

LORD HARLECH TALKS ABOUT THE KENNEDYS

WILLIAM DAVID ORMSBY-GORE, the fifth Baron Harlech, is a shy, brainy aristocrat, two of whose closest friends were President John F. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy. During the Kennedy Administration, he abandoned a promising political career to become British Ambassador to the United States. Now, at 50, he is almost totally out of politics and diplomacy, but he retains an urge to get back in, and in the likely event of a Conservative return to power, he will happily surrender his present consuming interest in commercial TV for a government post.

A member of the Cecil family, which for four centuries has exerted power and influence in British politics, he claims he has no great ambition. He would be content to serve, as Averell Harriman has done in America, in secondary positions from which he could exert a primary influence on his country's history. There are those, however, who believe he should be Prime Minister. With an understandable sparkle, they gaze into a future of "ifs," when he, a widower, would marry the widow of John F. Kennedy—as has been rumored—and she would become the first woman to have wed both an American President and a British Prime Minister.

The notion of David Ormsby-Gore's appointment as Ambassador was the private idea of President Kennedy. "We were uncomfortable about it," says Harlech. "I had been in Commons 11 years

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After the British dedicated the John Kennedy memorial at Runnymede in 1965, Mrs. Kennedy, Robert and Harlech visited former Prime Minister Macmillan.

At his place in Wales, Harlech reads about the second Kennedy.



For a Conservative peer, Harlech has remarkably unconventional children. Two of the five are Jane, left, mother of baby Saffron, and Victoria.

After a weekend of Kennedy football, he could hardly move

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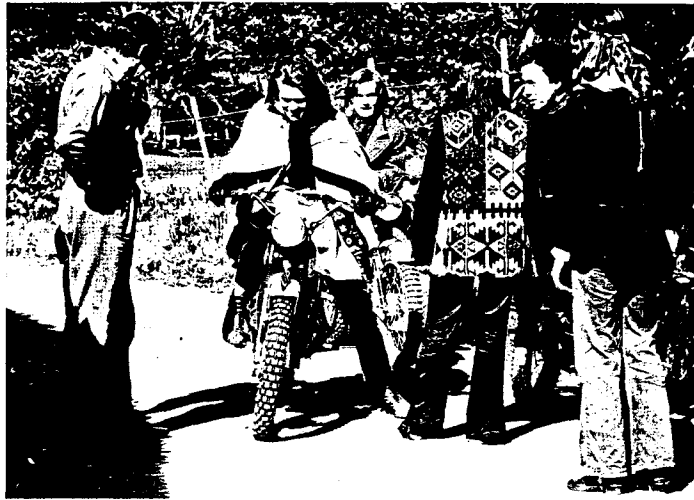
and had possibly some future there. Suddenly to finish that and start a diplomatic job, not knowing where it might lead, involved a big decision."

The first time he learned what was in his friend's mind was at lunch at the Carlyle Hotel in New York, shortly after the 1960 election. The two men had been talking about who would serve in the new Cabinet, when the President-elect said: "I think it would be a good idea if you came to Washington. We could work well together." Ormsby-Gore, then head of the British delegation at the UN Assembly, reported most of this to his government—"who would be Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury." But, characteristically modest, he omitted references to a new job for himself.

The subject came up again at the White House after the Inauguration. "It must have been mid-February, 1961, because we watched a program that evening—he and Jackie and myself—on the first 40 days of his presidency. And we sat and talked a

long way into the night." This time, the President couldn't understand why Prime Minister Harold Macmillan hadn't made up his mind about the appointment, a comment that again was not relayed to 10 Downing Street. Macmillan finally acted a few months later, and the Ormsby-Gores, with their five children (he would not succeed to his title until the death of his father in 1964), agreed to try Washington for three years. This may well have been the first time an American President had dictated to a major power his choice of its ambassador. The relaxed closeness of the resulting relationship would also prove unprecedented.

The two friends had known each other since the late 1930's, when Joseph P. Kennedy, the President's father, was Ambassador to Great Britain. John Kennedy's sister Kathleen—"Kick"—was best friend of Sylvia Lloyd Thomas—"Sissie"—who later married David Ormsby-Gore, and in 1967 was killed in an auto accident. Sissie used to stay with the Ken-



Jane's husband Michael Rainey (in cloak), friends and the girls rally at family retreat near Harlech Castle.

Once, at Hyannis Port, he found Teddy, just back from Vietnam, "extraordinarily well-informed, a considerable person with very good judgment, more of an extrovert than his brothers. I don't think any of them enjoyed campaigning as much as Teddy."

Being President made little change in John Kennedy's personality, Harlech recalls. Two days after the new Ambassador arrived in Washington, he presented his credentials to the President. He wore his best suit, prepared for a formal ceremony. "But, of course, that's not how Kennedy did things," Harlech says. "He started straight on, in practically normal conversation. I presented a formal letter on behalf of the Queen, representing her government's views about our relationship—beautifully typed and on a wonderful piece of paper. He was impressed by this and asked: 'Do our ambassadors hand over such a good document as this? I'm going to look into it.'" Meanwhile, the Briton noted the pictures on the walls of the office: "Most of them were of American warships sinking the British. I told him I was going to look for pictures in London of British ships sinking the Americans."

The Kennedys didn't give a party for the new arrivals, but one night, when John Kenneth Galbraith, then Ambassador to India, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., were coming to dinner, they were invited. "This became a sort of pattern," Harlech explains. "There would be a small private party, and that's when we could talk. Or my wife and I would just go over for dinner, or join them for the weekend, or go to Camp David. Quite a few of our meetings were never noticed. If the President wanted to talk during office hours, I'd go up the back stairs. So I managed for a long time to give the impression that I didn't see him very often."

"Each year, we went to the Army-Navy football game together. It was a good opportunity for private discussion, but in front of the press, we would just talk about football." The Ambassador had been introduced to the Kennedy brand of touch football at Hyannis Port in 1954. "When I got back to New York," he says, "I was so stiff, I could hardly move."

Kennedy loved to discuss the great battles of the Civil War. His friend, a Civil War buff himself, was astonished by the President's memory. "He'd



Grandfather, 50, teaches Saffron, 1½, sounds of music.

nedys. They all went to parties, spent weekends and holidays together, and Kathleen, in 1944, married David's cousin and friend, the Marquess of Hartington. Jack Kennedy wasn't always involved, Lord Harlech remembers, "but in those days, I knew him more as a social than a serious character. He was working on his book *Why England Slept*, but we never discussed that." On future trips, various Kennedys stayed with the Ormsby-Gores, who were married in 1940; after Kathleen was widowed in 1944, and until she was killed in a plane crash in 1948, he saw Sissie every week.

In those days, Robert Kennedy seemed a good social junior to Ormsby-Gore—"When I was 20, he was a little boy of 12, going to day school in London and wearing one of those funny little hats, which I think acutely embarrassed him." Not until after the war did the two become friends, and Ormsby-Gore first stayed at Bobby's in Georgetown over Thanksgiving, 1955. Edward Kennedy he knew less well.

never give an opinion or state a fact unless he knew he was precise. This meant that with him, there was never a misunderstanding over a conversation."

President Kennedy, however, often acted on impulse. In July, 1963, the U.S., Britain and the U.S.S.R. finally agreed to the test-ban treaty Ormsby-Gore had been working for since 1958. The President was discussing it in the White House operations room with the Ambassador and, "with all the telephones around," it occurred to him to call U.S. negotiator Carl Kayesen in Moscow. That day's meetings had gone well, the Soviets had conceded two points, but had offered alternative wording. The President asked if Britain would accept the Russian version. The answer was yes, so Kennedy told Kayesen to initial the treaty.

Just then, a call came for the President from Macruillan in London. He was concerned about the way everything was dragging in Moscow. "Kennedy cut in, and there was a wonderful smile on his

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"I'm not engaged. I have no plans to marry. But I've never said I won't remarry."

face. He said: "It's all right, Mr. Prime Minister. I've told them to initial the treaty, and David is sitting here beside me." A great giant stride had been taken, and the President hoped that springing from it would be a series of agreements. But of course, shortly after that, he was killed."

Kennedy's relations with Macmillan were healthy from the start. Harlech has a vivid memory of their first meeting in London: the President was returning home, disconsolate, from his fearful Summit session with Chairman Khrushchev in Vienna in June, 1961. General Eisenhower had once told Kennedy that he would find Macmillan a confidant who would give wise advice—and so he was. On his arrival at 10 Downing Street, the President went into the Prime Minister's office alone, while their advisers waited outside for formal talks to begin. The formal conversations never took place. The two men just talked and talked, and they forgot all about their aides and any agenda that might have been planned. The President was absolutely delighted. He had found somebody who understood big issues, someone with whom he could speak frankly.

The President was still depressed about Vienna, and his back was aching him. That night, he and Mrs. Kennedy dined with the Queen. As the meal progressed, Harlech recalls, it became apparent that he was preoccupied. He was wondering how to paint a true picture for the American people of what had happened. The report he gave was pretty gloomy. This first direct encounter with Khrushchev had been so contrary to what he expected.

Lord Harlech remembers in detail the discussions during the Cuban missile crisis of October, 1962. He had known something was in the air and had alerted London before a Saturday night party Bobby Kennedy was giving on the yacht, *Honey Fitz*. Many guests never turned up, and the Attorney General himself arrived late, preoccupied. Sunday morning, the President called Ormsby-Gore to the White House. "Well," he began, "as you probably have guessed, there is a serious situation over Cuba." He said that Soviet missiles had been spotted there and outlined the countermeasures that had been suggested. Rather typically, he asked: "Which do you think is right?"

Ormsby-Gore thought that attacking Cuba would be an overreaction that would be hard to justify. To present the situation to the UN might mean getting bogged down endlessly in debate. The blockade idea was probably the right choice.

The President liked what he heard. It confirmed what he had already decided. He was in a serious mood. He knew America was on a collision course, and understood the dangers of a false move. As the two sat on the White House balcony, looking toward the Washington Monument, they talked about Kennedy's terrible concern over a world of nuclear weapons. Long-range things were in his mind, as well as the immediate crisis. Then Mrs. Kennedy and the children came back from the country because he wanted them to be with him.

On Monday, some of the NATO ambassadors were told the details of the blockade and where interceptions would take place. The Ambassador worried about the diligence with which the Navy was going to pick up boats spotted bringing in the missiles. He argued for going more slowly and waiting to see what happened as they got closer to Cuba.

"That week, the Kennedys had planned a dance for two or three hundred people," says Harlech. "It

was canceled, but some guests had already turned up in Washington, and the President went ahead with a group of perhaps 16. After dinner, which was not the gayest, the President said, "I'd like to talk to you. The United States was being criticized, he said, for its handling of the situation. Doubt had been expressed that the missiles existed, and it had even been suggested that all this was a CIA cover to give the U.S. an excuse for another invasion of Cuba."

In that case, Ormsby-Gore said, it was important to publish the evidence. The President asked for the photographs of the missiles. As they were thrown on the screen, the two picked the most impressive, to be published. About this time, Robert Kennedy arrived. He had been to see Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, to find out if the Russians intended to stop their ships carrying missiles to Cuba. The answer was vital, because the next day, some of the ships would be approaching the United States screen and would be picked up. Kennedy reported that Dobrynin clearly had received no instructions. He had said: "I assume that they are to continue into Cuba." To which the Attorney General replied: "In that case, it's going to be a very rough time for all of us." He then marched out of the Ambassador's office, leaving him quite shaken.

Ormsby-Gore had been disturbed to discover that the Navy was actually going out to track down the Russian ships and stop them. Khrushchev would now have some difficult decisions to make. He'd gambled, his bluff had been called, and he was in a jam. The Ambassador wondered if there would be any harm in allowing the Soviets to sail on a little bit longer, just so they didn't go into Cuba. The President thought this made sense, and so did his brother. He phoned Secretary of Defense McNamara. Apparently, the Navy worried that as the ships got closer, the Cuban air force would intervene. "We can shoot them out of the sky," the President said. "That isn't serious." So, on balance, he agreed that it would be better not to try to intercept too early. They finished that night at about two, realizing that as far as Dobrynin knew, the Russian ships would continue on in, that American ships had instructions to intercept them, and within another 36 hours, the crisis might be even more serious.

"The next day," Harlech says, "we waited. The Navy was out searching, planes were flying around. And then—about midday—reports started to come in that the Russian ships had stopped. This was the moment, I felt, when Khrushchev's nerve had broken, and we were going to get out of the crisis. Many serious moments were still to come. But Khrushchev had backed down to the point of stopping the ships, and if the United States kept the pressure on, he would agree to say: 'Right. The crisis is over.' It was a very exciting day."

"Everybody knows about Khrushchev's two letters to the President: the first, agreeing to pull out the missiles, with no strings attached; the second, trying to bargain over the withdrawal of American missiles from Turkey and so on—all unacceptable to the United States. And then the President—Bobby was very much in favor of it—decided to agree to the first letter and ignore the second." On Saturday morning, the United States accepted the first Russian letter. The Soviets, for their part, were so eager to end this whole business that, the next day, without even bothering about official channels,

they broadcast their agreement to the Kennedy terms. "It was a tremendous diplomatic victory for

the President," Harlech says, "but one of the first things he did was to tell Pierre Salinger, his press secretary: 'There is to be no question of calling it a victory. We're going to have no crowing over this. It's a sensible agreement arrived at between two rational people, and it has defused a serious crisis.'"

"Everybody could draw their own conclusions, but it was important to avoid humiliating Khrushchev. I think Khrushchev appreciated that. From then on, his letters indicated that he trusted Kennedy as somebody who felt responsibility for world peace." The President and the Ambassador occasionally discussed Khrushchev's character, and they agreed that his blustering speeches made it difficult to reach a sensible agreement with him. Kennedy once remarked wearily that you have to be patient dealing with the Soviets, but it's worth it.

During this period, the Ambassador came to know Robert Kennedy intimately. "His close and a half years as Attorney General and his close collaboration with President Kennedy made him an extraordinarily well-equipped figure to be President of the United States."

"In their personalities, Jack and Bobby were different. Although they had the same ideals, they had different friends, a different way of speaking. President Kennedy was more self-confident. His life had been in danger more than once. Bobby worried and was unhappy about how he could achieve results. He was making this tremendous effort because it was his duty; he wasn't convinced he had the talents he would have wished. In this, he was a touching figure."

"President Kennedy had a knack of getting on, even with opponents. For Bobby, it was harder. I remember swimming with the President in Newport. The moment he appeared, people rushed forward to pump his hand. He smiled as they talked. Later, he said he was amused because he knew 90 percent of them had spent large sums to defeat him. Bobby wouldn't have been amused."

"I don't think Bobby regarded himself as a great lawyer," says Harlech, "but he was an able administrator of the law. He would simplify a situation to win support of his view. Some of the criticism that he saw things only in black or white is due to the fact that he tried to express opinions in terms everybody would readily understand."

"Jack preferred to pitch an argument almost at an academic level. He had a greater facility with words than Bobby, more poetic perhaps. But Bobby was growing all the time. He was reading biography and poetry, and he was acquiring a much deeper understanding of the use of language. And when he relaxed, he could be tremendously witty."

Lord Harlech shies away from talk, however oblique, about Jacqueline Kennedy, whom he often speaks of as "Mrs. Kennedy." He finds endless telephone calls from newspapers about their possible engagement tiresome, though he feels that he and Mrs. Kennedy know each other so well that these questions need no longer embarrass them. But it angers him when his children are pestered. "Can't two people be friends," he asks, "without getting married?" Recently, he told Margaret Laing, whose book about Robert Kennedy he is reading in the opening picture of this story, that like his wife Sissie, Jackie Kennedy is a very strong character with a highly individual point of view. He says: "I'm not engaged, and I have no plans to marry." But, he adds, "I've never said I won't remarry."

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