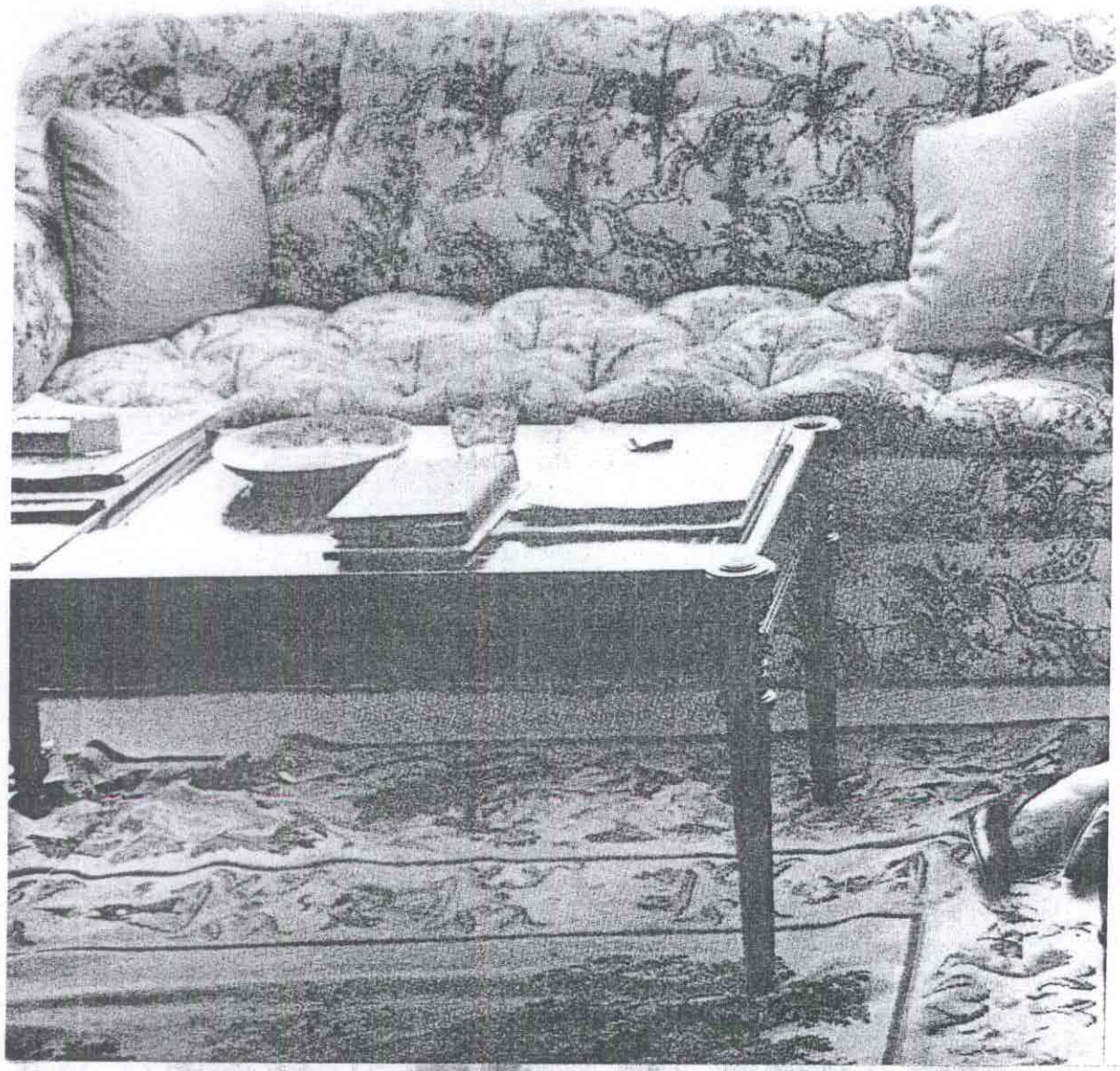
ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER JR. RESUMES HIS KENNEDY NARRATIVE

Life in the White House

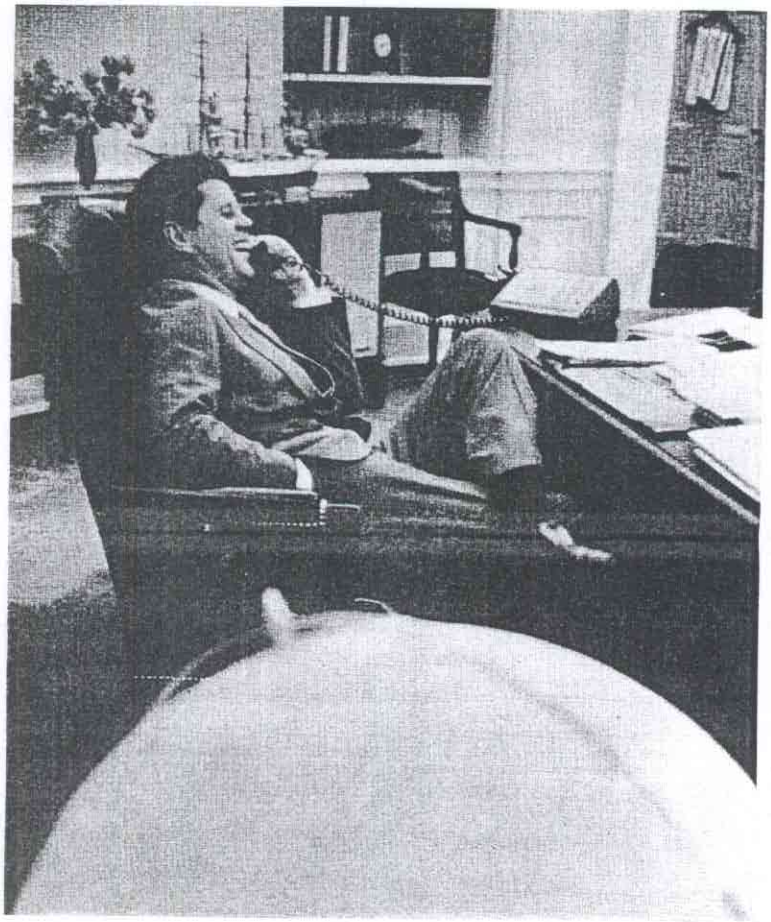
LIFE here resumes publication of *A Thousand Days*, the story of John F. Kennedy's presidency, by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., noted historian and member of the Kennedy inner circle. *A Thousand Days* will be published as a book Nov. 29 by Houghton Mifflin. On the following pages Schlesinger writes about life in the White House with the Kennedys, who are shown here in their living room in a previously unpublished portrait by Mark Shaw.



A THOUSAND DAYS, PART IV

A Stiff Regimen Leavened by Gaiety and Wit

by ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR.



Kennedy "radiated a contained energy," and even at the desk, flanked by a globe, "the atmosphere was one of informality."

By the summer of 1962 John F. Kennedy was well settled in the Presidency. He had changed somewhat, physically, in this year and a half. The face was more lined and furrowed; the features were heavier, less handsome but more powerful. The first 18 months is always the period of presidential definition, and for Kennedy the succession of crises had tied an already disciplined personality ever more irrevocably to the responsibilities for which he held himself accountable to the future. The experience deepened him and gave emphasis to a certain somber side of his nature. At the same time, it liberated him. He could at last be himself; the private face, somewhat subdued and withheld during the congressional years, became fully the public face. His intelligence, gaiety and wit, now displayed without inhibition, delighted the nation.

By this time the methods of the Kennedy Presidency were coming into focus. The day began at quarter to eight. George Thomas, his devoted and humorous Negro valet, would knock at the door of the Kennedy bedroom. As the President sat down before his breakfast tray, surrounded by the morning papers and urgent cables and reports which might have come in during the night, Caroline and John would rush in, greet their father and turn on the television to watch animated cartoons. Then more presidential reading, with the television going full blast. At 9 o'clock a calisthenics program came on, and Kennedy liked to watch the children tumble on the bedroom floor in rhythm with the man on the screen. Then, taking one of the children by the hand, he would walk over to the presidential office in the West Wing.

After a morning of work and a brief swim, he returned to the Mansion for luncheon. He preferred to lunch alone or with Jacqueline; very occasionally he would bring guests. After luncheon came a nap. Impressed by Winston Churchill's eloquence in praise of afternoon rest, he had begun this practice in the Senate. It was a genuine sleep, in pajamas and under covers. He went off at once; and in 45 minutes Jacqueline would waken him and chat as he dressed. This was her hour of the day, as the morning was the children's.

This historian, it must be said, had not realized how constricted the living quarters of an American President were. The first floor of the Mansion was given over to public rooms and reserved for state occasions. The third floor was rarely mentioned. The private life of the Kennedys took place on the second floor under conditions which an average Park Avenue denizen would regard as claustrophobic. A long dark corridor,

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brightened by a set of Catlin's Indian paintings, transected the floor. Bedrooms debouched from each side. A yellow oval room, marvelously light and lovely, was used for tea or drinks before dinner; it had served earlier Presidents as an office. Another chamber at the west end of the corridor was Jacqueline's room by day and the sitting room in the evening. Dinner guests used the President's own bath room. It was not a house for spacious living.

Yet it never seemed unduly crowded in these days. The atmosphere was always one of informality. When his family was away, the President used to have his afternoon appointments on the second floor. But generally he returned to the West Wing after his nap, where he worked until 7:30 or 8 at night. Jacqueline liked to guard the evenings for relaxation, and the President welcomed the relief from the incessant business of the day. One of Jacqueline's charms, Robert Kennedy once said, was that "Jack knows she'll never greet him with 'What's new in Laos?' " From time to time, of course, she did, as one crisis or another dominated the headlines; and he would tell McGeorge Bundy to show her the cables. But her central effort was to assure him a sanctuary of comfort and affection.

After the first year they seldom left the White House for private dinners elsewhere. Jacqueline, instead, would arrange small dinners for six, eight or 10 in the Mansion. They were the most agreeable occasions in the world. On such evenings Jacqueline would sometimes put on records and there might be dancing. The President often vanished into his bedroom to work or make telephone calls, then reappearing in time to bid his guests goodnight.

Occasionally there were films in the projection room in the East Wing. Kennedy was not a great movie fan and tended, unless the film was unusually gripping, to walk out after the first 20 or 30 minutes. He was interested, however, that one of his staff should contribute film reviews to a magazine, and with his curiosity about everything he would often have suggestions about critiques he thought should be written. Before beginning the assignment, I sent him a memorandum asking whether it would be any embarrassment to him if I became a film critic on my own time. The message came back through his secretary, Evelyn Lincoln: "The President says it is fine for you to write for *Show* as long as you treat Peter Lawford with respect."

Private relationships are always a puzzle to Presidents. "The Presidency," Kennedy once remarked, "is not a very good place to make new friends"—or sometimes to keep old ones either. The Kennedys watched with fascination how White Housitis affected their acquaintances, leading some to grievance and others to sycophancy, and they discussed a book which might be written and called *The Poison of the Presidency*. By 1963 the private dinners became somewhat less frequent. More and more the President fell back on the easy, reliable company of tried friends.

The state dinners were inevitable, but Jacqueline made them bearable by ending the old regimented

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As he sat on a desk given President Hayes by Queen Victoria, Kennedy tried to divert son John from a romp.

He made up stories about a shark that ate socks

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formality of solemn receiving lines and stilted conversation and changing them into elegant and cheerful parties, beautifully mingling informality and dignity. But the gala occasions were the small dinner dances. Jacqueline conceived them as a means of restoring a larger social gaiety to her husband's life. When several months of unrelenting pressure had gone by, she would feel that the time had come for another dancing party. There were not many such parties—only five in the whole time in the White House—and they were all blithe and enchanting evenings. The President seemed renewed by them and always walked with a springier step next day.

Sailing relaxed him most of all—the sun, the breeze, the water and, above all, no ringing telephone. He could get along happily without the sun and used to insist on taking friends out even on dark and chilly days. The guests would huddle against the cold while the President sat in the stern in a black sweater, the wind blowing his hair, blissfully happy with a steaming bowl of fish chowder.

The weekends and holidays, despite his battered black alligator briefcase stuffed with papers, gave him time for the children. He also saw them as much as possible during the week, and his delight in them was unconcealed. He loved children and told Jacqueline before their marriage that he wanted at least five; she had four in seven years. He liked young children in particular and always wanted a baby coming along when its predecessor was growing up.

Caroline and John were, as the world came to know, wonderfully spirited and original, and they cast their spell throughout the White House. One often encountered them in the corridors going over to their morning nursery school. One morning I said to Caroline, "Who is your friend?" She replied with dignity, "He's not my friend, he's my brother." They invaded the West Wing, took candies from a box kept for them on Evelyn Lincoln's desk, and liked to hide under the Cabinet table.

Often, at the end of the day, the President would leave his desk, throw open the French windows leading into the Rose Garden, walk out on the colonnade and clap his hands. At this signal every child and dog in the vicinity would rush across the green lawn into his arms. He would encourage John to dance, clapping his hands again as the accompaniment. In the evening he made up stories for them about Caroline hunting with the Orange County hounds and winning the Grand National, and John in his PT-Boat sinking a Japanese destroyer. He would tell them about Bobo the Lobo, a giant, and about Maybelle, a little girl who hid in the woods, and about the White Shark and the Black Shark. The White Shark lived off people's socks, and one day, when the President and Caroline were sailing with Franklin Roosevelt Jr. off Newport, Kennedy pretended to see the White Shark and said, "Franklin, give him your socks; he's hungry." Franklin promptly threw his socks into the water, which made a great impression on Caroline. And her father taught Caroline poetry: *Where the bee sucks, there suck I....*

For her part, Jacqueline was determined that the children should lead as normal lives as possible. This was not an easy goal, but she did her best, arranging the White House nursery school where they could fraternize with their contemporaries and taking them off in her blue station wagon on quiet expeditions to shops or parks. On Halloween evening in 1962, the front doorbell rang at my house in Georgetown. When my 14-year-old daughter opened the door to the trick-or-treaters, she found a collection of small hobgoblins leaping up and down. One seemed particularly eager to have her basket filled with goodies. After a moment a masked mother in the background called out that it was time to go to the next house. Christina suddenly recognized the voice. It was, of course, Jackie, and the excited little girl was Caroline out with her cousins. They had just rung Joe Alsop's bell; Dean Acheson was the next stop.

Such adventures varied their lives. John and Caroline were not, if their mother could help it, the little prince and princess, any more than she and the President were royalty. She disapproved of the term "First Lady," which had come into semiofficial usage. When she heard the servants referring to her by the title, she told them her name was "Mrs. Kennedy." She constantly reminded the children that the White House was their

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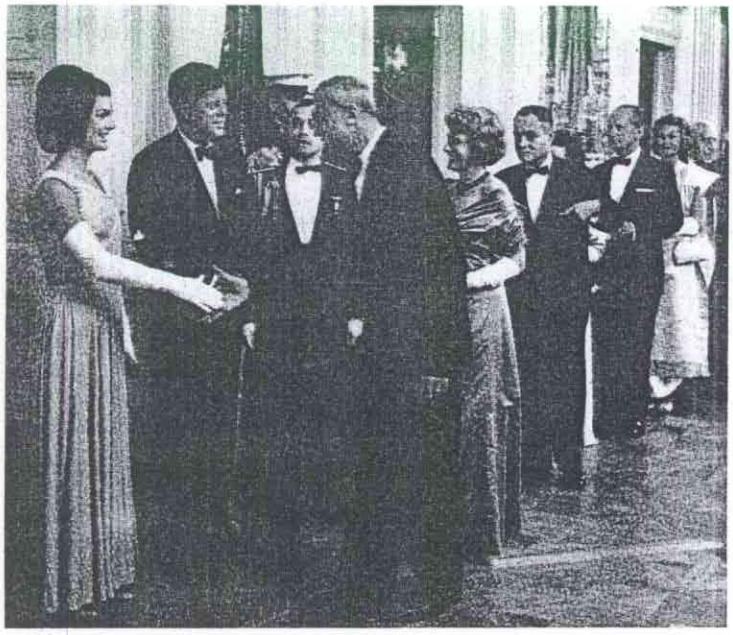

In parties like this for 49 Nobel winners, Jacqueline broke out of "regimented formality." Here Dr. and Mrs. Felix Bloch greet Kennedys; behind them, Ralph Bunche.

Thousand Days

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temporary residence, not their permanent home. When Alice Longworth or Franklin Roosevelt Jr. came to dinner, she would explain that they had once lived in the White House too, as Caroline and John were living there now.

The White House was temporary for the Kennedys but permanent for the nation. Mrs. Eisenhower had taken her successor on a trip around the Mansion in late 1960. It was too soon after John's birth, and Jacqueline was desperately weak after the Caesarean operation. She trudged through the historic rooms, long since emptied of the authentic past, now filled with mediocre reproductions; it seemed almost as if this were a house in which nothing had ever taken place. She resolved on the spot to establish the President's residence thereafter as unequivocally the nation's and transform it into a house of which the nation could be thoroughly proud. The restoration of the White House became her special project.

Her hope was to recover as many as possible of the old and beautiful objects which past Presidents had cherished and make the President's house both a distillation of American history and an expression of American excellence. "Everything in the White House must have a reason for being there," she said. "It would be sacrilege merely to 'redecorate' it—a word I hate. It must be restored—and that has nothing to do with decoration. That is a question of scholarship." Her husband sent Clark Clifford to help with her plans. Jacqueline, with his assistance, set up the White House Historical Association. She procured legislation designating the White House as a museum and enabling it to receive gifts, and she pushed through the publication of the first White House guidebook. It was a formidable executive effort, but she carried it out with a perfectionist's attention to detail, steely determination and lovely command.

The President watched the transformation with mounting pride. The success of the guidebook pleased him, and he kidded those on the staff who had said gloomily that it would never do to sell a guidebook in the White House. He congratulated her as the number of people going through the White House steadily rose: in 1962 the total was nearly two-thirds greater than in 1960. In February 1962, when Jacqueline took the whole nation on a television tour of the new White House, the President viewed the program with great satisfaction.

Her husband's delight in her was visible. His eyes brightened when he talked of her or when she unexpectedly dropped by the office. He was even entertained by her occasional bursts of undiplomatic candor. "Whenever a wife says anything in this town," he remarked in high amusement one night at dinner at the White House, "everyone assumes that she is saying what her husband really thinks. Imagine how I felt last night when I thought I heard Jackie telling Malraux that an eminent foreign leader was *un peu gaga!*"

He adored her because she remained utterly faithful to herself—and the nation, for all its earlier reservations, came to adore her for the same reason. She had dreaded coming to the White House, fearing the end of family and privacy. But life for herself and her husband and children was never more complete. It turned out to be the time of their greatest happiness.

John F. Kennedy had wanted to become President, he loved being President, and at times he could hardly remember that he had ever been anything else. He never complained about the "terrible loneliness" of the office or its "awesome burdens." He regarded his life, I think, as threatened more by confinement than by solitude; occasionally, at the end of the day he would say, almost wistfully, "What are you doing tonight?" and then enjoy a moment of gossip about old friends in Georgetown.

His presidential life was instinct with action. Seated at his desk or in the rocking chair in front of the fireplace, he radiated a contained energy, electric in its intensity. Occasionally it would break out, especially during long and wandering

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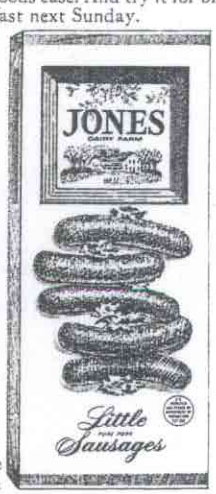

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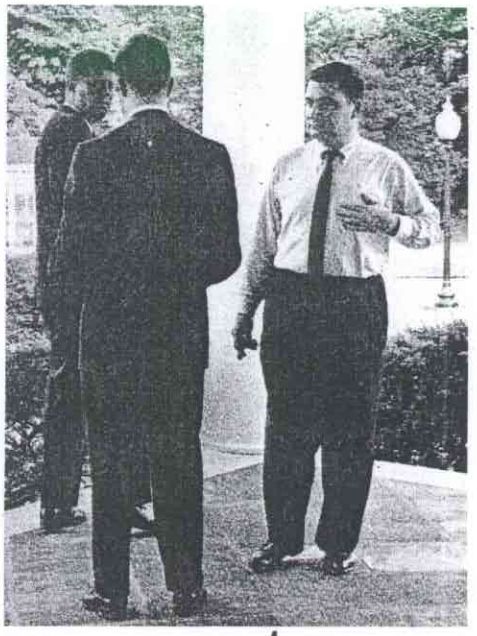

As shirt-sleeved Pierre Salinger listens, Kennedy discusses a 1961 speech draft with chief writer, Ted Sorensen, whose style, Schlesinger says, "fused" with the President's.

Thousand Days

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meetings. His fingers would suddenly be in action, drumming the table, tapping his teeth, slashing impatient pencil lines on a pad, jabbing the air to underscore a point. Sometimes the constraint of the four walls seemed too much, and he would stride across the room, pausing wryly to look at the indentations left on the floor by his predecessor's golf cleats, throw open the doors to the lawn and walk up and down the colonnade. One day, while talking, he rose from his desk, picked up his cane, inverted it and started making golf swings; then, looking up with a smile, he said, "I'm getting to be more like Ike every day!"

He had to an exceptional degree the talent for concentration. When he put on his always surprising horn-rimmed glasses and read a document, it was with total intentness; in a moment he would have seized its essence and returned to the world he had left. He was for the same reason a superb listener. "Whoever he's with," someone said, "he's with them completely." He would lean forward, his eyes protruding slightly, concerned with using the occasion not to expound his own thoughts but to drag out of the talker whatever could be of use to him. Isaiah Berlin was reminded of a remark made about Lenin: that he could exhaust people by listening to them. In this way Kennedy ventilated problems in great detail without revealing his own position and without making his visitors conscious that he was holding back.

His manners were distinguished, and the more timid or lowly the people, the greater his consideration. His moments of irritation were occasional but short. They came generally because he felt that he had been tricked or because a crisis caught him without warning or because someone in the government had leaked something to the press. The air would rock for a moment; his years in the Navy and in Massachusetts politics had not been in vain, and, when pressed, his vocabulary was vivid. But, though he got mad quickly, he stayed mad briefly. He was a man devoid of hatred. He detested qualities but not people.

He was infinitely accessible to his special assistants. One could nearly always get him by phone; and, while Kenneth O'Donnell guarded one entrance to the presidential office with a wise concern for the President's time and energy, Evelyn Lincoln presided over the other with welcoming patience and warmth. For the half hour or so before luncheon and then again in the last hour of the afternoon, the door between Mrs. Lincoln's office and the President's room was generally ajar—a signal to the staff that he was open for business. One put one's head in the door,

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Restoring White House, a task she carried out with "steely determination and lovely command," Mrs. Kennedy adds a gilt-shanked candelabrum of Monroe period.

Thousand Days

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was beckoned in; then the report was made or the document cleared briskly across his desk. Everything was transacted in a kind of shorthand. Kennedy's mind raced well ahead of his words; and, by the time he was midway in a thought, he was likely to assume that the drift was evident and, without bothering to complete one sentence, began the next.

He liked to regard his staff as generalists rather than specialists and had a distressing tendency to take up whatever happened to be on his desk and hand it to whoever happened to be in the room. But a measure of specialization was inevitable, and the staff on the whole contrived its own clandestine structure, taking care to pass on presidential directives to the person whose area it was. He never forgot anything, however, and he was perfectly capable weeks or months later of demanding to know what one had done about such and such.

He expected his staff to cover every significant sector of federal activity—to know everything that was going on, to provide speedy and exact answers to his questions and, most of all, to alert him to potential troubles. When a crisis was sprung without notice, there would be ejaculations of incredulity or despair: "For God's sake, do I have to do everything around here myself?" He wanted the staff to get into substance. He constantly called for new ideas. If a staff member told him about a situation, he would say, "Yes, but what can I *do* about it?"

Kennedy disliked meetings, especially large ones. He convened the Cabinet far less frequently even than Roosevelt. If he had to have a meeting, he preferred a small one with candid discussion among the technicians and professionals who could give him the facts. Policy people were less essential because he could supply policy himself. Kennedy would listen quietly to the presentation, then ask pertinent questions and expect precise replies. He had a disconcerting capacity to raise points which the experts, however diligently they had prepared themselves, were hard put to answer. Rambling made him impatient, but his courtesy was unshakable; there were only those drumming fingers.

Though he was a perfectly competent writer, he rarely had time any longer to compose his own speeches (except when he spoke extemporaneously, as he very often did). Ted Sorensen was, of course, his main reliance. They had worked closely together for a decade. I do not know which of them originated the device of staccato phrases ("We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe") or the use of balanced sentences ("Never have the nations of the world had so much to lose or so much to gain"); but by the time of the Presidency their styles had fused into one.

Next only to Sorensen, Richard Goodwin was Kennedy's best writer. After Goodwin's departure to the State Department, I found myself increasingly involved in speech drafting. The President somewhat mistrusted my efforts, however, as "too Stevensonian," by which he meant too complicated in syntax and fancy.

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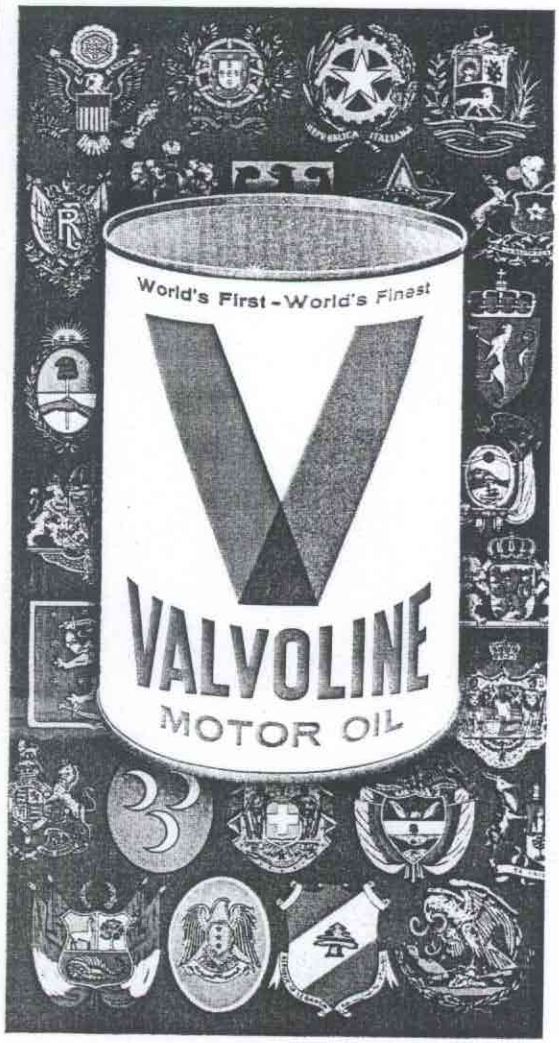

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Greenville Lumber Co.
Kingsport — Citizens Supply Inc.
Horsley Lumber Co., Inc.
Lowe's of Kingsport, Inc.
Roberts & Johnson Lumber Co.

VIRGINIA
Alexandria — Rissco, Inc.
Christiansburg — Montgomery Wholesale Supply
Chuckatuck — Saunders Supply Co.
Falls Church — Fallfax Thrifty Lumberteria
Front Royal — Rudacille Lumber Co.
Narrows — New River Lumber Co., Inc.
Newport News — Nice Bldg. Sply. Corp.
Norfolk — Building Supplies Corp.
Lowe's of Norfolk, Inc.
Whitehurst-Blassingham Corp.
Pearisburg — Timberlake Hardware Co.
Portsmouth — Boyce Lumber Corp.
City Supply Co., Inc.
Robertson Hardware Co.
Aubry G. Sweet, Inc.
Pulaski — Virginia Block Co.
Richmond — Lowe's Hardware of Richmond, Inc.
Massey Builders Supply Corp.
Roanoke — Lowe's of Roanoke, Inc.
Staunton — Lowe's Staunton Hardware
Suffolk — Beamons Inc.
Troutville — Cash Building Supplies
Vienna — Lowe's Vienna Bldg. Sply. Co.
Warrenton — Warrenton Bldg. Matl. Co.
Winchester — Glaize & Bros.

WEST VIRGINIA
Charleston — Wright-Bachman Lbr. Co.
Gilbert — Gilbert Lumber Co.
Hedgesville — Paynes Bldg. & Sply. Co.
Huntington — Danco, Inc.
Lowe's of Huntington, Inc.
Wagoner Bros. Co.
Oak Hill — Lowe's of Oak Hill, Inc.
Princeton — Lloyd Nichols Lumber Co.
Lowe's of Princeton, Inc.
Raderfield — Spratt Lumber Co.
Shinnston — Vincent Lumber Yard

Relaxed in the famous rocker which he used for his bad back, Kennedy concentrates intently on visitor's remarks. "He could exhaust people by listening to them."

Thousand Days

CONTINUED

He would begin his work on a speech by calling in the writer and sketching out his ideas. When the occasion was serious, he would read the draft with intense care, scribble illegibly in the margin and then go over the result with the writer. Like most politicians, he had little sense of the structure of a speech. He also was an uncertain speller; nor was his grammar infallible. But he was an excellent editor, skilled at tuning up thoughts and eliminating verbal excesses. Above all, he loved pungent expression. Early one Sunday in December 1962 he woke me to read aloud two sentences from a Khrushchev speech in the morning newspapers. One began, "At the climax of events around Cuba, there began to be a smell of burning in the air." The other went, "Those militarists who boast that they have submarines with Polaris rockets on board, and other surprises, as they put it, against the Soviet Union, would do well to remember that we are not living in mud huts either." Kennedy remarked with admiration, "Khrushchev certainly has some good writers." (I said that we could do as well for him if he would only give two-hour speeches.)

If the occasion was political or festive, he would approach the speech with greater casualness, quite often using the prepared text only as a point of departure, or, as he had done so often in the 1960 campaign, abandoning it entirely. He gave one of his most sparkling talks at a luncheon in Washington in October 1961, marking the publication of the first four volumes of the Adams papers. I had prepared a draft. His rather detailed suggestions led to a new draft, at which he glanced half an hour before the lunch while conducting conversations with other staff people on unrelated topics. In a few moments we went over to the Statler Hotel. During lunch he went calmly over the manuscript, crossing out paragraphs and writing inserts. When he rose to speak, the first half of his remarks was absolutely new (including the felicitous opening: "I want to say to Mr. Adams that it is a pleasure to live in your family's old house"). The second half was a free (and improved) adaptation of the text he had brought with him.

The speech process sometimes brought his miscellany of curious knowledge into play. In September 1962 he asked me to prepare something for a talk he had to make at Newport at the dinner before the America's Cup races. He suddenly said, "I understand that there is about the same amount of salt in the human blood as there is in sea water and that is proof of our origin in the sea." Apparently blood does have a certain amount of salt, almost as much as sea water, and the scientist Claude Bernard and others had speculated that the need of cells for a salt solution might be related to man's primal origin in the sea. When I later asked Kennedy where in the world he had heard this, he said he couldn't remember. In Newport he

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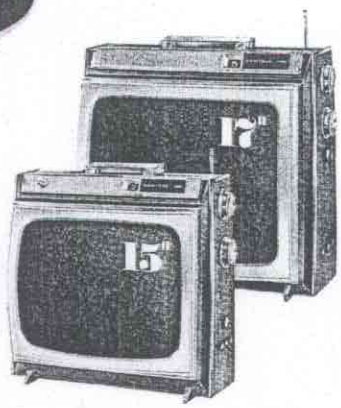

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*[illegible] Shown above, [illegible] (right). Admiral, Chicago. Canadian Admiral, Port Credit, Ontario.

On 'great' Presidents: 'How the hell can you tell?'

Thousand Days

CONTINUED

converted it into poetry: "All of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea—whether it is to sail or to watch it—we are going back from whence we came."

Irony was his most distinctive mode ("Washington is a city of southern efficiency and northern charm"). His use of it could be gentle or sharp, according to his mood, and it was directed at himself as often as at others. Detachment was one of his deepest reflexes. When the first volume of Eisenhower's presidential reminiscences came out, he said drily to me, "Apparently Ike never did anything wrong. . . . When we come to writing the memoirs of this Administration, we'll do it differently."

Kennedy came to the Presidency almost without break of stride. Yet the Presidency, as he once put it, is a "mysterious institution." He himself came to feel the mystique of the Presidency strongly enough almost to doubt whether the quality of the presidential experience could be understood by those who had not shared it. My father, who had asked a panel of historians and political scientists in 1948 to rate the Presidents in categories from "great" to "failure," repeated the poll in early 1962 and sent a ballot to the historian who had written *Profiles in Courage* and *A Nation of Immigrants*. Kennedy started to fill in the ballot; but, as he thought about it, he came to the conclusion that the exercise was unprofitable. "A year ago," he wrote my father, "I would have responded with confidence . . . but now I am not so sure. There is a tendency to mark the obvious names. I would like to subject those not so well known to a long scrutiny after I have left this office." He said to me later, "How the hell can you tell? Only the President himself can know what his real pressures and his real alternatives are. If you don't know that, how can you judge performance?" Some of his greatest predecessors, he would sometimes say, were given credit for doing things when they could do nothing else: only the most detailed study could disclose what difference a President made by his own individual effort. War, he pointed out, made it easier for a President to achieve greatness. But would Lincoln have been judged so great a President if he had lived long enough to face the problem of Reconstruction?

For all his skepticism, he read the results of the poll with avidity. He was greatly pleased that Truman made the "near great" class. He was also interested that Eisenhower rated only 28th, near the bottom of the "average" category. But what surprised him particularly was the high rating given to Wilson—fourth in the list and in the "great" category. Why, he asked, should Wilson have placed ahead of Jackson? After all, Wilson had made a botch of the Mexican intervention; he had messed up the League of Nations fight and, although a great speaker and writer, he had failed in a number of his objectives. He also wondered about Theodore Roosevelt (No. 7 and "near great"); he had really got very little important legislation through Congress. It seemed evident that his measure of presidential success was the concrete achievement; thus, people who educated the nation without necessarily accomplishing their own purpose rated, in his judgment, below those who accomplished their purposes without necessarily bringing the nation along with them. The best, of course, were those who did both, and he agreed with the panel's choice of the top three—Lincoln, Washington and Franklin Roosevelt.

Kennedy was determined to restore the personal character of the office and recover presidential control over the sprawling feudalism of government. This became a central theme of his administration and, in some respects, a central frustration. The presidential government promptly collided with the permanent government, which included men and women of very marked devotion, quality and imagination, but remained in bulk a force against innovation. The permanent government had its own set of requirements and expectations—continuity of policy, stability of procedure, everything

TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 104

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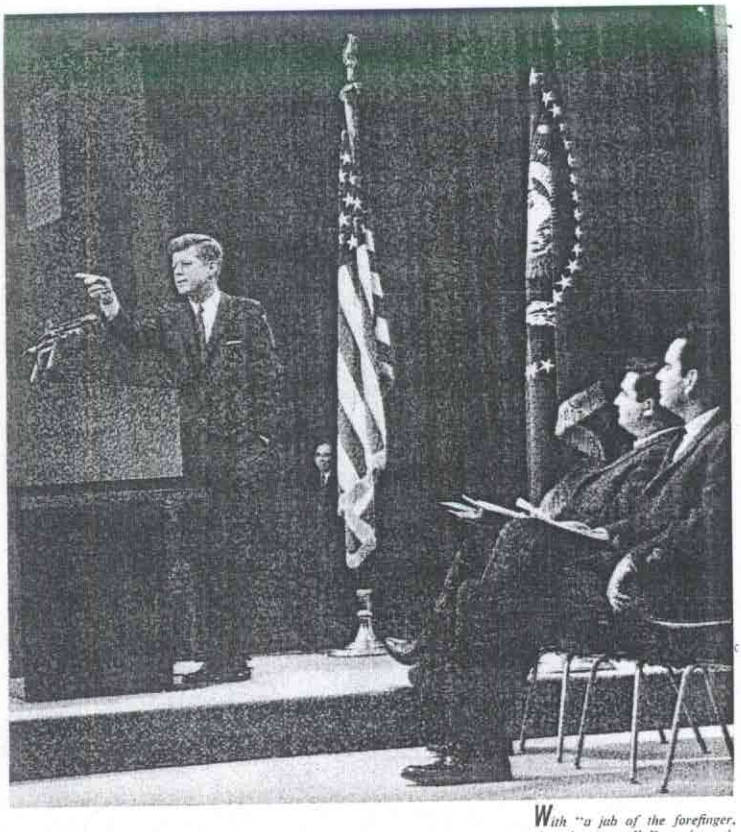

With "a jab of the forefinger, then the answer," Kennedy made his press conference "a superb show." Right: Press Secretary Salinger, aide Malcolm Kilduff.

Thousand Days

CONTINUED

within channels and according to the book. These were essential; without them government would collapse. Yet an active President, with his own requirements and expectations, was likely to chafe under the bureaucratic minuet.

Early in 1963 a group of Communists hijacked a Venezuelan freighter. The President was vastly, if somewhat amusedly, annoyed by the incapacity of his government to cope with the situation. A few days later Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt arrived for a visit. Preparations had been made for a splendid military reception. Then a terrific rainstorm came, and the show was canceled. An hour later Kennedy looked out of his window and saw a forlorn group of soldiers still in formation in the rain. He immediately called General Chester Clifton, his military aide, and asked why, since the ceremony was off, the soldiers were still there. Clifton replied that they had not yet received their orders through channels. Kennedy instructed Clifton to go out right away and tell them to go home. Then he said acidly, "You can see why the Navy has been unable to locate that Venezuelan freighter."

Like all the modern Presidents, Kennedy found the newspapers a major instrument for educating the public on his program and policies. Kennedy genuinely liked newspapermen; they genuinely liked him; and in Pierre Salinger he had an engaging and imaginative press secretary. While Salinger sometimes lacked the total knowledge of high policy which his very able predecessor under Eisenhower, James Hagerty, had enjoyed, he admirably conveyed Kennedy's own insouciant spirit to the White House press room, bore patiently with Kennedy's occasional outbursts against the press and prescribed an open-door policy for newspapermen in the White House and throughout the government.

The press conferences were the central forum of presidential contact. Kennedy averaged 21 a year, far fewer than Franklin Roosevelt and somewhat fewer than Dwight Eisenhower. Though at times oddly resistant when time came for another conference, he was the most skilled presidential practitioner in this medium since Roosevelt.

Success was the product of study as well as of art. Salinger organized a meticulous briefing process, drawing in predicted questions and recommended responses from information officers across the government. The President would then convene a press conference breakfast, ordinarily attended by Salinger, Sorensen, McGeorge Bundy, economic adviser Walter Heller and Robert Manning, the State Department's Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. Here the President would try out his answers, often tossing off his replies which convulsed the breakfast table but which, alas, could not be diplomatically made on the occasion. Later in the day he would go over to the auditorium of the State Department, and the fun would begin: the forest of hands waving from the floor; the questioner recognized by a brisk jab of the presidential forefinger; then the answer—statistics rolling off the presidential tongue, or a sudden glint in the eye signaling the imminence of a throwaway joke or, very occasionally, an abrupt

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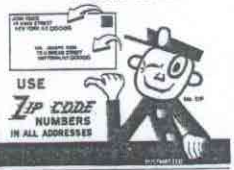

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His regret: 'I wish I had had more good times'

Thousand Days

CONTINUED

iciness of countenance; then the next questioner recognized almost before the answer to the first was completed. It was a superb show, always gay, often exciting, relished by the reporters and by the television audience.

One felt at times that the President missed chances to make his points to the nation for fear of boring the men and women in the room by telling them things they already knew. F.D.R. had never hesitated to cast elementary statement or homely metaphor—lend-lease and the neighbor's firehose—before the sophisticates of the Washington press corps, knowing that the key phrases would filter through to the people who needed them. In Kennedy's case, the uninitiated, instead of learning something about a public issue, often only witnessed abstract and cryptic exchanges between reporter and President. Nonetheless, the conferences offered a showcase for a number of his most characteristic qualities—the intellectual speed and vivacity, the remarkable mastery of the data of government, the terse, self-mocking wit, the exhilarating personal command. Afterward he liked to relax, watch himself in action on the evening news and chat about the curious habits of the press.

His relations with the press, like those of all Presidents, had ups and downs. Kennedy read more newspapers than anyone except perhaps Franklin Roosevelt, and he expected everyone else to do likewise. No experience was more frequent for members of his staff than to be called by the President early in the morning for discussion of an item in the papers. In my case, the calls regularly came before I had a chance to read the papers. Averell Harriman once told a congressional committee, "A man cannot serve President Kennedy unless he reads the newspaper carefully. He won't last very long if he doesn't in this administration."

Our last natural President had been Franklin D. Roosevelt, with whom Kennedy had much in common: both were patrician, urbane, playful, cultivated, inquisitive, gallant; both were detached from the business ethos, both devoted to politics but never enslaved by it, both serene in the exercise of power, both committed to the use of power for the ends of human freedom; both, too, had more than their share of physical suffering.

Yet, as a historian who had written about Roosevelt, I could not but notice the differences as well as the resemblances. Roosevelt had grown up in those days of glowing hope which were shattered but not wholly extinguished by the First World War. He remained buoyant, expansive, spontaneous, audacious, theatrical, overflowing with a careless confidence about the future; if life was filled with trouble, action and passion could overcome it. Like Churchill, Roosevelt rallied the certitudes of the 19th Century to fight the duplicities of the 20th. Kennedy, the child of a darker age, was more disciplined, more precise, more candid, more cautious, more sardonic, more pessimistic. His purpose was hardened and qualified by the world of ambiguities and perils. Underneath the casualness, wit and idealism, he was taut, concentrated, vibrating with inner tension under iron control, possessed by a fatalism which drove him on against the odds. One could only speculate about the roots of this fatalism—the days of danger, the months of sickness, the feeling that life was short, the cool but tormented sense of the importunities and frustrations of the age in which he lived.

Someone once asked what he regretted most. He replied, "I wish I had had more good times." The shadow was never far from him; that rendezvous at midnight in some flaming town. Many remarks attested to his laconic sense of the transience of the Presidency, if not to a haunted conviction of human mortality. No one could interest him much in the details of personal protection. "If someone is going to kill me," he would say, "they are going to kill me." Before he left on his trip to Mexico in June 1962, John McCone brought in a CIA report about assassination rumors. It had been a hard few days on the Hill; and Kennedy responded, without a second's hesitation. "If I am to die, this is the week for it." When we were preparing an exchange of letters with Harvard about the transfer of university land to the Kennedy Library whenever "the President" requested, he crossed out the words. "Who

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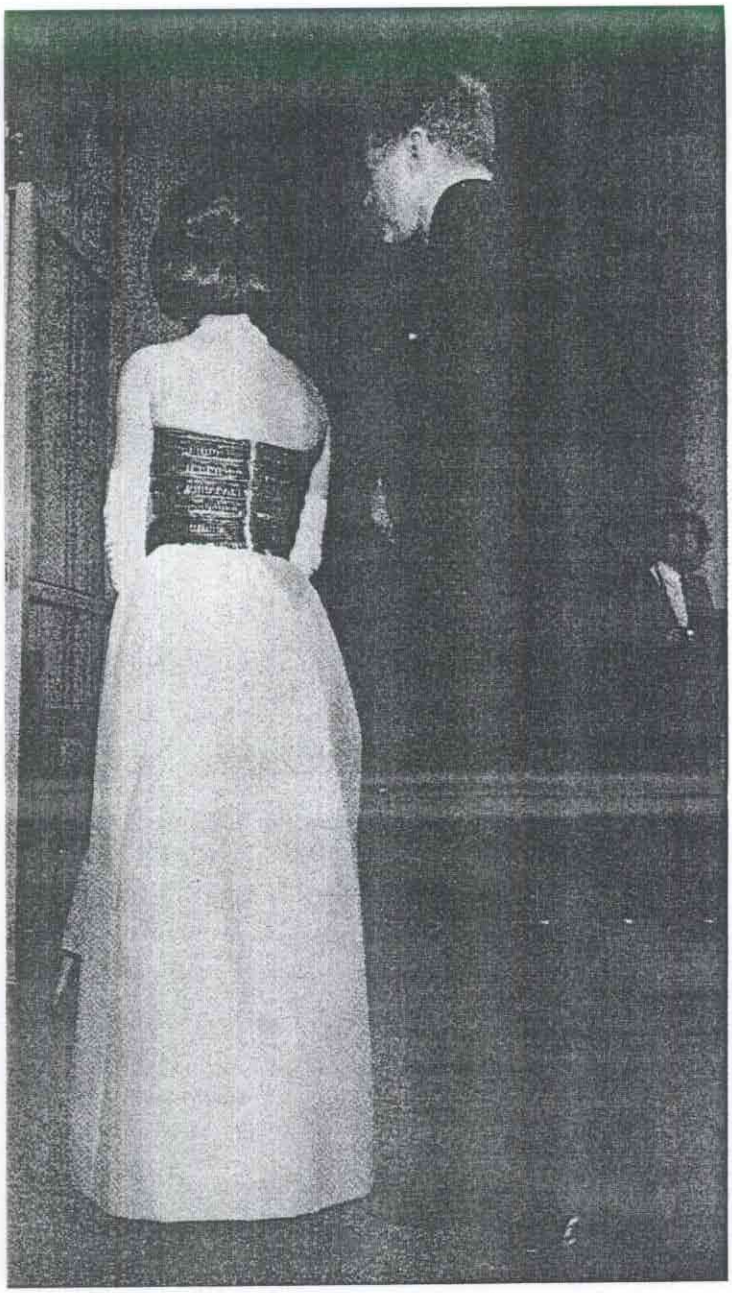
can tell," he said, "who will be 'the President' a year from now?"

As a natural President, Kennedy ran the office with notable ease and informality. He did this by instinct, not by theory. He always shrank from portentous discussions of himself and the Presidency (or anything else). Pressed, he turned questioners aside: "I have a nice home, the office is close by and the pay is good." In the autumn of 1961, Kennedy was sitting on the lawn of his mother-in-law's house in Newport, smoking a fragrant pre-Castro cigar, while in the background the sun was setting and a great battle cruiser was entering the bay. It was the time of Berlin and the Soviet resumption of nuclear testing; in California, Nixon was having his troubles with former Governor Goodwin Knight in internal Republican politics. As the ship steamed along, the American flag flying high, a friend felt a patriotic glow and was moved to ask Kennedy: "What do you *feel* at a moment like this? What is it *like* to be President?" The President smiled, flicked the ash from his cigar and said, "Well, it's a lot better than mucking around with Goody Knight in California." Once James Reston of the New York *Times* asked him what he hoped to achieve by the time he rode down Pennsylvania Avenue with his successor. "He looked at me," Reston later wrote, "as if I were a dreaming child. I tried again; did he not feel the need of some goal to help guide his day-to-day decisions and priorities? Again a ghastly pause. It was only when I turned the question to immediate, tangible problems that he seized the point and rolled off a torrent of statistics."

I fear that the President was simply stupefied by what he regarded as the impracticality of the question. He was possessed not by a blueprint but by a vision.



After a small White House dinner for India's Nehru in 1961, the Kennedys retire. Even formal occasions, Schlesinger says, were made "elegant and cheerful" by the Kennedys' charm.

NEXT WEEK: A THOUSAND DAYS, PART 5

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

Schlesinger writes an insider's account of the fearful days in 1962—how war was averted when Khrushchev threw in his hand