

THE JFK TAPES: HOW IT WAS

"A lot of this stuff is poetry, pure poetry," said Dave Powers, the irrepressible Irishman who greeted John F. Kennedy's visitors at the White House ("Hi 'ya, pal") for three years. "Some of it is going to raise the hackles of the people who were involved," said John F. Stewart, a young historian who never worked for Kennedy but knows the stuff of controversy when he sees it.

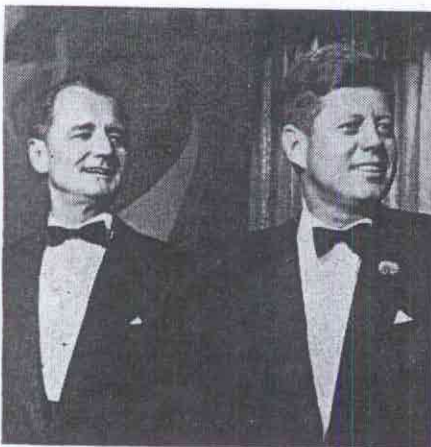
Both Powers, now the official curator of JFK memorabilia, and Stewart, acting director of the yet-to-be-built John F. Kennedy Library, were right about the lode of history they made available to scholars and journalists last week in the Federal Records Center at Waltham, Mass. There is some poetry—mostly in 409 boxes of fan mail—in the 7.5 million pages of "official" papers of the Kennedy Administration now cleared for inspection by qualified researchers. (Another 7.5 million pages, including

years—Kennedy partisans may conclude that the oral history project itself, launched in 1964 by Robert Kennedy and President Kennedy's widow, now Mrs. Aristotle Onassis, turned up more than they bargained for.

In the meantime, the tape-recorded recollections are clearly a windfall for historians. Some prime examples:

George A. Smathers: A longtime JFK crony, the Florida senator told of a proposal to assassinate Castro when interviewed in 1964. "I don't know whether he [JFK] brought it up or I brought it up," he said. "We had further conversation on the assassination of Fidel Castro, what would be the reaction, how would the people react, would the people be gratified."

Smathers, who declined to run for reelection to the Senate in 1968 for health reasons, recalled that Kennedy "was just throwing out a great barrage of



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JFK with Smathers, Khrushchev, Acheson: Instant history that is sure to stir fresh controversy

all those dealing strictly with foreign affairs, are still restricted.) There are also new glimpses of President Kennedy—some of them sure to stir fresh controversy—in the transcripts of tape-recorded "oral history" interviews with some 300 of his former friends and enemies. (Another 500 tapes have yet to be transcribed and released.)

The official papers include a previously unpublished testimonial from President Kennedy's No. 1 adversary, Nikita S. Khrushchev, predicting that history would judge JFK "an outstanding statesman." Khrushchev wrote his tribute in July 1964—three months before he was deposed as Soviet Premier—in reply to a letter from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

The taped interviews, reports NEWSWEEK's Charles Roberts, are far more candid than the official correspondence. When all the interviews have been made public—some now have portions deleted and others, at the request of the donors, are under lock for as long as 50

questions—he was certain it could be accomplished—I remember that. But the question was whether or not it would accomplish that which he wanted it to, whether or not the reaction throughout South America would be good or bad.

"And I talked with him about it, and, frankly, at this particular time I felt and later on learned that he did, that I wasn't so much for the idea of assassination, particularly where it could be pinned to the U.S." Smathers said he also discussed with the President the notion of provoking an incident at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay "which would then give us an excuse to go in and do the job."

Smathers, who had urged JFK to take a hard line against Castro during the 1960 campaign, recalled that by 1962 Kennedy had tired of discussing Cuba with him. He quoted JFK: "I like to visit with you, I want to discuss things with you, but I don't want you to talk to me any more about Cuba." When Smathers again raised the subject of Cuba, while

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McDonald and Blough: "Screwed"

Kennedy was preparing an informal dinner in the White House, the President "took his fork and just hit his plate and it cracked and he said, 'Now, dammit, I wish you wouldn't do that. Let's quit talking about this subject.'" The Florida senator said he wouldn't bring up Cuba again, "and I never did."

Dean Acheson: Acheson, who was President Truman's Secretary of State, told his interviewer he learned from Clark Clifford before the 1960 Democratic convention that Truman was about to go on TV and be "very extreme in his opposition to Kennedy." Acheson called and persuaded HST not "to say something which later on he would regret."

After his election, Kennedy called on Acheson in Georgetown and indicated he was considering appointing Sen. J. William Fulbright as his Secretary of State because the Arkansas senator "ran the [Foreign Relations] Committee pretty well and seemed to know a good deal about foreign affairs." The former Secretary advised against Fulbright, he said, because "he was not as solid and serious a man as you needed for this position. I've always thought that he had some of the qualities of a dilettante. He likes to criticize—he likes to call for brave, bold new ideas, and he doesn't have a great many brave, bold new ideas." Acheson then recommended a man Kennedy didn't know, Dean Rusk, as "strong and loyal and good in every way."

Kennedy, according to Acheson, favored Eugene Black, former president of the World Bank, for Secretary of the Treasury. Acheson told him that would be a very considerable mistake. He would turn out to be "the George Humphrey of the Administration." He prevailed on that one, but tried and failed to talk Kennedy out of appointing his brother Robert as Attorney General.

In March of 1961, Acheson said, Kennedy led him into the White House Rose Garden and outlined his Bay of Pigs plan. "I remember saying that I did not think it was necessary to call in Price, Water-

house to discover that 1,500 Cubans were not as good as 25,000 Cubans. It seemed to me this was a disastrous idea."

David McDonald: The former president of the United Steelworkers related that early in 1962, before steel-wage negotiations began, Kennedy called him and U.S. Steel president Roger Blough to the White House for "a little talk" about holding down wage demands and steel prices. McDonald agreed to stay within the Administration's 3 per cent productivity guideline, but Blough, he said, "never made one commitment on prices, not one commitment. He talked around the mulberry bush." When McDonald offered to sign an agreement in Kennedy's office, Blough declined.

Then on April 12, after returning home from the opening-day baseball game in Pittsburgh, McDonald got a call from the White House. "The President came on. He said, 'Hi, Dave.' I said, 'Hi, Mr. President. How are you?' 'Fine,' he says. 'Dave, you've been screwed and I've been screwed.' Those were his exact words." Kennedy then related that Blough had just called on him to inform him that U.S. Steel was raising its prices by \$6 a ton. "He [JFK] was really, really angry," McDonald said—until Inland Steel forced a rollback of steel prices.

In August 1963, the next time Kennedy confronted both McDonald and Blough in his office—this time to discuss steel imports—"the President was a little bit, shall we say, not too friendly with Roger." A call came through for McDonald from California. Kennedy quickly picked up the phone and answered, "This is John Kennedy, Dave McDonald's assistant."

In another oral history interview, Thomas J. Watson Jr., chairman of International Business Machines, related that Arthur Goldberg, then Kennedy's Secretary of Labor, decided to resign over the steel-price crisis. Watson, then JFK's best friend on the Business Council, quoted Goldberg as telling Kennedy: "Look, I've made this settlement with the labor side of things, and that implied that this thing was going to be controlled. I think we've let you down, and I'm going to resign." JFK's reply, according to Watson: "Oh, my God, Arthur, you certainly can't resign."

Other Voices: U.N. Secretary-General U Thant, the late President Sukarno of Indonesia, Princess Grace of Monaco, former British Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore (Lord Harlech), astronauts John Glenn and Alan B. Shepard Jr., admirals, generals, CIA officials, journalists, college classmates and rulers of a half-dozen smaller African and Asian lands are among the other contributors to the oral-history files.

Their tapes trace Kennedy's story from his undergraduate days at Harvard to his assassination. Among the clergymen who have taped are the Rev. Oscar L. Huber, who administered the last rites at Dallas, and Richard Cardinal Cushing of Boston, who conducted Ken-

nedy's funeral. In his interview, Father Huber defended the "validity" of the sacraments he gave the President after his face had been covered with a white sheet: "It is my opinion that his soul had not left his body."

Notably missing from the tapes currently available are interviews with Kennedy's top Cabinet officers—Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara—and White House staffers McGeorge Bundy, Ted Sorensen, Pierre Sainger, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Kenneth O'Donnell. Rusk, according to library officials, has taped nearly twenty hours of recollections but has not yet released the typescript of his interviews. Some of the others feel taping would be superfluous. "I said it all in my book," Schlesinger, for one, maintains.

Library: Eventually all the material in cardboard boxes and wooden crates in Waltham—the 800 interviews, the 15 million pages of documents and letters, 860,000 feet of movie film, 73,000 photographs, and 10,657 museum objects—including Kennedy's famed rocking chair—will be moved to a new building on the Charles River overlooking the Harvard campus in Cambridge. The library will adjoin Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

The 12-acre site, now a railroad yard, was picked by Kennedy before his death. When the public campaign to raise \$20 million for the memorial was begun in 1964, the Kennedy family expected to turn the library over to the National Archives, the government agency that administers five other Presidential libraries, "within five years." The fund-raising campaign has brought in \$18.5 million so far to build the library and endow an Institute of Politics within the school of government. But delays in acquiring the railroad yard and rising building costs have caused repeated postponements and modifications of



Michael Evans—New York Times

Waltham stacks: The rocker, too

plans. Now the library planners hope to break ground by next May 29—which would be President Kennedy's 54th birthday—and to occupy the new building by 1973, ten years after his death.