

Kennedy Talked Of Killing Castro

By HENRY RAYMONT

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NEW YORK — The John F.

Kennedy Memorial Library has opened to scholars and researchers the first selection of its 15 million pages of documents and manuscripts, including transcripts of 300 oral-history interviews, with such figures as Nikita S. Khrushchev, Mike Mansfield and a White House upholsterer.

A study of the documents at the library's temporary home, the Federal Records Center in Waltham, Mass., found that the bulk consists of White House correspondence and other less important papers but that the interviews add to the historical record many details of the president's attitudes and policies, particularly in the foreign-relations field.

The interviews — representing only a minor selection of the oral-history program initiated soon after Kennedy's assassination in November, 1963 — disclosed some fascinating insights into his major decisions on foreign policy.

DURING THE 1960 presidential campaign and after his election, for example, Kennedy and George A. Smathers, a close friend then in the Senate who had long been interested in Latin America, frequently discussed plans to overturn Premier Fidel Castro, including a possible assassination attempt. According to the Florida Democrat's account, the President eventually became so impatient with his friend's advice that one day he smashed a plate as he said, "Let's quit talking about this subject."

The reference to the assassination plot against Premier Castro, who came to power in

1959, was contained in a 175-page transcript of a series of interviews with Smathers, who frequently accompanied Kennedy on trips to Florida. Though the transcript has been edited heavily, deleting passages apparently dealing with the Bay of Pigs and the U.S.-Soviet missile crisis of 1962, it gives a detailed account of conversations with the President from the period just before his election victory.

"I don't know whether he brought it up or I brought it up," Smathers said in an interview dated March 31, 1964. "We had further conversation of assassination of Fidel Castro, what would be the reaction, how would the people react, would the people be gratified."

"AS I RECOLLECT," added Smathers, who has retired for reasons of health, "he was just throwing out a great barrage of questions—he was certain it could be accomplished—I remember that—it would be no great problem 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."

When the idea was discarded, Smathers suggested provoking an incident at the United States naval base at Guantanamo Bay, on the eastern tip of Cuba, as a pretext for a military strike.