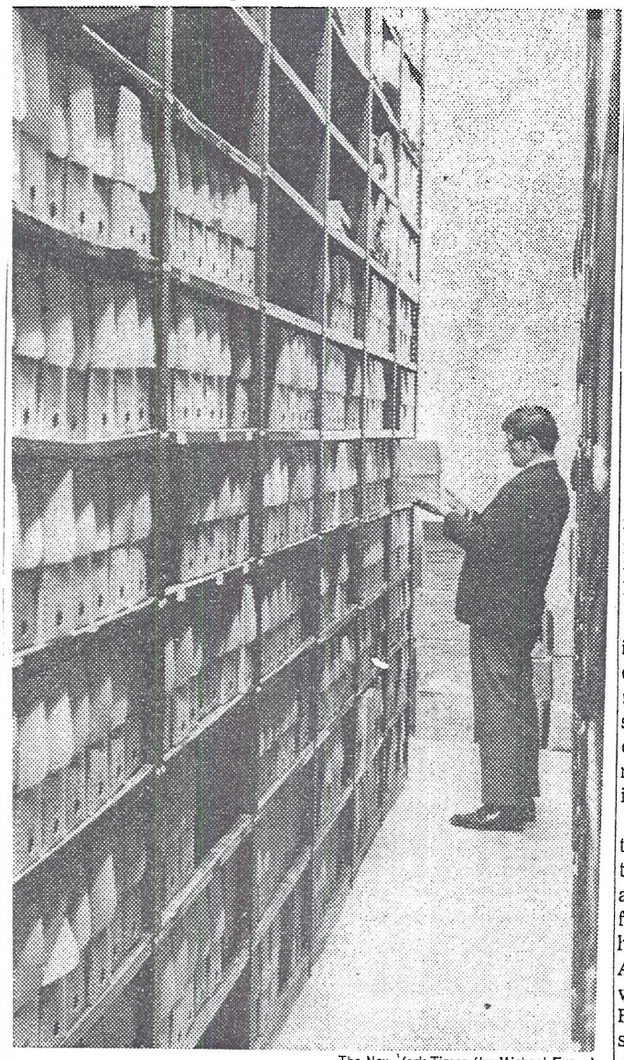
Kennedy Archives Illuminate Cuba Policy



The New York Times (by Michael Evans)

Archivist at work on Kennedy papers in Waltham, Mass.

N.Y. TIMES

By HENRY RAYMONT AUG 17 1970

The John F. Kennedy Memorial Library has opened to scholars and researchers the first selection of its 15 million pages of documents and manuscripts, including transcripts of 300 oral-history interviews with such figures as Nikita S. Khrushchev, Mike Mansfield and a White House upholsterer.

A study of the documents at the library's temporary home, the Federal Records Center in Waltham, Mass., found that the bulk consists of White House correspondence and other, less important papers, but that the interviews add to the historical record many details of the President's attitudes and policies, particularly on foreign relations.

The interviews — representing only a minor selection of the oral-history program initiated soon after Mr. Kennedy's assassination in November, 1963— disclose some insights into his major decisions on foreign policy.

During the 1960 Presidential campaign and after his election, for example, Mr. Kennedy and George A. Smathers, a close friend then in the Senate who had long been interested in Latin America, frequently discussed ways to overturn Premier Fidel Castro, including a possible assassination attempt. According to the Florida Democrat's account, the President eventually became so impatient with his friend's advice that one day he broke a plate as he said, "Let's quit talking about this subject."

Another aspect of the Cuban situation involved a two-page memorandum from the State Department officer concerned with Cuba that was designed to brief Mr. Kennedy for his first meeting as President-elect with President Eisenhower. No mention was made of the preparations for the Bay of Pigs landing although they had been under way for almost a year because, as the official, Robert A. Hurwitch, recalled, no one below the rank of assistant secretary was aware of them.

In the Berlin crisis of 1961, Gen. Lucius D. Clay, the President's personal representative in the beleaguered city—long believed to have been at odds with Mr. Kennedy over the use of stronger measures to counter Soviet pressures—said, "I had very distinct feelings that the President had greater resolution than many of his associates."

General Clay recalled in an oral-history interview that his plan to send fighter squadrons to escort American transport planes that were being buzzed by the Russians was not opposed by the President but by

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Gen. Lauris Norstad of the Air Force, then commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, who reflected the reluctance of the Western allies.

In the course of Mr. Kennedy's tenure, several career Foreign Service officers complained bitterly over what they considered to be interference in foreign policy by members of Mr. Kennedy's White House staff. In particular, G. Frederick Reinhardt, then United State Ambassador to Rome and now at Stanford University, criticized efforts by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. to support an alliance between Italy's progressive Roman Catholic and democratic Socialists as a model for progressive governments in West Germany, France and elsewhere.

An Ambitious Project

The Kennedy oral-history program began in March, 1964— one of the most ambitious projects of its kind. That month President Kennedy's widow and his brother Robert, then the Attorney General, asked foreign leaders, public figures and friends to make tape recordings of their memories and impressions of him and of their dealings with him.

The program, which has accumulated some 800 interviews and is continuing under the guidance of the National Archives, the administrating agency of the Presidential Libraries, was designed to provide raw material for historians and biographers.

John F. Stewart, acting director of the Kennedy Library, has estimated that interviews with key figures of the Kennedy years, including his widow, Robert Kennedy, Rober S. McNamara, Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, are likely to remain closed for several decades and in some cases as long as the lifetime of those interviewed.

Portions of interviews containing confidential references to national security or to living persons were deleted and will be opened in 20 or 30 years, depending on the donors' specifications.

The transcripts also include statements from and interviews with Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the deposed ruler of Cambodia; Leonard Bernstein, the conductor; Senator George Aiken, Republican of Vermont; U Thant Secretary General of the United Nations, and Larry Arata, the White House upholsterer.

Warm Personal Relationship

Interviews with Mr. Arata, an amateur accordion player, and six other White House employes indicated a warm personal relationship with the Kennedy family.

"One day," Mr. Arata said, "I was asked to play for Caroline and her schoolmates on the third floor—about 20 children were present. I loved it—I guess that's the Italian in me."

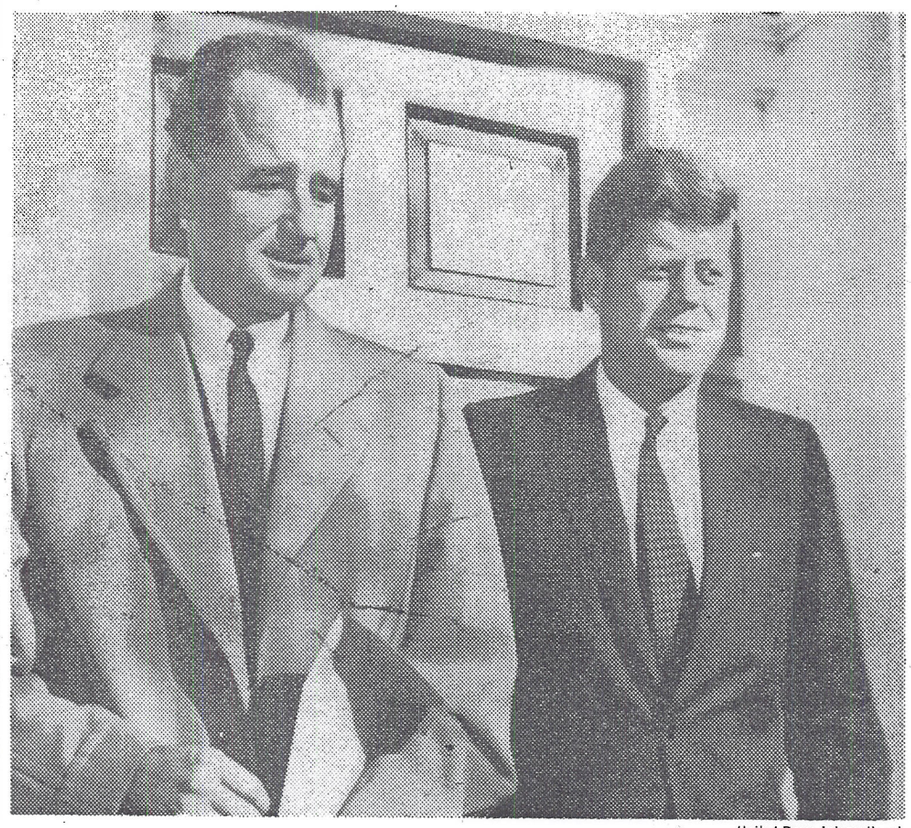
The reference to the assassination plot against Premier Castro, who came to power in 1959, was contained in a 165-page transcript of a series of interviews with Mr. Smathers, who frequently accompanied Mr. Kennedy on trips to Florida. Although the transcript has been heavily edited, deleting passages apparently dealing with the Bay of Pigs and the U.S.-Soviet missile crisis of 1962, it gave a detailed account of conversations with the President from the period just before his election victory.

"I don't know whether he brought it up or I brought it up," Mr. Smathers said in an interview dated March 31, 1964. "We had further conversation on assassination of Fidel Castro, what would be the reaction, how would the people react, would the people be gratified."

"As I recollect," added Mr. Smathers, who has retired for reasons of health, "he was just throwing out a great barrage of questions—he was certain it could be accomplished— I remember that—it would be no great problem. But the question was whether or not it would accomplish that which he wanted it to, whether or not the reaction throughout South America would be good or bad.

"And I talked with him about it, and, frankly, at this particular time I felt and later on learned that he did, that I wasn't so much for the idea of assassination, particularly where it could be pinned to the U.S."

When the idea was discarded, Mr. Smathers suggested provoking an incident at the Uni-



United Press International

Senator George A. Smathers of Florida leaving the White House after a breakfast meeting with President Kennedy in 1960. They often discussed plans to overthrow Fidel Castro.

ted States naval base at Guantanamo Bay, on the eastern tip of Cuba, as a pretext for a military strike.

"I did talk to him about a plan of having a false attack made on Guantanamo Bay which would give us the excuse of actually fomenting a fight which would then give us the excuse to go in and do the job," Mr. Smathers related.

"He asked me to write him something about it. And I think I did. I don't know if he ever kept any memorandums I wrote him or whether he just threw them away."

Mr. Smathers recalled that he first counseled Mr. Kennedy to take a hard line against the Castro Government before a speech in Miami during the 1960 campaign, at a time when Adlai E. Stevenson and other advisers were urging that the candidate play down Cuba in favor of helping the rest of Latin America to fight poverty and build democracy.

"Just prior to the speech while riding in the car," Mr. Smathers recounted, "I told him that he should talk about the importance of Cuba in our whole international relations problem, to recognize that it was a danger and a threat to the rest of Latin America and so on."

Mr. Kennedy, the Senator said, replied that he had "a pretty good speech" for his appearance in Miami and proposed to make "the big Latin-American speech" later in Tampa, which at that time had a larger Cuban population than Miami.

According to a statement by William Attwood, a campaign aide, the Senator's satisfaction with the speech was not shared by Mr. Stevenson. Mr. Attwood, now the editor of Look, recalled that in a telephone conversation with Mr. Kennedy in October 1960, Mr. Stevenson sharply objected to a memoranda from the staff implying that Mr. Kennedy should support an invasion of Cuba by exiles.

"Stevenson, who was due to make a television appearance on this subject the next day, called Kennedy and wanted to know what the position was," Mr. Attwood said. "I was also on the telephone. Kennedy was upset by this memorandum, I remember, and told Stevenson to 'get back on the high ground' and say that Cuba was a problem more for the O.A.S., which Stevenson did."

Mr. Smathers recalled that soon after the inauguration, Mr. Kennedy invited him to the White House to swim and to discuss a trade embargo the Senator had proposed during the election campaign. He said the President showed him a secret memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk endorsing the idea but pointing out other officials in the department opposed it.

"I don't know if the dates could be reconstructed," Mr. Smathers said, "but I told the President that I was pleased and I thought Rusk was smarter than I had previously thought him to be. I didn't know Rusk at all, but I can say that I have since come to the conclusion that he is a very able man not only on this but on all other matters."

After the Bay of Pigs invasion, which Mr. Smathers strongly favored, he felt that his influence with the President on Latin-American matters had come to an end and that Mr. Kennedy was paying closer attention to White House advisers who said Mr. Smathers had been overly influenced by the dictators he met during trips to Latin America from 1947 to 1960.

'I Love to Have You Over'

Early in 1962, he recalled, the President told him: "George, I love to have you over, I want you to come over, but I want you do me a favor. I like to visit with you, I want to discuss things with you, but I don't want you to talk to me any more about Cuba."

Mr. Smathers said he followed that injunction until the President invited him to an informal dinner.

"I remember the President was actually fixing our own dinner, and I raised the question of Cuba and what could be done and so on," he related. "And I remember that he took his fork and just hit his plate and it cracked and he said, 'Now, dammit, I wish you wouldn't do that. Let's quit talking about this subject.' I said: 'All right, it's just fine with me. I appreciate the opportunity to come over and visit with you, and this subject I won't bring up again'—and I never did."

Details of how the State Department's second echelon had been bypassed on the Bay of Pigs plans were outlined by Mr. Hurwitch, now a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, in an interview 200 pages long and dated April 24, 1964.

"There was, in my judgment, a divorce between the people who daily or minute by minute, had access to information, to what was going on, and the people who were making plans and policy decisions," Mr. Hurwitch said. "This divorce is one which has cost us, as history has shown."

The 1961 Berlin Crisis

President Kennedy's response to the Soviet pressures on West Berlin in the fall of 1961—which the President interpreted as the first move in an effort to weaken the United States position in Europe—was described by General Clay in an interview on July 1, 1964.

Discussing his first meeting with the President in mid-August, when the Administration seemed divided between advisers such as Dean Acheson, President Truman's Secretary of State, who favored stiff military measures, and a White House staff committed to the quest for diplomatic solutions, General Clay said:

"First, there was no mistake, at least in my thinking, that the President had already made up his mind that we were going to be firm in Berlin. Secondly, that he hoped to display sufficient firmness to restore the morale of the West Berliners, thirdly, that he hoped to convince the Russians that any further steps they took would be very dangerous."

Mr. Reinhardt, in an interview recorded in Rome in November, 1966, discussed one of the quiet struggles between President Kennedy's dynamic staff and the professionals at the State Department. Mr. Reinhardt's principal target was Mr. Schlesinger's effort to seek active United States support for a center-left coalition in Italy.

Reinhardt Saw Cabal

The diplomat challenged an assertion in Mr. Schlesinger's 1965 book, "A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House," that the President had pledged such support to the Italian Premier, Amintore Fanfani, when the two met in the summer of 1961. Mr. Reinhardt also expressed indignation at the White House aide's direct communications with Italian leaders.

"What he fails to point out," the former Ambassador said, "is that this did not really correspond to the official policy of the United States Government, nor does he at any time give any evidence that he had a mandate from the President to be so active in this sector. It was quite apparent that there was a cabal, so to speak, trying

Associated Press

Robert A. Hurwitch, State Department aide on Cuba, recalled that no one below rank of Assistant Secretary was aware in 1960 of plans for the Bay of Pigs landing.

to move American policy in this field in a more aggressive and active stance."

But William N. Fraleigh, another diplomat, who had been appointed as Mr. Reinhardt's political counselor, told an interviewer that he "at least once" heard the President tell Pietro Nenni, the Socialist leader, "how much he hoped that the new coalition government in Italy would be a success and how much opportunity it seemed to offer for useful achievement."

According to Mr. Fraleigh, the President saw a Socialist coalition with the Christian Democrats as a movement that would also "be helpful in forming more democratic governments in Latin America."

Commenting on a complaint in Mr. Schlesinger's book that it took "a long and exasperating fight" before the professional diplomats were made to comply with the President's policy, Mr. Fraleigh suggested that this was an allusion to officials at the embassy in Rome and in the State Department "who were very concerned about the effect of the Socialists' joining the government might have upon Italian foreign policy."

'Outstanding Statesman'

In other interviews, President Kennedy was remembered as "an outstanding statesman" (Mr. Khrushchev) and one who "never sought to overpersuade a friendly nation or to impose on an adversary terms which would subject a hostile government to an unacceptable loss of face" (David K. E. Bruce, former United States Ambassador to Britain and now chief delegate to the Paris peace talks.)

Accounts of the President's domestic programs tended to be more positive than many contemporary evaluations. They came from such labor leaders as George Meany and from the Democratic leaders in Congress, including Representative Carl Albert, the House Democratic whip, and Seantor Mansfield, the majority leader, who said: "Despite comments which have been made about the lack of cooperation between President Kennedy and the Congress, there was close cooperation and there was mutual respect."

In another interview, James McGregor Burns, Woodrow Wilson Professor of Government at Williams College and biographer of Franklin D. Roosevelt, conceded that he had been too harsh in his 1959 biography, "John Kennedy: Political Profile," which portrayed the Massachusetts Democrat as a skillful politician more inclined to short-run pragmatic solutions than to deep moral and ideological commitments.

Professor Burns said, "I do not think I really realized the greatness of this man, and I think this was a great man, by any test of greatness."

As They Say, It Depends Upon Your Point of View

A number of interviews in the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library's oral-history program disclosed considerable discrepancies in individual recollections of the same event.

Typical of these were interviews with 15 state Democratic leaders on the 1960 West Virginia primary. Each gave his own colorful, less than modest account of how he helped Mr. Kennedy defeat the then Senator Hubert H. Humphrey.

"That is one of the hazards of oral history," said John E. Stewart, acting director of the library. "When the microphone is there, some people like to take all the credit for victories and blame others for defeat. But then this is the raw material for historians, and when all is sorted out we'll get a pretty good lively picture of what actually happened."