



CONVERSATIONS WITH KENNEDY PART 3.

Phone Calls: 'Whizzah'

By Benjamin C. Bradlee

March 31, 1962—the President called about 4:30 this afternoon, again with nothing obviously on his mind, but with 30 minutes of conversation. The first subject was Byron "Whizzer" White, the All-American running back turned Rhodes Scholar, pro football star and deputy attorney general, whose appointment to the Supreme Court had been announced the previous day.

He asked what I thought of it, and after I told him I didn't know White that well and knew even less about his legal opinions and philosophy, I asked him how come it was White. "He was just the kind of guy I wanted

on the Court," Kennedy said. "(Harvard law professor Paul) Freund was the other choice, but it came down to a question of what the Court needed at this time. I just felt that it did not necessarily need another legal scholar at this time in history. What it needed was a man who understood America, what it was about and where it was going. That's the law, after all. And on top of that Whizzer (pronounced Whizzah) wouldn't be part of the divisive controversy on the Court now. He's led a broad life. He's had wide experience and he's also an intellectual and his judgment is good."

We next turned to the subject of Teddy Kennedy, whose difficulties

White, Teddy's Troubles

with the Harvard authorities had come to light earlier this week. In his freshman year at Harvard, Teddy Kennedy had persuaded an undisclosed friend to take a language exam for him. The dean had found them out and asked both of them to leave college, but with a provision that both could reapply after an absence. After two years in the Army, Teddy Kennedy and friend reapplied and were admitted. They graduated in 1956.

"I just spoke to him on the phone," the President said. "[He's] . . . really singing the blues." The story had been kicking around town for a while, and I told the President we had been looking into it for two weeks.

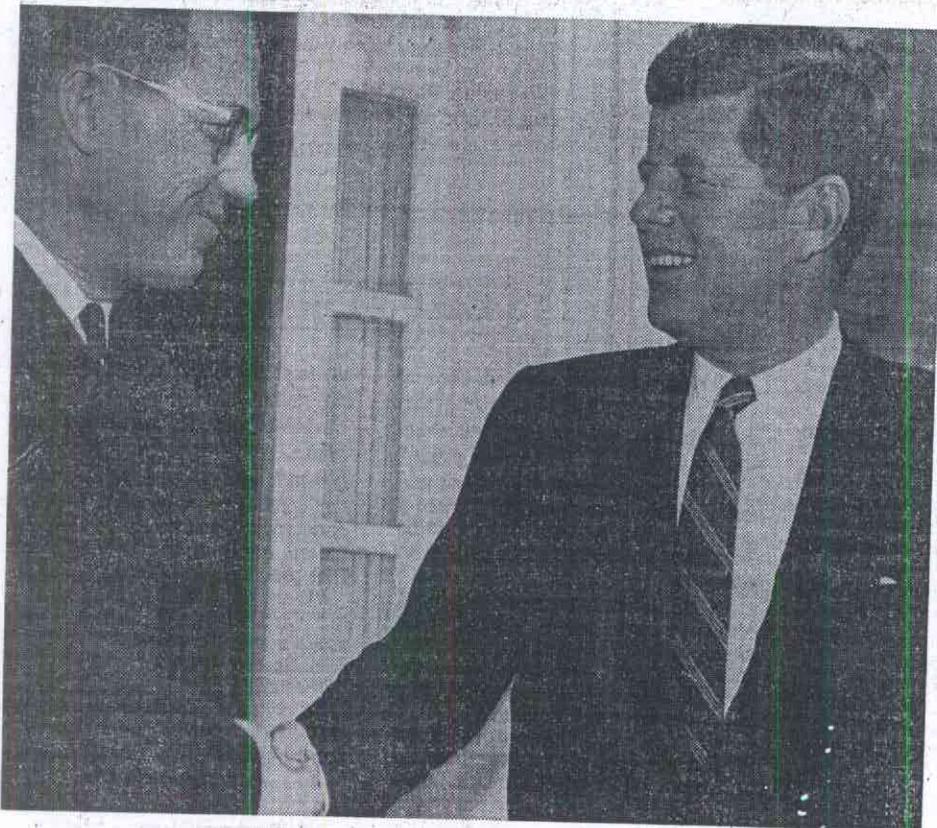
Kennedy said, "It was good to get the story out," and went on to add that Teddy had been waiting for the question to be asked, when he appeared on "Meet the Press" a few weeks earlier. When I asked the President what effect he thought the cheating scandal would have on Teddy's chances for the Senate nomination, he answered with a real edge in his voice: "It won't go over with the WASPs. They take a very dim view of looking over your shoulder at someone else's exam paper. They go in more for stealing from stockholders and banks."

The President seemed basically philosophical about the jam Teddy

was in. "He's got six months to fight his way out of it," he said. "It's just like my Addison's disease. It's out, and now he's got to fight it."

Kennedy's Addison's disease was always a mystery to me. It was a not-so-hidden issue in the 1960 campaign, especially in the primary. India Edwards, the onetime Democratic National Committeewoman who was campaigning all-out on behalf of Lyndon Johnson, once told a bunch of reporters that Kennedy was so sick from Addison's disease that he "looked like a spavined hunchback"—one of the least lofty moments of that tense episode. Kennedy's entourage

See TALKS, B2, Col. 4



Associated Press

President-elect Kennedy bids farewell to Byron L. (Whizzer) White in front of Kennedy's Washington home on Dec. 8, 1960. Afterward, Kennedy announced he had offered an administration post to the Denver attorney who would serve as deputy attorney general before being appointed by Kennedy to his current Supreme Court post.

Presidential Phone Calls

TALKS, From B1

would say only that he had "an adrenal insufficiency."

In his book, "A Thousand Days," historian and Kennedy friend Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. wrote: "(Kennedy) said that after the war, fevers associated with malaria had produced a malfunctioning of the adrenal glands, but that this had been brought under control." Schlesinger pointed out that Kennedy had none of the symptoms of Addison's disease—yellowed skin, black spots in the mouth, unusual vulnerability to infection—and quoted Kennedy as saying, "No one who has the real Addison's disease should run for the presidency, but I do not have it."

Whatever the condition, he did take cortisone derivatives and when he did, it often made his face fuller. Vain as always, it bugged him if he appeared a little jowly at press conferences, which he often did, not because he overate, but because he was taking some form of cortisone.

April 10, 1962—"Don't you ever work anymore?" said the voice on the telephone, and it was the President calling me at 2:30 in the afternoon. I was home in bed with the flu, the first day of work I'd missed since I'd had polio 25 years earlier—and Kennedy knew it.

I told him of the difficulties we were having trying to see Gov. Nelson Rockefeller for a Newsweek story, and he told me that Charlie Bartlett

had gone all the way to Albany, with an appointment, only to be kept waiting for more than an hour, and then put on his coat and left.

The President asked if we were going to take a look at Rockefeller's war record. It is interesting how often Kennedy referred to the war records of political opponents. He had often mentioned Eddie McCormack [Massachusetts attorney general and nephew of Speaker of the House John McCormack] and Hubert Humphrey in this connection and here now he was at it again with Rockefeller. "Where was old Nels when you and I were dodging bullets in the Solomon Islands?" he wondered aloud. "How old was he? He must have been 31 or 32. Why don't you look into that?"

Kennedy criticized casually The New York Herald Tribune and "Dennison," as he called Tribune editor John Denson, my former Newsweek boss, and said he believed the paper "was being kept alive only to help Rocky's chances in 1964."

I asked him if he had read "Six Crises," the book by Nixon about the crises in his life, including his defeat by Kennedy two years ago. "Just the 1960 campaign stuff," Kennedy answered, "and that's all I'm going to read. I can't stand the way he puts everything in Tricia's mouth. It makes me sick. He's a cheap bastard; that's all there is to it."

WEDNESDAY: JFK vs. U.S. Steel

© 1975, by Benjamin C. Bradlee, from "Conversations With Kennedy," published in May 1975 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved.