I joined in February—along about I guess it was September, October, we had then on our staff, in addition to Jean and Pauline and myself, two or three other girls, and we divided the country into geographic areas. Jean had all the south; I had what we called the “big delegate states:” New York, California, Illinois, and Ohio. And another girl had the Far West. We had it broken down geographically so we could generally be informed on the area, not necessarily the state so much. But Ohio was one of mine mainly because I’m from Ohio, even though I didn’t have much acquaintance with Ohio politics. But by the time of the announcement of candidacy in 1960 we know in all of the counties of Ohio who our supporters were. Not necessarily delegates, but we knew whom we could count on in each particular county, or whom we couldn’t count on, which gave us an inkling of how far we could go with Governor DiSalle [Michael V. DiSalle] at that point. You will recall that Governor DiSalle was the first governor to announce his support for Senator Kennedy. One of the reasons for that is that Senator Kennedy was able to go to the Governor and say, “Listen. Here is a list of all the counties and these are my people and this is the way they will vote on the candidates for the Ohio delegation.”

GRELE: Did he do this with other states?

CAMP: Yes, that was the normal procedure.

GRELE: With New York as well?

CAMP: I can’t speak for New York because I was not working strictly on that at that time. But in Ohio that was the case and in all eighty-eight counties we knew whom we could count on and whom we couldn’t. And this was an organizational thing in order to bring pressure to bear on the Ohio State Democratic Committee where their support lay.

GRELE: You attended the 1960 convention?

CAMP: I did.

GRELE: What did you do at the convention? Forgive me, I believe before that time you also worked liaison with Maryland?

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CAMP: Well, yes. Now let’s go through the primaries. The first primary was New Hampshire which was my first one. Well, I have to go back even before that. Up to the announcement of candidacy, we girls were all involved in geographic assignments. Once the announcement of the candidacy was made, three of us were then handed the primary states. We did not work on any other states. That was our first assignment for primaries and I drew New Hampshire, West Virginia, and Maryland. I can’t remember the other one—Indiana.

GRELE: You drew them?

CAMP: Well, I was assigned them. New Hampshire was the first primary I worked on. We had the responsibility of supplying them (the candidate and Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] who were in the field) any information from the files or from our independent sources. This would be in reading or anything that we'd pick up here in Washington, on the Hill, from our own private sources, how that particular state would be affected. We were in touch with every state too. For example, if we had a letter coming in from our man in New Haven, Connecticut, having something to do with New Hampshire, I would feed it directly to Larry if I felt that it affected the campaign at that particular time. So we were the backup channel here in Washington. This was true of every primary.

GRELE: Do you recall any problems in New Hampshire?

CAMP: No, that was the easiest of all. If they'd all been that easy it would have been wonderful.

GRELE: Any in West Virginia?

CAMP: Well, that was a touch and go. That was a tough one. The problem there, of course, was Catholicism and we all knew it. It was something we just had to live with and work with.

GRELE: The people in the field all told you this?

CAMP: Oh, yes. Right at the last minute it was even questionable. In some countries, particularly in the northwestern area of West Virginia, it was tough.

GRELE: How effective were the people sent out from Washington in West Virginia? Well, they must have been effective. They won the primary.

CAMP: They were marvelous. Marvelous. And the reason they were was because they were getting expertise from trained professionals

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by this time. O'Brien and O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] were, of course, in the field and a lot of the pros from Massachusetts were down. You develop this very easily. You have to because you have no time. I remember Bill Walton [William Walton], for example, was delegated to some area in lower West Virginia and he did a spectacular job.

GRELE: In Maryland how effective were Congressman Macdonald [Torbert H. Macdonald] and now-Senator Tydings [Joseph D. Tydings]?

CAMP: Maryland was—maybe it's because I worked on it so much. I feel Maryland was a classic Kennedy operation. We went into the Maryland primary knowing just about everything there was to know about Maryland and their potential delegates. We had excellent contacts in Maryland. When Torby was appointed the chairman of that campaign he relied a great deal on me to do the actual liaison work, which I did, and most of it was conducted by telephone because it's so close. The man—I can't remember his name now—was the campaign manager from...

GRELE: Massachusetts?

CAMP: Yes.

GRELE: Joe Curnane [Joseph A. Curnane].

CAMP: Yes. I worked with Joe very closely. Keep in mind that Larry could not devote any time to Maryland because they were campaigning in West Virginia and Indiana at that time. So it was set up in such a way—Macdonald and Curnane and through me as liaison to Larry, and it worked the other way too. It was worked out in such a way that the candidate could leave West Virginia and go right into the Maryland campaign as if nothing happened. He had everything going for him. He had all the information fed to him, he knew exactly what he was going to be faced with in that campaign. He knew every county leader, every one of our organizers. He was able to call them by their first names. It was that good. I think the Maryland primary campaign was probably one of the classic ones.

GRELE: Do you recall the debate during the Maryland primary over “walking money?” Whether or not it should be paid? Were you at all involved in that?

CAMP: No, I remember about it vaguely but without researching it I couldn't comment.

GRELE: Did you have any contact with John Kennedy personally at this time?

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CAMP: Well, that's a very strange thing. I worked for him for about six months before I ever met him. The reason for this is that when I joined the staff in February of 1959 it was a very busy office. Trying to see people was a very difficult thing. He was traveling practically every weekend and, of course, being in another building two or three blocks away, didn't give us access. Steve would always go to the Hill. Nobody came to us and that was the way it had to be done because he was on the floor of the Senate or in committee assignments and so forth and could not come down. He would make occasional drop-in visits to us, just to say hello and what-have-you. But other than a few, relatively few, staff meetings, he rarely got down to the Esso Building. I met him one day in

the Esso Building when he came in to see what the offices looked like.

GRELE: Did he know who you were?

CAMP: Yes. Oh, yes.

GRELE: He did?

CAMP: Yes, because I'd talked to him on the telephone all during this time. He called me Chris. It was just as if we had always worked together. But this was the way he was with everyone. I had met him by phone but I had never seen him. It was a good six months before I met him.

GRELE: When you talked to him by phone were you discussing local issues, local contacts?

CAMP: Yes. He knew pretty much the assignment of girls. There were only about a half dozen of us at this time. I would presume that through Steve he knew what we were working on because if he wanted to talk about Ohio he would generally call me to see if I'd had a letter from Mayor X in such and such a city, and, "I'm going out. What can you tell me? Who do you expect I should call on?" We would prepare briefing materials for Steve to give him before he went out to these places. So he knew who was in charge of the staff work on particular areas.

GRELE: Do you know what ever happened to the briefing materials?

CAMP: No.

GRELE: It would be a good acquisition for our research.

CAMP: Well, it would, but again we were never on a formalized basis. Now, materials such as that would be just a yellow piece of

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paper like this and I'd do it myself, just one copy. "This is what you ought to say to the Mayor's wife when you arrive," and that kind of thing. And he very well may, as his habit was, just stick them in the side of the car door and forget about it.

GRELE: What was your impression of his grasp of local politics?

CAMP: Excellent. He relied a great deal on what we could produce for him and keep him informed on, but I think—I'm not talking from personal experience but my observation is that he relied a great deal on actually going to a place, observing it himself and picking it up locally. But once he got it he never forgot it.

GRELE: Did he ever compliment you on the validity of your reports as compared to the reality, or did he ever criticize the operation, saying, “You were a little wrong here”?

CAMP: I can’t recall any incident along those lines, either pro or con. I feel very sure that if it hadn’t been what he wanted, we sure would have known about it because he was that way. We always assumed that if we didn’t hear from him directly that we were doing what he wanted. He would very often call us and ask us to do something in line with the assignment. We ought to write a letter to the editor of the editor of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, for example, complimenting him on an editorial.

GRELE: He kept up with the editorials?

CAMP: He kept up with them himself. Yes, indeed.

GRELE: When you went to the Convention, what was your function at the convention?

CAMP: Well, this was my first introduction to Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger]. After the primaries were over, Steve assigned me to go to Los Angeles in advance of the Convention to help Pierre set up the press headquarters. That’s how I went out and that was my assignment—to be an assistant to Pierre. And then when the Convention was over, he asked for me permanently. So that was my introduction to him.

GRELE: What was your impression of the relations between Mr. Salinger and the Senator at that time.

CAMP: Well, they were very good. You see, we (Pierre and I) were in Los Angeles a good three weeks before the Convention started. I had only met Pierre very briefly but my impression was that

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they enjoyed a very good relationship, that Pierre had access to him when he needed and he enjoyed a good relationship with all the other staff members. Of course, Pierre is very much of a self-starter, anyway. I never had the impression that he didn’t enjoy other than good relations with us.

GRELE: I asked the question because I have been told that when he first came on the staff there was a bit of awkwardness.

CAMP: Yes, I think there was, and this is not from personal observation. Keep in mind, Pierre did not know the Senator personally. The relationship with the Kennedys, as far as Pierre was concerned, was through Bob [Robert F. Kennedy]. He worked for Bob as an investigator on the McClellan Committee. So it was just

a matter of coming to know someone brand new, off the streets, and it takes time to develop any working relationship when you don't know someone.

GRELE: What did you do at the Convention? What was the advance work?

CAMP: Well, of course it's a big operation to lay on a press office. We had to acquire a press room where Pierre could hold press conferences on behalf of the candidate. We had to establish our own office which would be in liaison here in Washington and the national committee. We had prepared here, by (now Mrs. Jacobson [Lenore Ostrow]), press kits that we supplied all the media covering us; the background on the Senator and how he felt about the issues, and this kind of thing. Salinger spent a great deal of time liaising with the local California press, which was a sidelight for getting the candidate known in California. It was social as well as professional but it had one intent, which was to get the candidate known.

GRELE: Were you responsible for the rallies?

CAMP: No. All I was concerned was with the press end. That's all.

GRELE: Did you work on the convention newsletter?

CAMP: No, I can't say I did. I reviewed some of the copy that was submitted to Salinger, but Fred Forbes [Fred A. Forbes] was the managing editor of that paper and he generally ran it pretty much on his own, under Pierre's direction. My job, in the main, was private secretary to Pierre and helping him to arrange press interviews for the candidate or with other special assistants, or O'Brien, and keeping in general liaison with the media and seeing that materials and press releases were run off. I had that job to do, which was difficult under

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those circumstances, and to call press conferences when he (Pierre) wanted to talk with the press. The operational end of it was all I was concerned with.

GRELE: Do you recall any specific problems of getting the candidate before a press Audience? Problems with certain members of the press?

CAMP: Well, there are always those problems inherent with the press, regardless of who you are, because there's always a natural adversary relationship between the public official and the press. Sometimes you don't want them around for various reasons. Other times you encourage them and they won't come. As far as the candidate is concerned, no. There was no problem unless there were reasons why he didn't want to see them.

GRELE: Do you recall any specific incidents when you didn't want to see them?

CAMP: Not in the Convention. In fact, in my whole time with him I recall some cases where he would have like to defer them, but he was generally very accessible to members of the press.

GRELE: At the Convention, do you recall any members of the press who were particularly hostile, that one tried to avoid?

CAMP: No. Oh, there are always bad eggs, but I don't recall—no one sticks in my mind as being that difficult. The difficulty lies not with the individual reporter or correspondent. It lies with the organization he works for. We, meaning the public official and his staff, are more concerned with what appears in print, how a story or editorial is written about your man or about your subject, how it's interpreted. That's what we take issue with. Those things did occur occasionally, but this is an occupational hazard of being a public official.

GRELE: This question may not necessarily be relevant here, but do you recall any kind of change in temper and tone of the public releases in the Kennedy organization towards opposing candidates during the Convention?

CAMP: No, I can't say. Are you trying to develop a different idea of what the...

GRELE: I've been told that initially the press releases from Mr. Salinger's office were very hostile to Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson], and changed in temper and tone before his

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selection as vice presidential candidate.

CAMP: Well, if that were true, I certainly wasn't aware of it at the time. I would want to review them to refresh my memory. I don't recall. If it was, it certainly was not overt and it was not something that we were led to believe at all, on my level. It may be true, but I don't know without reading them.

GRELE: Did you have any part in the organizing of the meetings of the various delegations, or were you concerned exclusively with the press?

CAMP: No, no. Just the press, only. In fact, I never got out of the press room. I didn't even see him nominated.

GRELE: Are there any anecdotes that you can tell us about the Convention as far as the press room was concerned?

CAMP: Well, I recall the Convention as being one big room with about fourteen

telephones—and I only have two ears—and they were all ringing at one time.

There were always three jobs to be done that had to be done yesterday. That is really my only remembrance of the Convention. I did not see him nominated because I was working in the little house behind the Convention hall staying in liaison with our office downtown. Sometimes these glamorous jobs that you read about are not all that glamorous, and this was one of them because I was not able to ever be in a position to get away at a particular time because somebody has to stand by. Again, I'd have to.... Maybe I can supply an anecdote later. I can't think of any right now.

GRELE: Was there a conscious attempt at the time to either understate or overstate the delegation's support to influence what the press would report?

CAMP: No, I can't believe there was any currency in that.

GRELE: Not one way or the other?

CAMP: No, no.

GRELE: If a newsman came up, Mr. Salinger just told them what was current?

CAMP: Yes, but you keep in mind that we always want our man to look the best and, of course, we're going to put the best light on it. But that's what we're in business for, and we wouldn't be doing our man a good job if we didn't try to put him in that

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perspective. I think that in the long run the facts would bear out any statements or impressions left by the press secretary or his staff. There was enough substantiation to back up that type of thing.

GRELE: From the Convention where did you go?

CAMP: All over the country.

GRELE: You traveled on the campaign?

CAMP: Yes. I came immediately back to Washington from Los Angeles and then on several occasions I went to Hyannis during the "transition period," or before the presidential campaign actually got off the ground. But once the formal campaign started, I think I was in Washington maybe two weekends from Labor Day up until Election Day.

GRELE: Between the Convention and Labor Day, were you in Washington for the special session?

CAMP: Yes, I was here.

GRELE: I've been told that those were rather bleak days among members of the Kennedy organization.

CAMP: Well, yes, it was bleak because we were doing two jobs. We had the session to contend with and by this time our operation, the press operation, had moved to the Senate.

GRELE: You stayed with Mr. Salinger in the press operation, then?

CAMP: Yes. Right. And we hired some extra people at this time because we could see that the campaign itself would require more. We had Mr. Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher] join us by that time, and Sue Mortensen [Sue Mortensen Vogelsinger] had joined us. Of course, Barbara Coleman [Barbara J. Coleman] was with us, and I think there were one or two others on the staff. We were beefing up the staff, looking ahead to the campaign. We had very crowded conditions, and just no idea of when this special session would be over and when we could launch this thing. It wasn't a critical period but you felt frustrated because you just couldn't go the way you wanted to.

GRELE: Do you recall any of the discussions about press releases relating to the special session? Any pieces of legislation? I remember, personally, at this time that the Senator, later to be president, was criticized for not steering legislation through at this time. A civil rights bill was being bogged down. Do you

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recall?

CAMP: I don't recall. Again, I would need to research and read the statements at this time. I don't recall that, no.

GRELE: It doesn't strike you as presenting special problems?

CAMP: No, it doesn't.

GRELE: When you went to Hyannis, did you stay right in the Kennedy compound?

CAMP: No. We (the staff) stayed, at this time, right downtown in a motel. The compound itself is not large enough to accommodate the staff and all the Kennedy entourage.

GRELE: What did you do in Hyannis?

CAMP: Well, the same thing that I did throughout the campaign. A press secretary needs a secretary to keep him in touch and informed and do his mail and type the press releases and have press conferences and so fourth.

GRELE: Was there a constant communication between the press secretary and the candidate?

CAMP: Oh, yes, at this stage. Yes, definitely.

GRELE: Very close?

CAMP: Well, he had access to the candidate every time he needed it.

GRELE: Where did you go on the campaign? From the beginning?

CAMP: Oh, my dear. Well, the first one, I remember taking off from Friendship Airport and going to San Francisco, to Alaska, and then back to Detroit for the Labor Day speech. That was the first big one. Then, on to Pocatello, Idaho. And after that I lost track. Getting off the *Caroline* midway in the campaign after traveling steadily for three days I asked the local policeman at the bottom of the ramp: "Can you tell me where we are?" He replied, "You're in Indianapolis." I asked, "Do you happen to know where we're going next?" And he assured me that we would fly on to Louisville. I covered the entire campaign and my impression of it was just one big airport and one big hotel room.

GRELE: Were things as happy and idyllic on the press plane as

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Theodore White [Theodore H. White] makes them to be in his book, *The Making of the President, 1960*?

CAMP: I think Teddy's description of the organization and of the press in general is a very fair one. I really do. Yes.

GRELE: Was there ever any discussion at the time among the press men of the differences between the Kennedy operation and the Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] operation?

CAMP: Oh, they always did. They always let you know that Nixon was better and I'm sure that Nixon heard that we were always better.

GRELE: They told you that?

CAMP: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

GRELE: Who in particular told you that?

CAMP: Well, I couldn't give a verbatim quote. Of course, they decide among themselves. They're all qualified observers! Pierre and his staff did not enjoy a very high class reputation among members of the press for being great insofar as organization was concerned. And that is true because Pierre is not an administrator. Pierre runs a rather loose ship but he got the job done and we got the job done. And I think, under the existing circumstances, we did a very good job.

GRELE: When you say that he wasn't a great administrator do you mean that press releases wouldn't get to the press before the speech was given?

CAMP: When you deal with the nation's press you're dealing with fellows who—they want it yesterday. They don't want it a half hour from now and they want everything in pluperfect condition. Sometimes, you just didn't have those conditions to work under. But it wasn't such that it affected the operation whatsoever.

During the Pennsylvania campaign Sue and I got orders from Pierre at 6:00 A.M. to leave Harrisburg by car and go ahead of the candidate to prepare his "major foreign policy" speech which was billed for that evening in Baltimore. We were to be on hand at the luncheon stop with both the press releases for distribution to the press at noon and the candidate's reading copy. Sue and I loaded our gear (portable mimeo machine, two portable typewriters, one portable speech-typewriter, a bag of paper, ink and other supplies, as well as our personal bags) into a Hertz station wagon and headed down the turnpike to set up shop

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at the lunch site. Jack McNally [John J. McNally], who was driving, heard a soft tire and pulled into a gas station whereupon, not to lose time, Sue went into the ladies room, plugged in her electric portable and started on the speech. I set up the mimeo machine on the station's service ramp and ran off 100 copies of next day's schedule. Jack had the tire changed and after stares of wonderment from the station's patrons we loaded up and took off again—only to have a blowout ten miles up the road. None of the three of us said a word because we had work to do: Jack immediately went to the other side of the turnpike and hitched a ride back to the gas station for another tire; I pulled down the wagon's tailgate, set up a typewriter and continued working on the press release; Sue started the Senator's manuscript in the front seat with the speech-typewriter mounted on her knees. We were working against time and the interruptions were frustrating: the wind blowing copy away which had to be retrieved and three truck drivers who kindly stopped to aid us in our apparent difficulty. We turned them away—to their disbelief—by assuring them we were just getting our work done and we were fine. We didn't tell them who employed us since we feared the loss of the truck driver vote if they learned that Kennedy's "smooth and efficient staff" was to the contrary. We also feared that the candidate and the press party would come upon us which would do further injury to our efficiency and employment. The tire was duly changed and we sped on to the lunch stop where we finished our business of typing, proofreading, making corrections, and running off the copies with minutes to spare. If one of the press releases is extant you will find

Kennedy's foreign policy wavy of line and uneven of margin, but it's all there and in the form he cleared it.

During the Ohio campaign Sue and I discovered to our incredulity that we'd run out of mimeo paper at 3:00 A.M. there wasn't a store open (even if we'd known where to find one) where we could replenish our zero supply. We needed an absorbent paper which would take the mimeo's ink and finally decided that maybe, just maybe, Western Union copy paper could suffice. We got the Western Union man out of bed who obligingly lent us a ream. Not only was the paper not absorbent enough but it was too thick to run through the mimeo machine. Our only recourse was to set each piece of paper on the machine by hand, lift it off carefully so the type wouldn't run and then lay it out to dry. We did this all night and by 6:00 A.M. we had sheets of paper drying on the bed, the dressers, the floor, in the closets, and the bathroom. Sue and I were inked from stem to stern and massive showers wouldn't take it off for days. But the press got their press releases, albeit smudged and unpretty!

Another time, at the Stanhope Hotel in New York, we opened our supply footlocker to find it awash with mimeo ink. (The reserve ink

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tubes had exploded en route in the plane's unpressurized baggage compartment.) Sue and I were so discouraged by our ink problems by this time that we left the footlocker behind when we checked out of the Stanhope, hoping the management could cope with what had become a losing game for us.

They—the press—were serviced very well. They were always mostly inclined to say that Nixon had a better organization, a better staff. Well, that was true. He did because he had the vice presidential entourage behind him. He had all the equipment and all of the vice presidential machinery behind him and Mr. Kennedy did not. We were operating on our own and we were on our own dough at this point. We had to rely on the national committee for our backup which was good. The White House end of it, as far as Nixon was concerned, could apply more methodically to an operation like this than someone on the outside.

GRELE: Did the newsman ever compare the Nixon and Kennedy operations in terms of access to the candidate?

CAMP: They may have. I don't recall.

GRELE: Was there any problem in dealing with other organizations that were also putting out publicity releases, such as the national committee or the state delegations?

CAMP: Well, let me say how our setup was at this time. Pierre was the director of information and the press secretary. In other words, he was the overall director of what the presidential, vice presidential candidate et al. were saying. This was handled by Roger Tubby [Roger W. Tubby] here in Washington. He was Pierre's man at the national committee. It was Roger's job to coordinate all these activities so that the candidate knew, or had access to knowing who was saying what, when, and where. So that

was our channel, nationwide, while we were on the road. It was through Roger, and his assistant, Don Wilson [Donald M. Wilson].

GRELE: Were you ever instructed to handle certain people, certain media, certain reporters in a particular way?

CAMP: No.

GRELE: Everybody got the same treatment?

CAMP: The operation, under Pierre, was “Always exercise good judgment and good sense for the benefit of the candidate.” And that’s as far as direction went. If you goofed, you heard

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about it.

GRELE: Were there goofs?

CAMP: Oh, sure. There are goofs all the time because you’re only human.

GRELE: And you heard about them?

CAMP: But once you make a goof and you’re reprimanded, you never make it again.

GRELE: What were some of the most notable goofs?

CAMP: If I may insert this later. I may have some that I can tell you about but I can’t think of any right now.

GRELE: Did you handle speeches at all? The clearing of speeches?

CAMP: No, because the speech material would not come to me until after it was cleared by the candidate himself. It would not come to me until it was ready for press release form and until it was releasable.

GRELE: And then you gave it to the members of the press?

CAMP: Yes.

GRELE: Did they ever complain that the speeches you gave them and the speeches as they were given were different?

CAMP: Constantly. Constantly.

GRELE: Was this, in fact, true?

CAMP: It was true. Oh, yes. As the campaign wore on, the speech writers would submit drafts to him for clearance and he cleared them or rewrote them or said, “No, I don’t want to give that one.” But anyway, it would come down to the fact that we would have a speech, and we would run it off and we would give it out and he would get up on the platform and deliver an entirely different thing, verbatim of what he’d said earlier, or off the cuff.

GRELE: How did you face the press the next day?

CAMP: Well, that’s just the way he was. I mean, you can’t fight city hall. Some of them got touchy about it. For example

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if we were on the West Coast and they were filing stories to the East Coast papers, it made it particularly tough when they took a lead from a handout and they had filed their story to New York and, by Jove, he turned around and he didn’t deliver it at all. But Pierre made the ground rule—established it right away—that the candidate would stand on the text. In other words, the text was still good, whether he delivered it or not. They were never in error in printing a speech, so they got to learn early in the game that their lead really should say that, “Senator Kennedy was prepared to say today that...” Bill Lawrence [William H. Lawrence] once described Kennedy, in this context, as being a “textual deviate.”

GRELE: After the election what did you do? Or right at the end of the election, did you go to Hyannis?

CAMP: Yes. We wound up the grand campaign in the Boston Garden and straggled over to Hyannis Port after forty-eight hours around the clock. The night of the returns I was on duty in Bob Kennedy’s house, on the bank of telephones that you’ve read about and heard about. Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] and I were assigned to the two phones that were in touch with governors throughout the country. The other girls were in touch with our organizers around the country who were phoning in election results. As I recall, I was there until about 4:00 A.M. when we could tell generally how the thing was going, and then I’ll have to confess that I missed the whole thing the next day because I slept right through.

GRELE: Were you on the phones when the Vice President called?

CAMP: Yes. I was.

GRELE: Can you tell us what the gist of that conversation was?

CAMP: I can't remember where the vice presidential candidate was at that time. It seems to me he was here in Washington. He called in during that time the Ohio results were being phoned in. The candidate was there and took the call from Mr. Johnson. It was a very short conversation and I was right near the telephone. And after the conversation was over, he said something to the effect, "Well Lyndon doesn't think that we're doing very well in Ohio." Then he quoted the vice presidential candidate, saying that, "*You* are doing very badly in Ohio but *we're* going very well in Pennsylvania," which he enjoyed. He did enjoy that remark.

GRELE: Without rancor?

CAMP: Without rancor. He smiled. He didn't laugh but stressed

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the "you" and the "we" so that we got the message of how to solve that.

GRELE: Were you there when the governor of Ohio called?

CAMP: I may have been. I don't recall.

GRELE: I understand that Ohio was the greatest disappointment.

CAMP: It was. I took a very personal disappointment in it because I had worked on it for months and months and months. It became a flip account because every time I would run into the candidate after that, "Well, what did you do in Ohio? What went wrong?" It was, I would say, the biggest disappointment to the whole organization because we thought we had it.

GRELE: What did go wrong in Ohio? Do you have any idea?

CAMP: My personal observation is that it was religion.

GRELE: Religion?

CAMP: Religion. An undercurrent of.... I think the Ohioans were prepared to vote for him for every other reason but they could not bring themselves to do so because of the Catholic issue.

GRELE: Were you there when the calls came in from California?

CAMP: Well, I was but at the time—now, there were many girls there that evening. Other than the Johnson call, I don't recall any other outstanding call.

GRELE: From Mayor Daley [Richard J. Daley] or John Bailey [John Moran Bailey]?

CAMP: No.

GRELE: Right after the election, what did you do next?

CAMP: I came back here and tried to recoup for a couple of days. Let's see, that was November.

GRELE: The President went to Palm Beach

CAMP: I may have gone to Palm Beach with him for a ten-day period or so, but the one trip I do recall directly after the election was going down with him on Thanksgiving evening when John, Jr. [John F. Kennedy, Jr.] was born. That was a round trip that I had never expected I was

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going to make because I had been prepared to stay there for about 10 days.

GRELE: Can you describe it for us?

CAMP: Yes. We went down on the *Caroline*. We left late in the evening. It was eleven o'clock or so. As we were taxiing into the Palm Beach airport—I don't recall who told me about it but anyway, he had known on landing, at least, that Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] had been taken to the hospital where she was en route, and that they were holding a line open for him to talk to the hospital once he arrived at the airport, which he did. He got off the plane immediately and went into the airport and talked to Washington. Who he talked to, I don't know. I assumed all this time that it was the hospital and the doctor. He spent some time in the airport conferring with his aides as to what to do. Now, all the press were out there to meet him. The press plane had already arrived. We always made it a practice to send them off first so that they could be there ahead of us. He learned that she had been taken to the hospital and was in labor and he made the decision then to come back right away. So he boarded the press plane because it was faster.

GRELE: Were you on the press plane?

CAMP: Yes. And it was refueled. It would have taken the *Caroline* time to refuel plus it was a shorter range plane and would have taken longer. He decided to go back on the press plane. Also this would accommodate more people, too. Evelyn and I went back with him.

GRELE: Mrs. Lincoln?

CAMP: Yes. We were the only two staff members, and Pierre was with him. There may have been other aides but Evelyn and I were the only secretarial staff,

and the members of the press got on the plane, too. I remember poor Tom Ottenad [Thomas W. Ottenad] of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, who had been in Palm Beach. He was there in shorts and a tee shirt and got right on the airplane and came up to Washington and he got off in freezing temperature. But anyway, he was covering his story and I give him all the credit for that. But it was in the air, coming back, that he learned the baby had been born and that they were both doing very well. Pierre made the announcement aboard the press plane coming back.

GRELE: What were his reactions?

CAMP: Well, he and Pierre were in the forward compartment. This was

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a DC-6 plane we were in. He was of very somber demeanor when he boarded the plane because no one knew what her condition was at the time. He was very somber. The pilot then relayed the message that the baby had been born and she was all right, and he perked up immediately. Evelyn and I were sitting in a place where we could observe him. And then Pierre came out and made the announcement that it was a boy. The President-elect came out later and went up and down the aisle and took congratulations. And he was quite happy, just like any father would be.

GRELE: Were you around the President when any of the cabinet appointments were made?

CAMP: Well I was in Palm Beach quite a bit during this period. This was in December. I was there on the occasion of Secretary Rusk's [Dean Rusk] appointment.

GRELE: Do you recall any of the discussions over that appointment?

CAMP: No, I don't. I was not privy to anything of that nature. Where I was privy to it would be in relation to the press release. Occasionally, I would be called in to take dictation on biographic data of cabinet members, and that kind of thing, and then to prepare press releases for the announcement of the appointments. But a lot of those appointments were done here in Washington and some of them were done in Palm Beach.

GRELE: Was there a standard method of releasing the appointment to the press?

CAMP: Yes. I've never known the process of how the decision was made to name Mr. X to a given position. But after that decision was made, we were given biographic data. I would assume that this biographic data had been submitted to the President-elect during the process of consideration. So we had the fundamental facts to

work with. And if we felt that we needed anything else for the press along that line, we'd either get it directly from the appointee or his staff.

GRELE: Did you go out of your way at all to inform particular people about particular appointments beforehand?

CAMP: Oh, no. Never.

SPIVAK: Never?

CAMP: No, because the President-elect made a point of announcing

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them himself, especially in cabinet appointments and the immediate undersecretary level. It would be less of a publicity level if it were pre-announced and it would take away from him making the announcement, so it was never done.

GRELE: I have been told by someone that one of the appointments was preleaked to the *New York Times*.

CAMP: Well, of course, there was always speculation. This is the problem of the press on president watching, because they all—this is part and parcel of their business—is to try to outguess what he's going to do. This is one of the occupational hazards of a president-elect or a public official because the press thinks they have their sources pretty well wired in. But for our standpoint, from a press secretary's standpoint, this is all in the sheer realm of speculation.

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

GRELE: And after Palm Beach you went to work—after the inaugural, you went to work directly in the White House under Mr. Salinger.

CAMP: Yes. Right.

GRELE: What were your duties there?

CAMP: Well, I was his executive secretary, in charge of his staff. There were four or five girls in the press office for the White House.

GRELE: You were more in charge of staff than in charge of dealing with the press at all?

CAMP: Well, it was administrative rather than substantive, I would judge. Of course, I

had to deal with the press. This was part and parcel of the White House press office. Really, it's a two pronged operation. It's public relations as well as a press office, per se.

GRELE: In the hiring of the people to staff the press office, what were the qualifications that you were looking for?

CAMP: There were no set qualifications, actually. The staff that went into Pierre's office had all been on the campaign in some form, with the exception of one girl [Helen Ganss]

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who had been retained by the Kennedy administration—what we called a “holdover”—who was a transition between the Eisenhower [Dwight E. Eisenhower] press office and ours. A very sound idea. Whoever concocted that knew what they were doing. We had one staff member who had been there since Truman's [Harry S. Truman] day (Mrs. Ganss) so she knew the operation in the press office backwards and forwards and helped us a great deal.

GRELE: In his tenure at the White House, how effective was Pierre Salinger as press secretary?

CAMP: Well, of course, I'm prejudiced but I think he's the best press secretary to date.

GRELE: Why?

CAMP: First of all, the number one requirement for a press secretary is his relationship with the man whom he represents. His first responsibility is to that man. His second one is to the press. He served John Kennedy in that fashion. From what I observed of the two of them together and working with Pierre closely, he was devoted and loyal to the President and no man could have worked harder for him. I think he did a very good job. He's a very imaginative man and I think he had the right personality for the job. That job itself has an unbelievable amount of pressures and it takes a man who is quick on his feet and quick thinking, imaginative, but at the same time a man with a highly refined sense of humor, which Pierre has and that added a great deal.

GRELE: Was he responsible for the innovations in the handling of the press or was that a result of a joint agreement between the President and Pierre?

CAMP: Well, of course, in the long run it was joint. Pierre certainly would not have made any moves in innovating without the President's knowledge and consent and long exploratory discussions on it. On occasions, the President himself, many times, would change procedures or institute new ideas to follow up some....

GRELE: Do you recall any particular...

CAMP: Well, I'm thinking particularly of the White House luncheons for the editors and publishers which had a two-pronged effect. One: they served as an avenue for the President to get his views across to the people. Number two, it gave him access to information he wouldn't otherwise have had, and independent source. He would be able to have editor X from a given daily paper in Arizona and get

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that man's judgment of the local situation, issues that were affecting the people of Arizona in that locality. And it served to give the editors and publishers themselves some intimate, direct contact with the man about whom they were reporting on on their front pages, which otherwise would not happen. And they also served as a political factor—for the President to express his views on the issues of the day.

GRELE: What were the origins of the decision to televise the press conferences?

CAMP: Well, again, I was not privy to the decisions of who said what, when, and where, but I believe very strongly that it evolved out of the awareness, of the President and Pierre and all the special assistants, of the onslaught of television and radio in a public official's life and conduct of office; and the quite successful venture into the television debates because they were very crucial parts of our campaign and we saw that they were done effectively and enhanced our candidate's stature and it was going to move in anyway, so "let's get going and set our own ground rules," was the attitude.

GRELE: Do you recall the discussions over whether or not they should be taped or live?

CAMP: Well, there were general discussions of how to start it, where to have them, how to conduct them, but it was all experimental. The decision was made, "Yes, we would have television, we would have live coverage." I don't recall that we ever discussed taping so much on TV.

GRELE: Oh, I thought that they were live for awhile and then they were taped and then they went back to live.

CAMP: No, I don't recall any on tape. They were all live. Some of them were taped for replay later but as far as I can recall they were all live.

GRELE: How effective was Mr. Kilduff [Malcolm M. Kilduff]?

CAMP: Well, I think Mac was a very effective press officer. Our office was broken down three ways. Salinger was number one, Andy Hatcher was number two,

and Mac was brought in as a third man, and their duties were rather divided. Of course, Pierre was in general direction of the office. Mac was more on operations,

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actual physical operations of seeing where the cameras would be placed and getting the press to airplanes and off helicopters and general management, is what it was. He was in touch on substantive matters, too, but he did not fulfill the role as a spokesman at that stage.

GRELE: As I understand it, he first came in to deal with foreign correspondents.

CAMP: He did. That was part of it.

GRELE: What happened to Jay Gildner? Arthur Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] in his book talks about him running into trouble but never tells us what.

CAMP: Well, Jay was the first number three man in the office because we had a terrible burden in that office. We were only nine people handling the entire...

GRELE: That's small, too, isn't it?

CAMP: Yes, terribly small. And, of course, the President and his family, as you well know, brought a lot of public inquiry since they were very active people. So nine people handling press relations is very small and Jay was brought into the office when Pierre met him in Canada. He had been in our Canadian embassy and had done all of the press work in relation to the President's visit up there—the famous tree planting ceremony when he ruined his back. Jay was an excellent technician on arrangements, advance work, and procedures. We needed a man in the office who could devote most of his time to that because Andy and Pierre were necessarily engaged in liaising with other government agencies and departments and in writing and just handling the normal day's business. We needed a man who was a manager and Pierre asked for Jay to come down and fill that role and he did. Jay was assigned to go to India with Mrs. Kennedy. I can't answer your question but I understand that Mrs. Kennedy came back feeling that it would be wise if Mr. Gildner was not there any longer.

GRELE: What happened on that trip? Do you know?

CAMP: I don't know.

GRELE: People always talk about it as a great fiasco and I've never been able to find out why.

CAMP: I don't know the circumstances either, but his departure from the White House had to do with that and I suspect that it was

a clash of personalities. And these things happen among people. But that's what I suspect. I don't know.

GRELE: How effective was Mr. Hatcher?

CAMP: Well, he was very effective in his line. He had a great deal of responsibility in backup support for Pierre, and he dealt with the Negro press and the ethnic press which was very valuable to us.

GRELE: Oh, I didn't know it was divided up that way.

CAMP: Well, it's not necessarily divided up that way but these things have to be taken care of. Just like the foreign press and TV and radio have particular problems, the Negro and the ethnic press, they have particular problems. You just have to take on certain assignments. Andy, of course, was very well informed on the Negro press, having worked in it himself, and he was the liaison with the national committee from our standpoint on the press relations with the Democratic organizations throughout the country.

My personal judgment of Andy is that he was very good initially. I became less enchanted with his operations later on. Andy—I'm very fond of him and admire him a great deal but he became hooked on the glamour angle of it, and by the time that Pierre left the White House I would not say that Andy was as entirely reliable and dependable as he had been earlier.

GRELE: Did the President ever take an interest in your work?

CAMP: Well, he was always interested in the nature of the press and of reporting, and having been a reporter himself at one time, and a voracious reader, yes, he took a very extreme interest.

GRELE: Did he ever pop by and say, "What happened here?"

CAMP: Oh, constantly he was in and out of the office every day. You couldn't keep him out.

GRELE: Do you recall any specific instances when he came in and said, "What happened?" and you were there?

CAMP: Well, yes. My worst experience with him was early in the administration when Pierre got himself backed against the wall on written agreements by the staff not to write articles. One entire press conference was devoted to that subject and also it was devoted to the subject of the French cook and the domestic staff. It

was a long press conference and Pierre knew at the time that he had volunteered more information that he really should have. This was a noon press conference. The press conference was concluded and Pierre went to lunch and I got a call from Evelyn Lincoln saying, "Send Pierre in right away. The President wants to see him." And I said, "I'm sorry. He's at lunch. I can call him." She said, "Well, wait until I find out." She came back and she said, "Send Andy Hatcher in right away. I said, "Well, he too, is at lunch but I can call him." Third time she came back and she said, "The President wants to see you." The normal practice was to grab your notebook and your pencil and I went into the office and with him was Ken O'Donnell in the President's office. And he was pacing up and down. I'd never really seen him angry before but he was mad as anything. And he quizzed me about the press conference. He'd just read the transcript and heard reports of it and he said, "What was it that Pierre said today?" and I gave him a general account of the tone and nature of the entire conference. And he said, "What does my French cook have to do with the nation's business?" And I said, "I can't answer that. These are the questions they were asking." He said, "Didn't they ask anything about the nation's economy?" I said, "No." He said, "Didn't they ask anything about Laos or Berlin?" And I said, "No." He said, "They didn't ask about my domestic programs?" He was enraged about the questions, about the press itself. Then the more he talked and the more questions he asked, he became more enraged about Pierre's handling this. "Why did he do this? Why did he volunteer this?" Then the one thing that I recall most of all was he said, "What do you think Jim Hagerty [James C. Hagerty] would have done under those circumstances?" And I said, "Mr. President, I can't answer that. I don't know what Jim Hagerty would have done and I frankly think that it's an unfair question to ask." He said, "I want to see that this story is played down." He said, "You take the following down and I want you to call the AP [Associated Press] and the UP [United Press, later became the United Press International] and give them this and don't let them know where you got it," meaning let them think that it was the press office but not directly from him. And he dictated in such a fashion—and he was pacing up and down and I could not hear him for one thing. I was trembling. I was absolutely trembling, and O'Donnell was of no help. He just stood over there next to the wall. He was sympathetic with my plight but he knew he didn't dare say a word. This Irish temper was something to behold. So I did the best I could and then, as he always did, he said, "Read it back to me." Well, I started and I got about ten words out and he said, "You missed a comma." He always dictated punctuation. He knew exactly what he wanted to say at all time. He knew exactly what punctuation he wanted.

GRELE: And he remembered?

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CAMP: And he remembered it. He said, "I did not say that. I did not put a semicolon there. I put it after the word 'and.'" Well, by this stage he realized that he had put me to too supreme a test and he apologized. He said, "I'm mad. I shouldn't have done that. We'll start over again." Then he said, "Now I'll go a little more slowly and you tell me if I'm going too fast." And so he did, and we got it all right. And he

said, "Now, I want to see you within a half hour. I want you to bring in the AP and UP ticker and show me that it's actually on the ticker." So I went back to my office and I transcribed this little document. It was a clarification of some point Pierre had made in his press conference. I called AP and UP and said, "This is a clarification of what was said today, just from a White House source." And sure enough, thirty minutes later they had run it and I was able to take it in and he said, "Well done," and that was the extent of it. But, of course, when Pierre came back from lunch I told him the whole story, and when I got to the point of telling Pierre that the President had asked me how Jim Hagerty would have handled this, Pierre said, "I guess I'd better go in and resign." And I said, "Pierre, my judgment is that this is just pure Irish temper and he was piqued and enraged about the questions." I said, "I think you'll find that when you go in and see him that he's forgotten all about it and it's over and done with." But Pierre took this very seriously. He said, "If he said that, I'm not doing my job." And he was prepared to submit his resignation. But Pierre, of course, went in and presented his side of the case and they talked it over and the President just made sure it wouldn't happen again, and that's all that was ever said about it.

GRELE: Did anything like that ever happen again?

CAMP: No. Pierre never made the same mistake twice. That's one thing, and I think this is true generally of the staff; that once you met the wrath and the lecture—they were always sweet and short and to the point and you got the message. But you never made the same mistake again.

GRELE: Did he ever come around and compliment you on a job particularly well done?

CAMP: No, not in that particular manner. You always knew when you did a good job because he'd always ask you to do more. That was the indication that he relied on you. You were always complimented if he asked you to take on an assignment. He had the manner of putting you on his level. First of all, he expected you to know your job and know it well and perform well. But he always put you on the same level. He would be as inclined to talk to you about

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the gross national product as he would with the Secretary of the Treasury. While he realized that you certainly couldn't be expected to know about the GNP, at least he would ask you for your opinion and he may assign you to do something along that line. But that was the type of compliment he would give you.

I recall particularly a time when Sue and I were on a Sunday duty at the White House to process and distribute the final press release of the President's annual economic message to Congress. Pierre left us saying that the draft message was being cleared by the President who would call us when he was through with it. The President called me a few minutes later to say the draft was ready but for me to bring my book since he had "a few changes." I went over to the mansion and located the President in his bedroom in bed with the pages of the

draft scattered all about him. Well, the “few changes” graduated into a major rewrite of the whole message which was voluminous and extraordinarily complicated, given the subject matter of balance of payments, the outflow of gold, etc. I had taken dictation for about an hour when I suggested that I go back to the press office to start the transcription and send Sue over to finish. Well, we worked this in relays for the entire afternoon. The President was about three quarters the way through when he said, “God, this is boring stuff.... You know what I want to say—just fix up the grammar and the punctuation and work it out.” I said, “Mr. President, I’d feel a lot better if I could transcribe this in draft and have you look over it again since I’m not confident about the technical language in the message.” He said, “No, no, I know you’ll get it right—I don’t want to see it again—just go ahead and give it to the press when you’re finished.” After getting back to the press office Sue and I despaired over our notes—whether outflow was really outflow and not inflow—and we knew we didn’t dare rely on our notes. We debated whether we should have the operators find either or both Secretary Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon] and Walter Heller [Walter Wolfgang Heller] so we could review the final transcription for accuracy. But luck was with us for at that moment Fred Holborn [Frederick L. Holborn] walked into the office and he immediately became an economic expert by our gratuitous shifting of the responsibility to him.

GRELE: Did your office handle Mrs. Kennedy’s press relations at all?

CAMP: No, we did not. That was Pam Turnure [Pamela Turnure]. Pam took general direction under Pierre on procedures and we were the channel for issuing press releases. But she, in the main, handled Mrs. Kennedy and the children [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy, John F. Kennedy, Jr.].

GRELE: Was there ever any comment in the White House press office about the handling of Mrs. Kennedy’s press relations?

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CAMP: No, because the...

GRELE: No interoffice rivalry?

CAMP: No, I can’t say—because we got it off the ground early in the administration that there was—you see, Pam was an innovation. That was one of the innovations under the Kennedy—a press secretary for the First Lady—and it worked very well. She was introduced as the press secretary and everybody knew who to turn to when it came to Mrs. Kennedy and the children. The only time where we would become involved with them would be when they would travel with the President. But otherwise it was strictly in the East Wing.

GRELE: Did you ever go on any trips?

CAMP: Practically all the time.

GRELE: To Bermuda?

CAMP: Yes, and I did a lot of advance trips, too.

GRELE: To France?

CAMP: Yes, I did that one. One of the press officers and one girl in the press office would go on the advance trips because our procedural and technical problems were such that we had to do a great deal of advance work. For example, on his first trip to Europe, Pierre and I went to Vienna and London and then we were back maybe two or three days in Washington, did our report, the decisions were made on all the agenda and scheduling and so forth, and then were turned right around and when back with the President.

GRELE: Who went to Paris?

CAMP: I did not go to Paris. I joined Pierre in Vienna. I think he did that one alone or he had somebody—maybe the State Department did it. I don't recall who advanced that.

GRELE: Were there any particular problems in either London or Vienna? Probably security problems in Vienna.

CAMP: Well, yes. There were problems on every trip and they were always different. Sometimes they would be peculiar to the press office, sometimes they would be peculiar for the security office. The advance arrangements were always very professionally handled because on an advance trip you would have the Secret Service, the White House communications, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], on certain occasions the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency],

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the press office. If it involved a state dinner we'd have someone from Tish Baldrige's [Letitia Baldrige] office go along. Usually, a full 707 Boeing jet would have an advance party making arrangements for any presidential mission abroad, because you'd have State Department people, and military, if it were involved with the military.

GRELE: What was the most enjoyable trip?

CAMP: Well, the most enjoyable one for me was his last trip to Europe—Berlin. I have never seen anything like it, having gone through all of the campaign and seeing the audience reaction to him, as a person. Berlin was the most captivating one because this one was of special importance to him, but the Berliners—the

flavor of those seven hours in Berlin just overwhelmed me. In the experience that I'd had in traveling with him, I'd never seen anything like it. And, of course, the Irish visit, too.

GRELE: Did you do the advance work on that? The Irish trip?

CAMP: No. Mac Kilduff did that one.

GRELE: There's a marvelous story about Minihan [Andrew Minihan].

CAMP: Andy Minihan? Yes, he's great.

GRELE: What was the most unenjoyable trip?

CAMP: Unenjoyable trip. Well, I have to go back to the campaign. The most unenjoyable trip for me was the campaign train in California. It was just a miserable, miserable thing in trying to conduct an office—a press office—on a train. When you had four coaches to run through to get to him (the candidate) and back to where the operating press was, and just all kinds of unaccountable things could happen. I remember we finally ended up in Oakland on that trip and I was ordered to stand by to finish the evening speech with Ted Sorensen. His girl was doing the manuscript and I was doing the press release and we had to run it down to the coliseum where he was making this major speech. And we were in the Oakland Round House! They'd shuttled the train off. And all of a sudden the lights went off, the train started to move and it went backward, and Ted said, "Where in the hell are we going?" and I said, "I don't know but I'll find out." And I ran up a couple of coaches and found a trainman and I said, "Where do you think we're going?" He said, "Well we're going to go out in the yard. We're going to wash the train." And just about that time water came splattering down all over the windows.

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We were way out someplace in the suburbs of Oakland. I don't know where we were—out in the train yard, and I looked out and there were hundreds and hundreds of coaches just sitting there, doing nothing! Well, my immediate problem was, "How on earth am I going to get this speech down to the coliseum? I don't even know where I am. We may be in San Francisco, for all I know." But there were the kind of things that went on constantly and you had to cope with just technical, physical problems.

GRELE: Did he ever use a train again?

CAMP: Yes. We used it once more in Michigan. A short trip, but was just as miserable. I am no at all an advocate of campaigning by train. It may be good for the candidate but sure isn't for the staff. I'll tell you that!

GRELE: In the press operations was there a hierarchy in the press corps in the terms of media? Were certain media—let's say, like television—was it given special

consideration compared to newspaper people?

CAMP: As far as stories were concerned?

GRELE: Yes. As far as stories.

CAMP: No. We always had to take into account special problems of the media. For example, on a press conference, we had to give them (TV correspondents) some advance notice of when the President was going to hold a conference because this meant television time had to be procured from the networks. We had to make him available to them. They had to figure out their own schedules, what programs to break into, the placing of equipment—it takes television quite awhile to get their gear in line and in place, and this was particularly true abroad. We had great difficulties in just circuits and telephone lines and this kind of thing. But as for actual story material and substance, no. I don't believe one was given more access than others.

GRELE: Were the wire services treated differently than the press? The other press? My assumption being that they cover such a wide audience.

CAMP: Well, they do. Yes. Let me put this in context. We always had a crash list that we called on when we had an emergency announcement to make or an announcement after hours. But the wire services cover on an hour by hour schedule, and you figure that TV and wire services, if you can catch them, you're going to be able to inform the American people. That's the purpose behind all

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this, and you're going to catch a wider range. So from that standpoint, TV, radio, and wire service reporters were given, not special privileges, but they would get the advance tip-off of impending announcements so they could be sure to cover it. We all knew what the deadlines were for the major dailies. For example, if we had an emergency announcement and it happened at eight o'clock at night, we would call the papers who were not on deadlines last because it was most important to get the ones that were going to press first. We had a regular list of what the deadlines were; the East Coast and West Coast and which ones were afternoon papers and which ones were morning papers. On some occasions we had to know what the timing was vis-à-vis the press in Europe if we were making an announcement affecting NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] or Britain, or something like that, and we would certainly include the wire services from Europe; Agence France Presse and the Italian service, and Reuters, from London, and BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation]. We did this within the context of deadline and the broad range of audience rather than setting one off against the other.

GRELE: Were the major dailies, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, given any special kind of treatment?

CAMP: You mean from the press secretary's standpoint?

GRELE: Yes.

CAMP: No, I can't say that they were. They were always recognized as being, of course, the major dailies of the East Coast. Of course, they would have greater accessibility that someone from the *Dayton Courier Journal* [*Dayton Journal Herald*, Ohio]. The reason I say this is because the *Times* and the *Post* covered the White House all the time whereas the *Dayton Courier Journal* didn't, and Salinger was only one man. The President was only one man. They can see so many people but you do business with your clientele that are there all the time. So if any favors were given, it was given to the hardcore reporters who covered us constantly, and in some cases it would happen with small papers who did cover us regularly. They deserve—just because they take their work seriously enough—they deserve to be included in this.

GRELE: This brings to mind a statement that someone once made to me that it didn't much matter if conferences were so open and so many people attended because most of the hard core sat in the first three rows and they were the people addressed and the other people were there for the show, more or less. Was this your impression?

CAMP: It actually turned out that way. First of all, the President

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enjoyed them. He liked them. He liked the give and take and he liked to figure out what kind of questions they were going to ask next. I think he did very well in getting outside of the regular White House reporters. This served to get people who cover the Pentagon or the Hill to ask him questions. From my standpoint, I think it worked very well. Now, the press itself probably feels differently. They were inclined to take things too personally, I felt.

GRELE: In what way?

CAMP: Well, they felt that if the man on the right side was called on press conference after press conference and the guy on the left wasn't, why, Kennedy didn't like the guy on the left. Well, that wasn't the case at all. He probably recognized Mr. X because he wanted to hear what he had to say. But it was no personal thing he had going for this fellow over here.

GRELE: Was there any special kind of treatment, and I don't mean special in terms of added prerogatives but I just mean unique treatment given to the men in the press corps who are in themselves sort of institutions, like James Reston [James B. "Scotty" Reston] and Walter Lippmann?

CAMP: No. You mean insofar as accessibility was concerned or special priorities?

GRELE: Well, special background, special access, special concern over what they were going to say.

CAMP: I would say that the walking institutions like Lippmann, Reston, and Krock [Arthur Krock] and so forth, had a rather favored position vis-à-vis the President but they couldn't walk into his office just any old time of day and get a private interview because we maintained a list of all requests—from all over the country—for private interviews from every journalist, every TV commentator. Pierre would periodically take it in and say, "These are outstanding requests for private interviews." And the President may or may not have said, "Okay, I'll see them," and set up an appointment. Then on the other hand, you would turn around and Pierre would walk in and he'd find Scotty Reston in his office. But this is just the way the President operated. But I don't feel that there was any particular calculated singling out of individuals. It happened occasionally but it wasn't calculated. The press felt among themselves that there was a layering of favorites; who played golf with him and who were invited to intimate dinners and who went on the *Honey Fitz*. There was a back biting kind of thing among themselves. But this was their judgment, not from our standpoint.

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GRELE: A lot of personal friends were newspapermen. Did any of them ever abuse that friendship?

CAMP: No, not to my knowledge.

GRELE: Very rarely, probably.

CAMP: Very. Very.

GRELE: The operation with the special press offices in the Pentagon or the State Department—how did that work out?

CAMP: This was in conjunction, mainly, with the press conferences but we were in touch generally every day with the Department of State and Defense, NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], and USIA [United States Information Agency]. They were channels of liaison. For example, of course Pierre would deal with Roger Tubby or Bob Manning [Robert J. Manning] or Jim Greenfield [James L. Greenfield], whoever was his counterpart in State; with Sylvester [Arthur Sylvester] at Defense, and Wilson [Donald M. Wilson] or Rowan [Carl T. Rowan] or Murrow [Edward R. Murrow] at USIA. We had to deal with them on a very close liaison because anything, of course, affecting foreign policy would affect the State Department and because they would have to supply the backup, support material in a lot of cases, or conduct background conferences on their own official level. So the State Department liaison was very well

worked out, I feel, from our standpoint. I can't remember when we were ever truly dissatisfied with their job, and the same is generally true of DOD [Department of Defense].

Then we worked out a procedure for press conferences where all the public information officers would come to Pierre's office for a general briefing the day before a press conference. They would bring in written, prepared, anticipated questions with the answers in big, black books. Pierre would be briefed and then he would take this material and present it to the President. The President would review it with Pierre and they would talk over the possible questions the press might ask. Then the morning of the press conference the President would have a luncheon or a breakfast with the Secretary of State, with the Vice President, and with several staff assistants for one final review before he went before the camera.

GRELE: I asked that question because I can see for myself, personally, how there could possibly be a diffusion if there wasn't some kind of central control.

CAMP: There was and it was in our office. I maintained a liaison most generally with the State and Defense. Mac and Andy did, too,

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because we had to arrive at simultaneous release times, what the subjects were, what the President wanted to say, or if he didn't want to say anything, we'd have the State Department announce it. Pierre's policy was "You (departments and agencies) announce the bad news, I'll announce the good news!"

GRELE: You were on the last trip of the President to Dallas. What were you doing on that trip?

CAMP: Well, I was assigned to that trip to help the acting press secretary, in this case Mac Kilduff. Pierre was en route to Japan. Just the normal press release, getting speeches out and the same things I did on all the trips.

GRELE: What were you doing at the time of the assassination?

CAMP: Well, I was on *Air Force One* at the Dallas airport with Sue Vogelsinger, who was also assigned to the trip. We were in the process of typing the Austin speech that the President was to make that evening in Austin. We had gotten his clearance that morning while we were going into Dallas that we could type it into press release form as well as type his manuscript. We had gotten through typing the manuscript cards and were just about to start to proofread them when the telephone rang in the stateroom. Colonel Swindal [James B. Swindal] answered the phone and he came out of the stateroom and stopped beside the table where we were working and said, "I think you'd better close up. Something has happened. It looks like we're going right back to Washington. Someone's been hurt." That's all he said and he raced out of the airplane because all the crew were either at lunch or at operations, except for the guard and a couple of the stewards. There

was no one else aboard. Of course, we didn't know what happened. So it occurred to me—we had been in Florida two or three days before this trip and on that occasion one of the Secret Service agents on the presidential detail had been injured in a motorcycle accident. It had been a very minor thing. But I thought that maybe one of the agents had been hurt in some way. This was always a possibility in this kind of travel. Also we had had the indications that Dallas might be rough from the standpoint of crowd handling and perhaps a hostile crowd, but we were always prepared for that, in a way. But then it didn't seem quite logical that *Air Force One* would be flying a staff member back, and I thought, "Well, maybe something has happened in the vice presidential party or the Vice President, but *Air Force Two* was there. They would use that airplane, certainly." And it suddenly struck me that it had to be the President or *Air Force One* would not be going back. So the next thing we did was to turn on the television in the stateroom, and we saw it on television just like everyone else did.

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By that time, the crew had reassembled on the airplane and they were preparing to be ready for takeoff. Of course, this was a matter of, oh, I guess, a good hour we were on board the plane before Mac made the announcement downtown. Sue and I did not know just what to do because we knew Mac would be in a jam and he would need us, but we didn't know where he was or how we could get in touch with him. We didn't want to tie up the phone on the airplane. So what I can recall of it now is that I remember gathering up the speech—the cards—and throwing everything in my briefcase. Because it's a curious thing to think that you suddenly are confronted with the fact that you are no longer a part of the presidential staff, that somebody else is going to take over. I think—it was an instantaneous reaction—that I was pretty well certain that I was not going to be going back on the airplane, because somebody else would be filling my shoes right away which, in fact, happened. It's a curious psychological reaction that you go through in addition to the emotion of the moment and the impact of an act like this—an assassination—and being on the scene or in the fringes of it, and not knowing what to do. But by instinct you're guided to take the right steps, and in our case it was perfectly true. We just stood by and waited because we knew we'd either hear from Mac or somebody would give us a direction. He did come back and he had with him Sid Davis [Sidney Davis] from Westinghouse Broadcasting, who was the pool reporter in reporting the flight home. As it turned out, Sue and I had to be dumped from *Air Force One* because other people had to take our seats. A new staff came on. We came back on *Air Force Two* with the Texas delegation, the Secret Service, and other staff members.

GRELE: What was your impression of the reasons for the trip to Dallas?

CAMP: Well, they were political. He was...

GRELE: To mend the fences?

CAMP: To mend fences, yes. I can't remember the public reasons why he went out there but it was purely political.

GRELE: When you returned to Washington what did you do?

CAMP: We went immediately to the White House because we knew that this would be a long, hard night and we were still on duty, of course. The new president needed as much help as he could get and we went directly to the press office. By this time Andy had been in touch with Pierre, or had, through channels, been in touch with him. Andy was in charge of the White House press office. He had immediately gone to the White House. Mac Kilduff, on arrival, of course, went with President Johnson and stuck by him. On arrival at the White House I was met by Andy and Bill Moyers [William D. Moyers], who expressed his

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condolences on behalf of the President and Mrs. Johnson [Claudia Alta “Lady Bird” Johnson], and asked us to stand by and stay with him [President Johnson]. I recall that—well, we had to work. Phones were ringing and people were asking questions and, of course, this was a whole new world to us, too, because we did not know the new president in order to answer those questions; and we had the burden of the initial questions on the funeral and on the arrangements and on Mrs. Kennedy. I recall that I didn’t get out until four in the morning, just for a few hours and then we were right back at work and this was steady then right through the funeral.

GRELE: Did you plan the funeral arrangements?

CAMP: Well, not I, no. We were all privy to them. We had to be because we had to answer the questions about them. But it was a double duty because we were in effect working for two presidents at this time. President Johnson had to get right into meeting people and to be briefed on what was going on. The nation had to be run and it was. And it was done very well, I think, under the circumstances, on both sides.

GRELE: You continued to work for Mr. Salinger while he continued to work for Mr. Johnson. Are there any comparisons you would like to make between the Kennedy and Johnson press operations?

CAMP: Well, they were striking to me, personally because President Johnson is a man unto himself, totally different in personality and makeup and operation than President Kennedy was. While he wrought no immediate change in procedures or handling—of course, I feel it’s very unfair to make comparisons, anyway, but I think the striking difference is that President Johnson was, in comparison, unexciting to work for and work with. I don’t think Pierre had the accessibility to President Johnson that he had with President Kennedy. But there are good reasons for this, over and above professional reasons. Keep in mind that this was a terribly emotional problem for all of us, the Johnson staff as well as the Kennedy people. President Johnson would, of course, demand the people who were most loyal to him and be more inclined to rely on them. We who were there as

members of the Kennedy staff were always made to feel that we were just a little bit suspect of our loyalty and our reliability because our loyalties had not been tested under President Johnson, and that's normal human nature. But the style and the organization, the procedures were totally different, just one extreme to the other, I think, from what I found.

GRELE: Can you think of anything we've missed that you'd like to cover in more detail?

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CAMP: No, not at the moment. I may think of something later.

GRELE: Well, thank you very much.

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