

Peter Skutches
Richard Gallen & Co.,
260 Fifth Ave.,
New York, NY 10001

9/10/93

dear Peter,

McKnight also confirms that what I use of the O'Donnell oral history on LBJ, the military and Viet Nam is entirely new and of great importance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Peter Skutches".

8/8/93

Peter Skutches
Richard Gallen & Co.,
260 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10001

Dear Peter,

Wrone says that he knows of no use of any part of that O'Donnell oral history.
He is perplexed that with the passing of time many others there also have not been used.

He also says it means what I say and he was absolutely astounded when he first saw it.

McKnight has not yet returned so I cannot yet ask him.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "H. C. ...".

Dear Dave,

8/4/93

I think the O'Donnell transcript is very important. And I can't remember it ever being used anywhere. Apparently there was a reason for getting his widow's release in 1982, though. Anyway, my purpose in writing is not only to thank you but to tell you I'm surprised you made no mark on pages 84-5, about Viet Nam! I think it is quite significant!

LBJ was led into it by the military and it is not what he wanted or intended!

They never told him the truth and they fibbed a bit.

The Gulf of Tonkin was contrived for the involvement!

My do I wish I could lay my hands on my contemporaneous analysis that said it was all contrived to get us involved!

^{But} what remains of it is in the basement and if I do not have a separate Gulf folder I doubt I'll take the time to wade through all that stuff now.

I was down there once today to do a little filing and bring a box of file folders up and after several hours still feel it.

I've written Peter about it, suggesting it can be at the end of the Military Conspiracy? chapter or as I'd prefer at the end of the epilogue or even a long note.

O'Donnell says that Fallbright was wrong in what he said about LBJ and Viet Nam and I have no clear recollection of that now.

Best,

Harold

Peter Skutches
Richard Gallen & Co.,
260 Fifth Ave.,
New York, NY 10001

8/4/93

Dear Peter,

You may not be old enough to remember Kenneth O'Donnell but I think Richard does. He was JFK's appointment secretary who also was one of his speech writers, an able Boston lawyer who had been active in the JFK campaign. He is one of the JFK people who stayed on with LBJ when he asked ^{to} that.

I've just been given the first 110 pages of an oral history he made for the LBJ Library. This was not as a JFK man although he remained a Kennedyite.

This is to say that O'Donnell, who's book Kennedy was well received and highly regarded, is an excellent source.

I can't understand why ^{it} was not given any attention when it was released in January, 1982. He ^{was} taped in July, 1968. It has that much in it I regard as new, but then the media did not have that much interest in LBJ after Nixon was President.

I've found 35 lines of typing that are an entirely different account of Johnson and Viet Nam. O'Donnell says that LBJ intended not to get involved in any fighting there and that the military not only saw to it that he was never told the truth but contrived a situation during the campaign that boxed him in. They created the situation that led to a situation in which he had no ^{real} choice, the situation that led to our involvement there.

Remember, Never Again! ^{makes} out a case of the military conspiring. *This does fit!*

I do not want to ask Kevin to add anything without your approval. I presume that means Richard's, too. But I think this might get major attention if called to a reporter's or a reviewer's attention and that it also is fairness to LBJ.

To the best of my knowledge, nothing like this was ever said before in any form.

I think that it would fit well at the end of the Chapter, Was There a Military Conspiracy?, as a note to it, or at the end of the ~~epilogue~~ epilogue.

If you agree my preference would be to quote most of those 35 lines, with some excisions, with a short explanation. It would make no difference to me where it would be used.

I think that in the sense of last-minute-news it might be best at the end of the epilogue, which consists of what I got after drafting the book, it might be best.

If there is no objection, I'll send you a copy when I send it to Kevin. If not wanted, that is OK, too.

Mc Knight, who teaches Viet Nam, will be back in four days. I'll check the newness with him then.

Please excuse my using an ^{old} ~~old~~ envelope I had to open.

Sincerely,

Hardy

82-11

*Complete
as sent to me
Dad*

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
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Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Kenneth P. O'Donnell

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Justine O'Donnell of Boston, Massachusetts, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on July 23, 1969 in Boston, Massachusetts and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording shall not be available for use by researchers for fifteen years.
- (3) During my lifetime, I retain all copyright in the material given to the United States by the terms of this instrument. Thereafter, the copyright in the transcript shall pass to the United States Government. During my lifetime, researchers may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcript without my express consent in each case.
- (4) Copies of the transcript may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcript may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Justine O'Donnell
Donor

January 25, 1982
Date

Dorothy M. Stone
Archivist of the United States

February 12, 1982
Date

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 23, 1969
INTERVIEWEE: KENNETH O'DONNELL
INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN
PLACE: Mr. O'Donnell's office, Park Square Building,
Boston, Massachusetts

Tape 1 of 2

M: Let's get your identification on the beginning of the tape here, sir. You're Kenneth O'Donnell, and your official position with the Johnson Administration was as special assistant to the president from the time he took office, a job you continued in from the Kennedy Administration, on until the early part of 1965. Is that correct?

O: In addition to that, Doctor, I was also executive director of the [Democratic] National Committee. I held two positions at the same time.

M: You had been in Washington beginning in the late 1950s with the Rackets Committee investigating staff, with, later, Senator Robert Kennedy. Did you get to know Mr. Johnson at all during that time?

O: No. I had seen him, but I'd never met [him]. The first time I saw Senator Johnson then was when the hearings were being conducted on the space program in 1957, where they used the same room we used. We were ejected from the room because of the hearings that the Majority Leader then wished to hold. But I never met him until the convention of 1960.

a good job. You can't get off the train, it isn't like, once you get on it you're going to go places. And it doesn't make any difference whether you don't like it or not, but that's the way the tracks run. But that was a strange. . . .

The only other part of the campaign that I think was of any significance--there are two parts. Number one, which is coming back to haunt him, is the Vietnam thing.

M: Was that even considered much? Was that just crept into the speeches without much consideration at the time?

O: No. You see, what had happened Vietnam had become pretty hot now. Tonkin Gulf has now come, which again the poor guy is maligned about--Senator Fulbright is not correct--but it's not his fault, nobody had ever told him the truth. I was there when the thing broke. Lyndon Johnson no more wanted Vietnam in his pocket than he wanted anything in the world. The military may have told some fibs, I don't know. But he took it as a test, and he and I talked about it that night, of whether he has got any guts or not, that's all. They're just testing him, why would you do something like that that doesn't make any sense? A provocation which has no military significance to it. They're going to test him to see if he has got enough backbone, or whether in a political campaign he dared to do anything about it, and then they'd go further maybe next time. So he asked for the resolution and then they retaliated, but it was perfectly on the up and up--there was no thought of troops,

no nothing. But Dick Goodwin was writing his stuff on Vietnam. I'm as sure as I'm sitting here Lyndon Johnson was as sincere as he could possible be about Vietnam and getting out of there. That comes really to fruition in 1964 and then in early 1965 when the military situation changed rather drastically. But I think he was as straight as a string on his speeches. He gets a little flamboyant and he says things maybe a little more than he should have, but basically that's what he meant. I know that. I talked to him about it many, many times. I was totally for getting out of Vietnam totally from 1961 on, and he and I used to talk about it. There was no problem on that until late in 1964.

But the only other significant thing in the campaign was his Bobby situation again. They tried to shaft Bobby in every conceivable fashion. He didn't want him in that United States Senate, and this is where I performed somewhat of a function. He couldn't shaft Bobby without me knowing about it, and I wasn't about to let him. And he couldn't afford to have me resign in the middle of the campaign because he was shafting Bobby and go up and work for Bobby, so I've kind of got him in a position, too. We put our advance men, and I brought them all in from Massachusetts, and they were all Lyndon Johnson's advance men in New York. They were also Bobby Kennedy's advance men in New York, because strangely enough, the very community that really had supported John Kennedy was anti-Robert Kennedy. The Jewish liberals, the Democrats for Keating was composed totally of what now is the McCarthy group probably. The