

By Myra MacPherson

Once again, in this week marking the 10th anniversary of the death of John F. Kennedy, men who knew him well are mining their memories.

Kenneth O'Donnell, JFK's appointment secretary, and Ted Sorenson, a special assistant, did so yesterday at a National Press Club luncheon.

Sorenson and O'Donnell, like others around Kennedy, have run unsuccessfully for office in the decade since his death, and have themselves written books about their former leader, and

will, forever it seems, be linked with him.

O'Donnell got a lot of laughs when he said he once asked the President what his favorite song was and replied, "Hail to the Chief" has got a mighty good lilt to it."

O'Donnell recalled that when JFK wanted to get a disagreeable message across he would do it obliquely. "He'd say to Bobby, 'Your roommate [O'Donnell was his brother Robert's roommate at Harvard] said you made a lousy choice for a judge-ship.' Bobby would say to O'Donnell, 'Why didn't you tell me directly?' And I'd

say, 'He said that, I didn't.'"

Both Sorenson and O'Donnell took swipes at Watergate and President Nixon. In a question session, when asked what Kennedy thought of Nixon, Sorenson said that Kennedy once summed up "some Nixon action" with "He has no class." O'Donnell said, "I lived with him all the time he ran against Nixon, and I never heard him mention his name, and that speaks volumes to me."

Stephen Schlesinger, son of Kennedy White House assistant Arthur Schlesinger

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also spoke of how "intoxicating" Kennedy was to him and others who were in college during the JFK presidency.

"It is fashionable these days to put a leader down for 'raising expectations,'" said Schlesinger, who is now writing a book on 1970 liberalism. "But the fact of the matter was, that was what Kennedy's presidency, to me, was all about." He credited Kennedy's "raising expectations" with accelerating the civil rights movement in the '60s and with giving students the sense that "their own individual strivings were important."

O'Donnell said Kennedy was "never Camelot" but "hard-bitten politician" who was "kind" and "considerate" and "ran a happy ship." He added that in his presidency there was "not one single iota of corruption."

Sorenson said when Kennedy died the nation "suffered a loss of leadership and has not recovered. What a 10 years it's been—inflation, recession, riots, apathy, crimes both high and low. It's not a coincidence these occurred after we lost this man." He said it was wrong to blame the office of the presidency for current "abuses—rather than the man. It would be a tragedy if we allowed the cynicism of today to bury the ideals of Kennedy beside his body."

Both men said repeatedly, when asked about whether

Kennedy made many mistakes or gave us "more hope than promises," that he was a man growing in his job.

"When he went to Dallas he was a different man than he ran in 1960," said Sorenson, "more committed to peace, the cause of civil rights, more skeptical of military solutions after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. The tragedy of Dallas is that he was cut down before he could apply all he had learned."

Sorenson said he thought Kennedy's biggest single accomplishment was "his successful resolution of the Cuban missile crisis which led to a series of building blocks that brought détente."

The audience was filled with reporters who knew Kennedy and former White House staffers who came out to greet Sorenson and O'Donnell. One former staff member, when asked what she was doing, said "looking for a job—like all Democrats."

O'Donnell offered a final poignant touch. In constant severe back pain, the President was, at the last, being treated, apparently successfully, by a new doctor who said he had not been getting the proper treatment for muscular development.

"His health had improved so much it was impossible to believe," said O'Donnell. "On the day he walked out of the White House to go to Dallas, he turned around and said, 'This is the first time in my life I really feel 100 per cent perfect.'"