

**Anthony B. Akers Oral History Interview - 7/17/1971**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Anthony B. Akers, the United States ambassador to New Zealand from 1961 to 1963, discusses the 1960 presidential campaign, his posting to New Zealand, his work with Robert Kennedy and the senator's assassination.

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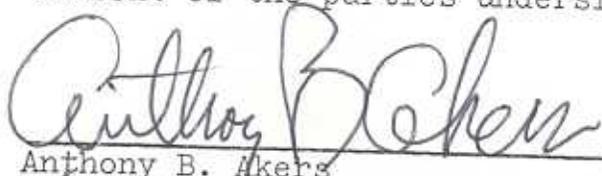
By Anthony B. Akers

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ANTHONY B. AKERS

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Oral History Interview

With

ANTHONY B. AKERS

July 17, 1971  
Newport, R.I.

By William W. Moss

For the John. F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: On the tentative outline that I gave you, Mr. Ambassador, I have an indication of pre-1960 associations with John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. You were telling me a little earlier, before lunch, that you and your wife both knew Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] before he became president, here in Newport, and, particularly, that you had given a cocktail party for them here at your home on the occasion of their wedding or during that week. Will you talk about this just a little bit?

AKERS: Yes. I knew president Kennedy, separately from my wife. My wife knew John Kennedy from various times on his visits to Newport when he was a younger man. She knew Jacqueline Bouvier quite well--friends of the family for many, many years. Each summer my wife came here to Newport with her family and so did Jacqueline Bouvier with the Auchinclosses, so they knew each other quite well.

So when I came first to know John Kennedy, he was in motor torpedo boats--there's a little backdrop to that that may clarify it a little bit. I was in the first squadron of motor torpedo boats that was in action out in the Pacific. I was in the Philippines with Squadron 3 when war started and we stayed there until Corregidor was about to fall, at which time we took General MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur] out on his way to Australia. And then two of us, Bulkeley [John D. Bulkeley] and I went back and got President Quezon [Manuel Luis Quezon] and brought him out.

Then, after that, we were flown directly back to the United States and General MacArthur and the Navy Department decided that they wanted four or five hundred motor torpedo boats in the Pacific area. And we were sent back to Melville, Rhode Island, to set up, establish and create a training squadron and a school, a training school for motor torpedo boat personnel. So all personnel who finally ended up in motor torpedo boats went through Melville, Rhode Island, and that is where I first met John Kennedy, when I was executive officer of the training squadron after I had already been in the Philippines and back. I didn't know him well in the school; he was a student in the school at the time. He was--I noted at the time--very good at organizing touch football games after the day's work was over.

Then the Navy Department sent me off to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer [Corporation] in Hollywood for three months duty as a technical advisor on a motion picture called "They Were Expendable" which is a story of our squadron's operation in the Philippines. And while I was out there, I was assigned a new squadron, as squadron commander of a new squadron of motor torpedo boats which was then--some of them still being built and fitted out. They were headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida.

When I left Melville, Rhode Island, and went to MGM for this assignment, John Kennedy was ordered to my squadron in Jacksonville, Florida. In my absence, he arrived there and reported for duty. But he found out after he got there that it was going to take about four or five or maybe six months to get all the boats underway and fitted out, down through the Caribbean, over into the Pacific, loaded on freighters, and then out into the Pacific where the fighting was going on. He had a friend who was in the Bureau of [Naval] Personnel, I was told later, and he called him by telephone and got orders to go directly to the South Pacific--I think Guadalcanal and two or three other spots. I've forgotten exactly the location of the PT base he reported to.

But the point of the story is that here was a young man eager to see action and he could have spent four or five, six months fitting out boats, having a fairly orderly and very pleasant routine it was, down in Florida and through the Caribbean and so on. But he tempted fate and went that much time ahead into the fighting in the Pacific, and that's where he was assigned PT 109, the story which has been told many different ways.

Incidentally, the squadron commander, John D. Bulkeley, who was one of the first Congressional Medal of Honor winners in World War II and was my squadron commander in the Philippines, went on a recruiting tour right after we got back from the Philippines, around different ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] units

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and other Navy oriented frameworks around the country, and John Kennedy was then in one of those--I've forgotten which one, in another state--and Bulkeley influenced him to volunteer for motor torpedo boats and then come on to Melville, Rhode Island. And that's where I first knew him.

MOSS: What sort of a person was he at that time--do you recall? Was he....

AKERS: Well, as I say, I didn't know him well. He was one among many, many students--student officers. I was five years or so older than John Kennedy and I might say that one of the real shocks of my life was when I suddenly realized in 1960 that for the first time in my life the president was older than I was. [Laughter]

MOSS: You mean the other way around?

AKERS: The other way around. I mean I was older than the president. I'm sorry. The other way around.

MOSS: Did you have any contacts with John Kennedy between that time and the 1950s--and 1952 when he became a senator?

AKERS: Yes, I did see him occasionally. I saw him occasionally at social events in Washington. During the Korean War, I was deputy under secretary of Air Force and I was over in the Pentagon. It was a very busy time. I saw him occasionally when we were out at social things in Washington. And of course we saw then Jacqueline Bouvier who was our neighbor. We were living in McLean, Virginia, at that time while I was in the Pentagon. Of course, after he had won against Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] in Massachusetts, the next year, I believe it was in 1953, the marriage took place here in Newport, Rhode Island, and we had a cocktail reception for both sides of the families here in the room where we're sitting in this home here which is my wife and wife's mother's home here in Newport, Rhode Island, and has been for years. Then since my wife had known Jacqueline Bouvier for a long, long time, it was natural that we give a dinner for the bride the night before the wedding. The dinner for the groom was given at the Clambake Club, but the dinner for the bride was given here in this house.

MOSS: Any particular incidents or anecdotes, vignettes out of that experience that stick with you and that you think are illustrative of the people or the time?

AKERS: No. I don't recall any particular vignette. I do have the memory of this room filled with the Kennedys, and when a room is filled with Kennedys it's an interesting experience. They're very attractive people in a large group, and, of course, when they assemble together as a family they are a quite large group of people.

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MOSS: What about the 1956 Democratic [National] convention and his try for the vice presidency. Do you have any connection with that at all in any way?

AKERS : Well, I was running for office myself in 1954 and '56 for Congress in the 17<sup>th</sup> congressional district in New York which is popularly known as the "silk

stocking” district.

MOSS: This is John Lindsay's old district.

AKERS: The district that John Lindsay later had.

MOSS: Gore Vidal tried that, too, in '60....

AKERS: Well, no. He was in there and I think looked at it, but when he ran, he ran in a district up the Hudson River.

MOSS: Ah, that's right. I remember now.

AKERS: I think Poughkeepsie's in the area he was in.

MOSS: Yes. Yes.

AKERS: But I was not at the convention in Chicago at which John Kennedy was almost nominated for vice president as you know well. In 1954, in 1956 that is, he was in New York. He campaigned for me twice in New York and Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] came and campaigned for me the last time, the third time I ran. But, he came into New York in 1956, after the Chicago convention, campaigning for me.

And the constituency in the 17<sup>th</sup> congressional district is sort of a mixed bag. There is a fairly large Irish Catholic constituency in that district and, of course, there was some emotional attachment to John Kennedy who was then the most pre-eminent Irish Catholic. We were still talking in terms of Irish Catholic politicians and thank God all of that has since disappeared over the horizon. But at that time, this had relative importance. He was the greatest leader in that particular kind of community since Alfred E. Smith, and, naturally, people in New York had a great emotional attachment to him also in many ways, and he was very helpful to me in that way. But, more than that, John Kennedy, as all of us know and the results finally proved, had a great universal appeal, a kind of charisma, glamour that appealed to the silk stocking element in the district as well as all the other groups in the constituency.

He was very generous in his campaigning for me. He came in and spent a day that was a very valuable day to him. We had a press

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conference in the morning and then a meeting at Marietta Tree's house in the afternoon, which was a combination of a fundraising exercise plus a larger sector that were doing various kinds of jobs in the campaign. And I recall that in our conversations, talking about what we should say about each other, that he asked me to mention the Chicago convention and the results and so on, in an offhanded way, but I was left with the impression of the 1956 convention, out of my conversations with him, that this had

given him a tremendous sort of political boost and a kind of political reinvigoration. He'd proved his mettle in defeating Lodge in Massachusetts in 1952 in the face of this huge Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] landslide and the fact of course we all know that Lodge was very closely attached to Eisenhower in the campaign and otherwise. So these two points, I think, were high points.

The '56 convention, I had the impression in talking to him that he had his eye on a higher office and (he never said this to me in any way, but this is the impression I gathered) that he was thinking in terms of.... He talked about some of the problems of campaigns and so on with me and out of this I gathered that he felt that he and his team, which was a very well-organized team in many ways as they proved out in Massachusetts, could do a job of organizing and establishing frameworks and so on that would have something different than the usual kinds of traditional frameworks in politics. And I had a feeling that he thought there might be an opportunity to extrapolate from Massachusetts the experiences and so on and build a kind of national organization that would be much more efficient than what he had seen at Chicago and what he had seen in the presidential campaigns--the Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] campaign and others.

MOSS: This is your interpretation of....

AKERS: This is my impression. This is not what he said to me, but he said things that left me with these impressions.

MOSS: Yes. Was he disdainful at all of the Chicago....

AKERS: No. No.

MOSS: Was it this kind of thing, or what?

AKERS: No. He wasn't disdainful of it. But, as I recall, he did feel and we all know, all of us that have been in politics, that the Democratic party, especially, is oftentimes a highly disorganized party. As Will Rogers once aptly said, "I'm not a member of any organized political party, I am a Democrat." This is the experience. I heard him make comments about the inefficiencies that existed in the national presidential elections and so on.

MOSS: What sort of speaker was he? People have said that he

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really didn't come into his own as a public speaker until somewhat later. Now you saw him in that kind of a role in 1956. What do you recall of that?

AKERS: Well, he wasn't as, let us say he was not as forceful a speaker as I saw in the presidential candidate in 1960. I think first of all he received tremendous

psychological boosts and otherwise in the primaries in Wisconsin and all the way through West Virginia and so on. And I think this helped a great deal. But he was a very good speaker at any time that I ever heard him speak. And furthermore he was a very clever speaker, not in the usual sense of cleverness, but he would sense what an audience was, how they were responding to him and so on and was very facile with a quip here and there, or whatever, that would bridge over a situation. He was very good at that, and he was marvelous, he was absolutely great at street campaigning. Mind you, this is 1954 and '56, and we would go down Third Avenue or one of the streets in New York and shake hands with people; we'd ring doorbells; we'd stand at a street corner for a while and things like that. And of course, the fact that John Kennedy would come into New York and campaign for me was quite helpful to me always in getting some headline of some sort that, "Kennedy comes in to help his PT boat pal," or something like that, that some story, personal interest story or something would go with it, get you a little more currency in a city where news is hard to come by, in a great city like New York, and gave you a little better horizon. But he was marvelous at shaking hands with people and he would give the impression to the individual that he'd spent a lot of time with him but he really had not. Then he'd go to another person. But it was never shaking hands with one person while he was looking at somebody else. He did it in a marvelous way that was a great thing to watch.

MOSS: Did you get an impression of how he would receive advice from other people, how he would absorb information, whether or not he took people literally or had some kind of critical base to compare things with or what?

AKERS: Well, first of all, he was one of the most clairvoyant people I've ever seen operate in politics. He could spot those with the wrong motives at a far distance, and he was very adept at seeing through an individual. And he was also very adept at concealing this.

MOSS: Yes, this is one thing. I didn't want to lead you into it too much, but I have discovered one thing, and that is that there are many people who have the feeling that they had gone in and presented him with a certain type of advice and that he had bought this advice completely, that he had thoroughly agreed with them and that they, therefore, understood the president's mind on any given policy. It's my impression that he did this with many people,

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sometimes on advice that was entirely opposite, you know, and that he would entertain many kinds of things and not really let people know where he himself stood. Did you get any feeling of this at all?

AKERS: Well I didn't get so much of that because I really wasn't in a position in which he would have been listening to seven or eight different interpretations of something, except in the political frame of reference...

MOSS: Yes.

AKERS: ... before he was president. He did this--I did see this: He was not a person who dissembled at all. He was a wholly natural person in conversations and discussions and so on and he was not a time waster in anyway. He was interested in getting things accomplished and going ahead and getting it over with. If he had four or five different interpretations about some political thing, he would either make a decision if he could on the information that he had at once or he'd delegate somebody to find out what it was and get it done.

MOSS: Yes. All right. Here is this man who has almost been vice president or at least the vice presidential nominee and he is reelected in Massachusetts again in 1958 rather handsomely and is very definite political timber, presidential timber. And I've listed three or four issues here that were Senate issues, and I was wondering if you recalled the New York Democratic, the Liberal party reaction to him as a senator in the period between 1955 to 1960--Civil Rights, the education, the aid to parochial schools issues, the labor rackets question and the medicare thing. These were the chief things that occurred.

AKERS: Well, as I said before, I was running for office myself in '54, '56, and '58, and some of these things blur together in your memory. But, I would say that the New York civil rights groups and supporters are of course among the strongest civil rights elements in the United States. I think that Kennedy had to prove himself in civil rights, shall we say, with the New York group, and I think he did this fairly well through those years in his reactions to the various things that arose one way or another. Also, let's see....

MOSS: Do you want me to cut this for a moment?

AKERS: Cut it for a moment. [Interruption]

MOSS: All right. We'll come to civil rights then when we talk about the 1960 campaign, and I'll ask you to comment on the education issue, particularly the aid to parochial schools which Senator Kennedy and, then later as president, Mr. Kennedy opposed.

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AKERS: Well, I've already said and we all know that because he was the pre-eminent Irish Catholic politician in the United States at the time, this had great meaning before 1960. John Kennedy was probably suspect with reference to whatever he would do with parochial schools. He was in a very difficult position. If he said anything in favor of such aid, he would be accused of being a religionist and whatever he did the other way, then he was

probably trying to do that in order to avoid being a religionist and so on. He was in a difficult position. But I think his position was right and he followed it all the way down the line; there was never any question about it. His positions on aid to education were carefully reasoned and carefully spelled out. If you recall, Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] and Cardinal Spellman [Francis J. Spellman] had been through a vehement contretemps on this and some other related subjects in New York. And John Kennedy was not about to come down on this conservative side with reference to all of this, and I think his position was quite clear and in the end was very helpful to him in New York.

MOSS: Yes. Right. And on the labor rackets question with Robert Kennedy as counsel in the hearings and so on and the Teamsters being such a powerful union in New York--how did this go?

AKERS: Well, as you are aware, New York's always been a strong labor state and Teamsters is a very strong union there. The senator on the subcommittee and his brother as counsel to the subcommittee, these proved a mixed bag for labor in New York as well as I'm sure in some other areas. This exposing of widespread rackets in the labor ranks could have hurt Kennedy's chances for any national office in a convention that would have had some labor-oriented delegates and things like that. I'm sure that John Kennedy and his brother Robert dismissed all of this as irrelevant at the time and went right ahead with the job that was before them to expose whatever evil practices they could find in labor ranks. In the end, as you know, labor vigorously supported him. The people like Walter Reuther and others not only supported much of the work that was being done by the Senate subcommittee but then of course later supported John Kennedy for president.

MOSS: Later, after Robert Kennedy became attorney general--of course, this would have been after you had gone to New Zealand, but I'm sure that there were repercussions afterwards that you would know of, in New York perhaps--Robert Kennedy has been accused of overdoing the "get Jimmy Hoffa" thing. There's supposedly a "get Hoffa Squad" in the Justice Department during his term as attorney general. What view do you have on that?

AKERS: Well, of course, as you've indicated I was overseas while much of this was going on, so I was not privy to the administration of the Justice Department. But the impression I have--and I

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knew some of the people in the Justice Department like, at that time, Byron White [Byron R. White], and Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach], and Robert Kennedy--they went right down the line and did what was to be done and that was all there was to it. I don't think

there was any vendetta against anybody. They were carrying out the legal processes of the United States in a difficult case and a difficult situation.

MOSS: Right. And anything more on the labor rackets hearings?

AKERS: No. I believe that's....

MOSS: All right. And how about medicare?

AKERS: Well, New York State's always been ahead of many of other states in this field and its predisposition toward medicare and his--John Kennedy's position along the way on medicare were quite helpful to him in the end in New York.

MOSS: Okay. Now when did you first become aware that he was seriously going after the presidency? You mentioned some of it in '56 where he was talking about organization and you thought he was thinking in national terms. When did you get the feel that he was really going for it. Was it at Claiborne Pell's [Claiborne deBorda Pell], at the 1960 meeting you had? I have New York City down here. I believe it was in Washington.

AKERS: That's Washington, Washington, D.C.

MOSS: Yes. Washington.

AKERS: Well, I had the impression that he was going for the presidential nomination before that. And I cannot recall--I've thought about this--the exact time that I was absolutely certain that he was going for the presidency. But my impressions had been such--dating all the way back to '56--that I felt almost certain in my own mind for some time before he ever announced or ever began to put out his own feelers that he was going to try for the nomination, always with the reservation, I felt, that he would have a reasonable chance in the primaries. Because I felt from some things that he'd said that it was going to be, whatever he did was going to be difficult.

MOSS: Yes.

AKERS: I got that impression in 1956. You know, he didn't waste words about things. If he said something was going to be difficult, you new what was being talked about in the context.

MOSS: Do you recall that meeting at Claiborne Pell's?

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AKERS: Oh yes, I recall the meeting very well.

MOSS: What sort of discussion was it; what sort of things did you talk about?

AKERS: Well, he told me that, of course, he was putting together his organization and that he wanted me to help him in New York. Especially as I had run there--as I have already said, he'd been in there campaigning for me when I'd run for office--and told him right off that I would do everything that I could in the best way that I could for him because I really believed in him and I believed that he had great potential. I was in an embarrassing position in New York from the standpoint of my own private, personal life because I had just assumed senior partnership in a newly reorganized law firm. It was quite difficult for me to just pick up and leave the law firm and he understood that and knew that and knew some of my partners and so on. But I told him that I would do whatever I could in New York but I wouldn't be able to go out of New York very much in the interim but that I would help him in New York in any kind or sort of trouble-shooting within the Democratic framework in New York. New York was in difficulties at that time. Of course, it's then since degenerated into practically utter chaos.

MOSS: Yes. Where did you see the difficulties? How were people lining up for candidates at this point?

AKERS: Well, it might be well to just look at sort of the background of what New York was coming into at that point.

MOSS: All right.

AKERS: As you know, in 1954 Averell Harriman [W. Averell Harriman] was elected governor of New York and the leader of the Democratic party in New York was Carmine DeSapio [Carmine G. DeSapio] and the chairman of the state committee was Prendergast [Michael H. Prendergast]. Harriman made DeSapio secretary of the state of New York. He was a Democratic political leader in New York then who was listened to nationally and he was on the cover of *TIME* magazine and other things. He had a kind of a national image at that point. The Democratic party had picked itself up in New York and elected a governor and so on. It's against this that we ought to sort of look at the 1960 presidential nomination maneuvering and the election itself in New York. And, of course, in 1958 Harriman had then been defeated by Nelson Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller] for governor and with that much of the luster had departed from DeSapio as a political leader.

So you come then to New York State in 1960, having lost much of his political power in the '58 defeat of Harriman, DeSapio at that point needed badly to have a big winner in order to stay alive politically. It is my impression from my recall in talking with various political

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figures around New York at the time, including DeSapio, that DeSapio did not feel at that time that Kennedy could win the nomination and the presidency, that the religion factor would be against him and this would be a problem of one kind or another. And he was

lukewarm all the way through. Also, DeSapio represented the first sort of major American breakthrough in the Italian community in that kind of leadership, so that he was sort of, had been sort of a national political image of now another minority group coming along, another kind of framework.

The New York picture was complicated greatly by the fact that the reform wing of the Democratic party was still loyal to Adlai Stevenson and wanted him to be the candidate again in 1960. The reformers, the liberal factions of the Democratic party in New York, led by former governor and Senator Herbert Lehman [Herbert H. Lehman] and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.... They were the political and honorary leaders of this group. Thomas Finletter [Thomas K. Finletter], former Air Force secretary, was one of the leaders. But they had supported Stevenson in 1956 and they were still pretty furious over at least their interpretation of the 1956 results in which they felt that the old-line Democratic party bosses and leaders and Democratic framework in New York really did not support Adlai Stevenson. And I think much of that is true. There was certainly no enthusiastic campaign efforts for Stevenson on the part of the traditional Democratic framework of New York.

But up until the convention, the reform faction definitely was all the way for Stevenson. They went to the convention for Stevenson and you know the story of the presentation of Stevenson at the convention. The post-convention maneuvering is a sort of story in itself and we might postpone that until after the convention.

MOSS: All right.

AKERS: But before the convention, John and Robert Kennedy both handled the New York situation with a great deal of skill. DeSapio and Prendergast started boomlets for Stuart Symington [W. Stuart Symington] and for Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. They had them come into New York and were seen by the leaders and so on. Neither of them caught on in New York. Most of the Democratic county chairmen across New York State were Irish Catholic at the time and had an emotional commitment to JFK as the pre-eminent leader in that community nationally, and they wanted him for their candidate.

MOSS: What do you know, if anything, of the role of Joe Kennedy, Sr. [Joseph P. Kennedy] in lining up the county chairmen?

AKERS: I'm not too familiar with the role he played in it. I know that he did talk to as many of the county leaders as he felt it was worth his while to do. He did help influence Charlie Buckley [Charles A. Buckley]

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and some others who supported Kennedy all the way through. These leaders across the state had not been enthusiastic for Adlai Stevenson. They were now enthusiastic for John Kennedy and they wanted to go with this candidate. Peter Crotty [Peter J. Crotty] in Buffalo--this is the upstate megalopolis in New York, Erie County--was a JFK adherent all the way down, and Charlie Buckley in the Bronx was then a congressman and chairman of

the Public Works Committee in the House of Representatives, an important figure in New York politics. He lost his leadership role later on, but he was very helpful to Kennedy and this sort of upstate-downstate group worked together and were making more and more commitments all the time among the leaders to Kennedy.

MOSS: Where was Wagner [Robert F. Wagner] in all this?

AKERS: Well, Wagner listened a great deal during all of this, [Laughter] judiciously, I think--of course he later came to support Kennedy but at a late time. But I think his role was the political role of acting as the mayor of New York and he felt that he couldn't commit himself at that particular time. Ray Jones [J. Raymond Jones], a Harlem leader, and Adam Clayton Powell were for Lyndon Johnson, you may recall. Edward Weisl, Johnson's New York lawyer, helped Johnson around New York. Of course, even as late as the day before the convention, DeSapio tried to change the convention's direction by trying to get the convention to take Johnson as a candidate. This didn't get the New York delegation; this didn't go down at all.

MOSS: This was in the caucus at Albany on Saturday? No. This was in Los Angeles.

AKERS: Well this was in Los Angeles. This is the day before the final voting.

MOSS: Right.

AKERS: He went all the way down the line. He wanted to have a candidate who was more sympatico toward him than was John Kennedy. John Kennedy felt that he, Kennedy, had considerable strength in New York without DeSapio. And Kennedy felt that DeSapio was going to have to go along with Kennedy in the end anyway. It was not that he didn't want the support of all the leaders in New York, but he didn't want to have the New York delegation controlled by someone to whom he would have obligations later on. And he and Robert Kennedy played this very well, so that in the end New York of course went for Kennedy on the first ballot and they did not have any great obligation to any particular individual in the delegation. There were many individuals in the delegation who were very helpful, but there was no single leader such as DeSapio to whom they felt any great obligation at all.

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There were roughly four groups in New York before the convention: these led by DeSapio and the state chairman Prendergast; those committed to JFK through Buckley and Crotty and John English and the others; and here were a considerable number of independent minded Democrats such as, well, John English on Long Island was a fairly independent Democrat and others who had no roles and offices and so on such as myself; the reform group was the other group that generally supported Adlai Stevenson. One cannot say, I think, that the black community was behind any one candidate, but the symbolic leaders--Adam Powell and Ray Jones and so on--had stated that they were for Johnson along the way. I think

there was sort of an inevitability about the New York delegation finally going for Kennedy and I think they, both Robert Kennedy who masterminded this, and John Kennedy who had roles to play all the way through it, played it that way and it came out the way they thought it was going to come out.

MOSS: What sort of things was Robert Kennedy doing? What was visible besides simply talking to the county chairmen and talking them in it?

AKERS: He was doing the obvious things of talking to county chairmen all over, not only in New York of course, but everywhere. He was delegating certain kinds of authority to leaders--Buckley, Crotty, and John English. Some things I did were not major things but sort of trouble-shooting things in one way or another. Already before the convention he was delegating various kinds of things to people to do in this troubled framework that the Democratic party was.

MOSS: Right. This kind of assignment of duties and so on presages a kind of change in the power structure if DeSapio is excluded. How clearly was this put to people that, "Look, this is a new day and a new team and we're handing out the prizes and if you want to enjoy the fruits thereof, you'd better get aboard pretty quickly." How much of this was made explicit?

AKERS: Well, Robert Kennedy, as many of us who knew him know, was, as I've said about John Kennedy, not one to waste words and he was interested in action and results. There was not the pose of a threat, but there was always the pose of, "Well, we are going ahead with this and it is succeeding and it would be well for you to come along." I think many of the leaders conveyed this in no uncertain terms across the state of New York long before it ever got to the convention.

MOSS: So there was nothing really that had to be done in the way of overt pressure upon people to move things in the Kennedy direction. Was it simply a....

AKERS: Well, I'm trying to think of some specific examples.

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MOSS: Were there trouble-spots?

AKERS: I really can't think of a specific example of something such as this where somebody has moved into a different position or something. I just don't recall anything like that. Nor was there a threat, I think, of ousting anybody.

MOSS: Because this does come up later.

AKERS: Yes it does, yes. But there was no uncertainty left that the loyalists were going to be those who were following the lead of the Buckleys and the Crotty and John

Englishes and the others in the Democratic party of New York State. Anybody else was not going to have very much other role in any Kennedy post-election, post-convention framework in so far as Kennedy would control the direction effort in New York.

MOSS: All right. There was some question, wasn't there, on the chairmanship of the delegation before it went to Los Angeles, as to who was to be the chairman of the delegation?

AKERS: There is, but I was away at the time that fight was going on and I really won't be able to contribute anything very....

MOSS: Okay. Anything on the Kennedy meetings with Wagner in June?

AKERS: No. I was not present at either of those meetings with Wagner, so I really don't know what transpired there. It's my impression that Kennedy, was using his charm and grace and whatever power he had to convince Wagner that he ought to move as soon as possible.

MOSS: Just looking on the surface of it, it looks like the kind of thing, the last check to make sure that the thing is nailed down so that it doesn't come apart before the convention.

AKERS: This is my impression, yes. And I think although Wagner was not in the position of the political leadership role, in fact I think a great deal was expected of Wagner because he was major of the biggest city, the most delegates in the state of New York and so on. In other words, he was in a position to help in the convention and if he did not it would be obviously a quite negative mark.

MOSS: All right. You did not attend the convention as a delegate. Did you attend as an observer?

AKERS: I attended the convention merely as an observer. I played a minor role in helping Robert Kennedy canvas delegates to try to switch them from other candidates to Kennedy's candidacy.

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I don't really think I had any great impact of any kind on the convention.

MOSS: Did you see many changes?

AKERS: Yes. There was a sort of continuing kind of series of changes. I didn't convert a lot of people but I saw evidence of this all along the way.

MOSS: What sort of thing?

AKERS: Well I'm trying to recall specific examples--it's been a long time ago--but there were switches. Byron White was in charge of this operation right under Kennedy, and I recall some of the tallies that we were keeping in Robert Kennedy's headquarters that day. Every three or four hours we were keeping tallies on the delegates and there were switches along the way that were important. Now I've forgotten states involved. It's been a long time ago.

I was present personally at the television debate between Kennedy and Johnson, if you recall.

MOSS: Oh, yes, yes.

AKERS: Johnson had made the challenge. I had felt this was somewhat of a turning point in the campaign because Johnson had made the challenge and had publicly lost I think. This was on television. I think this final ploy of a debate really was counter productive from his standpoint. It was a telling round. One of the interesting side-lights of the convention I'll always remember is Robert Kennedy right after this debate had taken place, he was mopping his brow and he recalled this comedy of errors. If you recall the telegram that Johnson's people sent to Kennedy challenging him was lost or wasn't delivered to the proper place. Bob Kennedy didn't get his hands on it until very late in the time frame of reference and JFK had no real preparation for this debate. And Robert Kennedy was laughing about it--with hindsight it was funny. After it was over and successful he thought it was one of the funniest things that happened at the convention that John Kennedy walked on the stage and turned to Robert Kennedy and said, "What shall I say?"

MOSS: Okay. Do you remember anything more from the convention that's worth putting down or shall we go on to the campaign in New York? How did you get tabbed for setting up and coordinating the citizens groups? Let me ask you this: How did the responsibilities break down, say, between you and Bill Walton [William Walton] and Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] in New York?

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AKERS: Well, perhaps again it would be useful to sort of look at the backdrop of that.

MOSS: Right.

AKERS: After the convention, it would seem logical at that point having nominated the candidate that all divisive groups would go back to New York and commence an all-out campaign to elect a new, vigorous, young presidential nominee, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Somehow this is not the way New York politics work. It didn't work then and it never seems to work that way. I suppose politics in other states, those that I've seen, are quite similar. I think this posed a new requirement and a kind of dilemma now for the state chairman Prendergast and for the leader in New York, DeSapio, because there was a

candidate who had been nominated, really without, they had endorsed him finally but he was not their man and vice versa and so on. I think there was a kind of requirement at this point, kind of public relations requirement I'll call it, for DeSapio and Prendergast to now take the candidate and get him elected and put the greatest appearance possible on it that they had delivered the election results.

I'm not impugning their motives in any way; this is a standard political procedure and the logical outgrowth of the sequence of events before the convention and nomination at the convention. Much of a campaign then relates to how often one group as opposed to another group can claim the body of the presidential candidate. If you've got him speaking before your group all of the time, then he's speaking to your people and you elected him. And the name of the game at that point is to keep him away from the other groups which is not obviously conducive to best election tactics because you then are just furthering divisions within and among disparate groups in a large political spectrum in a state and you're not accomplishing the purpose of electing the man that you nominated in the first place.

MOSS: A campaign organizer's nightmare. Right.

AKERS: Yeah. At this point I think you can say there are probably three groups in New York. Now you have to sort of put all of the traditional Democratic bosses and all that framework together because at least they now have publicly pledged allegiance to support and further and so on. So, generally speaking, then that framework will operate under the leader DeSapio and the state chairman Prendergast but, of course, with a great deal of help in one way or another in many instances on the part of the candidate's representatives for people like Buckley and Crotty and others, English, who have helped before the convention. So you've got that kind of a group with sort of holes creating a sieve in that.

And then you have the reform group who went to the convention for Stevenson. They obviously now should be desirous of electing John Kennedy over Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], but they have some reluctance now and they want their terms of reference spelled out and their relationship to the campaign generally spelled out and what position they have and how they relate to the campaign. Those are two main groups, and perhaps it's just better to stay with them for the moment.

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The liberal elements in the Democratic party in New York--many important and renowned Jewish names among these like Senator Herbert Lehman who was governor and senator; Mrs. Roosevelt was, we've already said, one of the principal leaders--it was difficult for the Kennedy forces to find an individual who would be chairman of this group, of the reform group, the acting working chairman--your honorary chairmen are already there--but an acting working chairman who would get on well with the reform group and who had enough experience with the regular Democratic party framework so that it would be possible to anticipate difficulties and preclude them wherever possible and to cause the thing to function as a more or less arm's length integrated unit all the way through, all working for the benefit of the presidential candidate.

It's my impression that Bobby Kennedy did quite a bit of thinking, he went through several names, I believe, before he decided that because of my background with the reform group in New York--I had run as a Democratic candidate in the 17<sup>th</sup> district which was principally reform but also had DeSapio in the district, and so I had a sort of a feel of both sides of this from the time I first ran in 1954.... And so he asked me to have dinner with him one night at the Cote Basque Restaurant in New York and we had a long dinner session. Justin Feldman was present with us at the time, who incidentally was very helpful pre-convention and all the way through the campaign, both to me and to Robert and John Kennedy.

We had this long session in which we talked about all of the problems, how to meet them and how to organize a reform group. First of all, the traditional Democratic party in New York led by DeSapio and the chairman Mike Prendergast, did not want any representation of any other elements in New York. That is the logical and understandable position: the party's there, the party represents the party's nominee, so why do we need other representation. Of course, the bitterness dating back to the Stevenson campaigns and some of the other battles in New York, in the Buffalo convention and so on, these old animosities were very strong and there was a genuine requirement if we were going to get the liberal Democratic establishment, the reform groups to come along and really help in the campaign.

Incidentally, that element of the party was and the various groups, members of them, were very helpful in money raising, fund raising for Stevenson and down the line and all of us knew that. So not only did they constitute an extremely important element with reference to marshalling of voters and getting electoral support that way but financial support was essential, too, to come from this group.

So Bob Kennedy asked me, after he'd spelled out terms of reference and so on to me, if I thought this could work. I said that I did believe it could be done. I said it would take some very careful doing, that the reform group was still very edgy. They were still, they did not feel that John Kennedy was a liberal as they wanted in a presidential

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candidate. They felt that Stevenson was more liberal and that they now had a candidate that they would be less than enthusiastic about. I'm not now talking about the top level, I'm not talking about Governor Lehman, Mrs. Roosevelt, and others at the very top level, but this permeated the middle level groups and others down the line. The pro-Stevenson sentiment was quite strong, and I had to create several different ways to deal with it. We had to deal with it really all the way down the line. It diminished more and more as time went on, but there was definitely anti-Kennedy feeling among the reform group and there was lack of enthusiasm. There was just plain lack of enthusiasm that was pretty widespread with....

MOSS: Let me turn this over just a moment. Excuse me.

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

MOSS: All right. You were saying that one of your tasks was to overcome the lack of enthusiasm amongst the rank-and-file reformers or the lack of enthusiasm that permeated the rank-and-file reformers for John Kennedy, that this was one of the tasks facing the campaign. Were there other difficult spots? What were some of the others?

AKERS: Well, one of the greatest difficulties in the beginning right after the convention was that there was literally no organization existing, no framework under which these reform voters could be marshalled and utilized in the various ways important in a presidential election. So we had to establish this committee and we called it the Citizens' Committee for Kennedy-Johnson, New York Citizens Committee for Kennedy-Johnson. I was the working chairman of this group and Governor Lehman and Mrs. Roosevelt were honorary chairmen and Tom Finletter was voted an honorary chairman of it. First of all, the presidential representatives had to meet with this group. You have to start with confrontations in politics and assemble together and find out who you are and how you're going to organize. The president's representative I refer to was Robert Kennedy, campaign manager, who went with me to a meeting which I had set up, attended by Governor Lehman and Irving Engel [Irving M. Engel], who at that time was one of the leaders in the reform group, and others. We met in a Park Avenue apartment, I believe; I've forgotten now whose apartment it was, I'm sorry. I was going to say Governor Lehman's but I don't believe it was Governor Lehman's apartment. But Governor Lehman was there as a spokesman for the group. Byron White, National Chairman of Citizens for Kennedy-Johnson, and Robert Kennedy and I attended this meeting, representing the president.

I had considerable discussion with Robert Kennedy before we went there. Robert Kennedy, as all of us know, when he was younger--these were his younger days--had an abrasive quality about him at times. In his desire to get things done he could be abrasive. And the fact that he had to go and meet with this group and take up valuable time that he wanted to be in Colorado or California or somewhere else, to spend an hour or more with them left him in a poor frame of mind. He had hoped that right after the convention, this group would organize and he could make a kind of symbolic tour to say hello and meet a few people and things

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like that and go on about his business. And I think with hindsight he realized that he should have given more thought to it.

They wanted their terms of reference spelled out, they wanted to know that the presidential candidate was going to appear before their group during the campaign at a reasonable number of events and under appropriate auspices and so on. They made several queries and some minor demands and so on, and Bob Kennedy lost his temper with this group. I don't mean he lost his temper completely. He dealt with the situation in a very forceful way, shall we say, and I think in doing so antagonized--I know in doing so he did

antagonize Governor Lehman and some of the others in trying to get the thing underway and over with so that he could go on about getting his brother elected president.

MOSS: How forceful? In a sense of exasperation and impatience....

AKERS: Somewhat, yes.

MOSS: Or what?

AKERS: He'd reached a state of some impatience and said that he wanted to get his brother elected president and the job was there before him and now let's get it done, in that kind of language. And the meeting broke up without very much enthusiasm. Well, it broke up with no enthusiasm. And the things that I had hoped that he would say when he went there, and I had talked to him beforehand.... I stated to him before he went that he should simply ask them for their help, outline the problem before the presidential candidate in the state of New York and the nation, and to ask for their assistance, and ask that their leaders delegate some individuals to work closely with me, and so on. He didn't follow the laundry list very carefully that I had given him on the way down. It was necessary to spend quite a bit of time some three weeks or a month or so after that to get Governor Lehman and some of the other leaders in--it was not that they were opposed to Kennedy and didn't want to support Kennedy, but they wanted at that point to demonstrate some continuing independence. And they did that through not publicly coming forward with their support. I at this point had a New York Citizens' Committee for Kennedy-Johnson, I was the working chairman of it. But Senator Lehman and Mrs. Roosevelt did not then come forward until a few weeks later. There was valuable time lost in this process that should not have been lost. We should have been able to go ahead very quickly.

But then I talked to Mrs. Roosevelt, I talked on several occasions to Senator Lehman. Bill Walton went to see Mrs. Roosevelt. Of course, Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. was very helpful in most of this, although he was not part of this reform group and he had no means of speaking for the reform group. He was very helpful with Mrs. Roosevelt and as he could be in the state of New York and, as we well know, all over the

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country. But it took some time to get this turned around and get the proper endorsements projected publicly before the people and thus get all of the reform group marshaled into the particular slots all the way down the line so that we could commence all the canvassing operations and the public relations jobs and the finance jobs and all the rest of it that has to be done in any campaign. So we lost some valuable time there, but we recouped later on and I think made up for it. At the end of the time, we had their full support. This was not my doing, this was the doing really of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

MOSS: Yes. How did the meeting between him and Eleanor Roosevelt come about?

AKERS: Well, I'm not too clear at this point. I knew the facts earlier. I was not in attendance on it and I have forgotten. I was out of town. Bill Walton went with the president, I believe, when he met with Mrs. Roosevelt. But that came about because we had asked him to meet with her--Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. [Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.] had something to do with that--and we felt it was essential that he make an effort to go see her and to enlist her aid and support. Of course after an appropriate time, Governor Lehman and Mrs. Roosevelt were extraordinarily helpful. As honorary chairmen of the reform committee they spent a great deal of time and effort in campaigning in New York for Kennedy. And the whole thing progressed as a kind of, almost as something orchestrated because there was the initial scrambling for positions and so on; then some delay; then the frameworks were established, the citizens' committee was operating. We had some trouble getting financing in the beginning right away, the way we wanted to start off and so on. But we got all of that done. And then the remarkable thing to see was with every visit to New York of JFK--and this is a measure of the candidate--that he made, things improved in all directions. But also, every speech he made that New Yorkers were exposed to--nationally, in other states, and otherwise--the reform group became more and more pro-Kennedy. Where they had been less than enthusiastic at one point, by the end of the campaign they were extraordinarily enthusiastic all the way down the line from the fundraisers all the way down to the people working in the canvassing jobs and so on. It was a remarkable kind of transformation done by one man really.

MOSS: All right. You and Bill Walton had sort of similar jobs in a way. He was called state coordinator I believe, and you were head of the citizens' committee. What was the real difference here?

AKERS: As you probably know, the Kennedys had a rule which had advantages and disadvantages, and that was that every state that they went into, every region and so on that they went into, they would delegate a representative to go there and to speak for them and they could always get him on the telephone, talk to him, tell him

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what they wanted done. It had those kind of advantages. It also had the disadvantage of causing the people in the state to say, "Well, don't you trust us?" And, of course, the answer to that is, I suppose, no, you really don't trust anybody except those that you're very close to in some of the complicated dealings that have to be done. I don't mean illegitimate things in any way, I mean simply the day-to-day functioning of the campaign. The man on the other end of the phone from the presidential candidate and the presidential campaign manager must be someone in whom they have trust and they know what he says to them is true and they know it's not being shaded in any way to favor any single group or factor. So for this reason and others of

organization in one way or another, William Walton was sent down. William Walton was an old friend of Kennedy's, lived in Georgetown, had known him quite some time while he was senator and before. He was a former newspaper man and an excellent representative to send to the state of New York. He had friends and acquaintances in New York. And I knew Bill; I didn't know him well but I knew him before that.

And he moved into our headquarters that we established and worked out of our headquarters for quite some time, until the DeSapio-Prendergast group began to say to him, "Well, you know, do you represent the president or do you represent the reform group; you're over in the reform group headquarters." At which time he got an office, another office, which was more expense added for no reason really.

But, I got along very well indeed with him. One of the problems from the local individual standpoint is that when the presidential campaign manager sends a coordinator into the state, some of the funds are going straight to the coordinator instead of the usual group that they go to. So we'd lost some money that way that would go straight to Walton in order to have it handed to the candidate himself, a check or something.

But Bill Walton did a very good job of keeping contact between these two groups. Of course, I talked back and forth with the other groups all the time because I knew all of them. And he and I both talked regularly with the campaign manager, and Bob Kennedy always came in to see me and to see Walton when he was in New York. It finally worked out and worked out successfully and very well. New York was won by a large plurality.

MOSS: Who really handled the money in New York?

AKERS: Well, that was another one of the problems that plagues any campaign always, but especially at that time with so many sort of disparate groups even within the traditional framework of the Democratic party. If you have a highly organized loyalty all the way down the line, all the way through Democratic ranks in a given state, I suppose you could find a small state where you go in and you deal with the state chairman and the local political leader or the governor or whoever it is, and they raise funds and it all goes through one framework. In New York this is quite different.

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I don't recall how much was raised for the county campaign by the traditional party framework, but the Citizens' Committee for Kennedy-Johnson raised approximately a million dollars for Kennedy, and we presented him with a check for something under two hundred thousand dollars at a breakfast the day before the election. The citizens' Committee did very well in the financial end of it. Joseph Baird was a businessman, finance chairman; Bob Benjamin [Robert S. Benjamin] of United Artists [Corporation] was the treasurer of the committee; Arthur Krim [Arthur B. Krim] of United Artists was helpful at that time also in raising funds. Marietta Tree

and Dorothy Hirshhorn were both really great in calling on the telephone, writing letters. Remember these contributions are not large contributions. Raising a million dollars--there were very few checks that were ten thousand dollar checks or five thousand dollar checks. Most of them were a thousand dollars, two thousand dollars, five hundred dollars, a hundred dollars and on down. And this takes a tremendous amount of organization, time, effort on the part of a great many people.

MOSS: Is there any attempt by other parts of the organization to either raid your treasury or dictate what should be done with it?

AKERS: Well, because the money is raised in New York, the Democratic party in New York feels that it should be their money. This is not the way it worked at all in 1960. I'm not sure how it had worked in several campaigns, but in 1960 the traditional Democratic party framework raised its money and the citizens' committee raised its money and both of these.... You see much of the traditional party campaign framework funds that are raised in a presidential campaign are kept in the state, paying workers to do many kinds of jobs all the way from secretaries and so on that you have to have, outside volunteers that you have to have in order to keep a large organizational framework going and rolling. There is a considerable amount of funds that go just for those purposes and I believe that, I just don't know how much the traditional Democratic party framework gave to the national campaign. But I know that a very large part of ours went directly to the framework set up by the campaign manager nationally for television, and some of it actually was raised for the purpose of putting the candidate on television, for television spots and things like that. In other words, you can raise money at times easier by asking somebody for five thousand dollars for John Kennedy to appear on a television spot for five times around or whatever it is.

MOSS: On the spending of it now. Political campaigns and Kennedy campaigns, I think, in particular were notorious for not paying their bills in full, settling up for one, two, or three cents on the dollar and this sort of thing. Did you get involved in that at all?

AKERS: Well, I was not involved in the picking up of the pieces as it were. I went off to New Zealand afterwards. But my impression is that the citizens' committee paid all the debts that it

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had entered into obligations for in any way.

MOSS: Where does Paul Corbin fit into all of this? How did you cope with him?

AKERS: Well, I was not too familiar with Paul Corbin's role in New York in the citizens' committee framework in 1960. I'm not sure just how he fitted in to the picture.

MOSS: Because the story that I have is that wherever they spotted a weak county chairman, Paul's job would be to go in and set up a citizens' committee. Does this square with anything that you know?

AKERS: Well it didn't work that way in New York, because.... Well I won't say it didn't work that way in upstate New York. There were some citizens' committees that were set up in upstate New York with which I'm not familiar. Some of them I did know about and I think you are right that he did do some of that, but I was not familiar with several of those that were done in upstate New York in some of the smaller counties. There were not too many democratic votes in many of those counties, you see, and there was no strong democratic organization therefore and had not been traditionally. And it was an attempt to give some focus to these where there really wasn't being a job done that citizens' committees were instituted.

MOSS: Do you know Corbin at all?

AKERS: Yes I do. I met him.

MOSS: What kind of a guy he is?

AKERS: I really don't know. I've only met him occasionally in campaigns and I don't know him well personally.

MOSS: Okay. Can you think of anything in the visits and so on? I seem to recall a situation in the first big tour around New York City. There was to be a reception at one of the hotels, whether it was The Waldorf-Astoria or the Commodore [Hotel], I forget which....

AKERS: It was Waldorf. I know about that.

MOSS: It was The Waldorf and DeSapio and Prendergast tried to leave out, tried to leave out Mrs. Roosevelt and Senator Lehman?

AKERS: Oh no, that comes somewhat later, that comes later. But my wife Jane and several others in the campaign had a hand in organizing the first big rally in The Waldorf-Astoria. I

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got a tremendous number of complaints about it afterward for the simple reason that it was the most hugely overwhelming success that we've had mound and we had given out tickets in large numbers and many of the people who had tickets were forced out or rather other people had come in and sat in their seats where there were no tickets, where they had no tickets. So there was a large number of people who were quite upset over the fact that they

didn't get to use the tickets that were given to them. But this really is, from a political standpoint, the mark of great success to have so many great numbers of people hanging out of the rafters of The Waldorf ballroom and so on.

I remember this meeting very well. Governor Lehman spoke. Harry Truman [Harry S. Truman] spoke. Abe Ribicoff [Abraham A. Ribicoff] spoke. And I was introducing these people part of the time and part of the time I was with the candidate going through the different.... We had assembled in The Waldorf many of the reform groups teams of workers and their leaders and so on, and Kennedy had the opportunity that day to shake hands with a great many local people that he would not have seen otherwise. He visited our headquarters and went through the volunteer units and things like that. Then there were such huge crowds all over the Park Avenue area outside The Waldorf that we put him on top of an automobile with a loudspeaker and he spoke out there sort of spontaneously to this large group.

MOSS: Yeah. What is the occasion that I'm thinking of where DeSapio and Prendergast tried to keep Mrs. Roosevelt and Senator Lehman from being there at all?

AKERS: Well, this was the final sort of unity meeting that was to be held representative of all of New York State in New York City just before the election.

MOSS: So this would be the November prior....

AKERS: This is the grand finale.

MOSS: Yeah.

AKERS: This has been done, you know, every presidential candidate a day or two before election goes through New York and he's either in Madison Square Garden or in the Coliseum or somewhere. This was in the Coliseum.

MOSS: Right. Okay.

AKERS: And we go back to the.... We had problems down the line with this facet of the campaign which I mentioned before as who has the body of the presidential candidate and whoever has him has the spotlight, of course, for the day and so on. We had difficulties with the people who were scheduling Kennedy in trying to get them to put him before the reform groups more. The traditional regular party people

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were complaining that they didn't want him to go before this group or that group, they had a better group that he should go before. This went on all the way through the campaign. This is not to say that it was an absolutely chaotic undertaking. It's a fairly normal procedure for campaigns, but it can be quite abrasive and there's a tremendous amount of hostility at certain levels that builds up. And this went on through the campaign. The

reform group was not getting, the citizens' committee was not getting Kennedy as much as they should; the other side was getting him here; they wanted him more than the citizens' committee had him there, and so on. This went on all the way down the line.

And the advance men and the people who were scheduling Kennedy were faced with this every time they came to town. There was a session among Bill Walton, DeSapio, myself and others, and we'd sit down and practically every time they came to New York, before the candidate, they'd have to sit down with us to work out whatever we were going to do. Nobody ever leaves those meetings satisfied; everybody leaves such a meeting dissatisfied. It's in the nature of things.

MOSS: And does the schedule necessarily follow what you decided upon?

AKERS: And the schedule often doesn't follow what was decided in the first place. And then more hostility results from that. But this is normal procedure. I must say, it reached some very heated points from time to time throughout the campaign. I mentioned this because the final big rally in New York marked the zenith of this kind of infighting between the two groups and so on. Now the citizens' committee--Governor Lehman, Mrs. Roosevelt, myself, and others--felt that through the campaign Kennedy had not appeared enough before the reform groups. The appearances that he made were very successful ones and he had benefitted in many ways from them we felt and I'm sure that's so. The other side felt the same thing, that they'd been short changed. But in many ways they had more county chairmen and things like that dealing with Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and others who were scheduling Kennedy through New York State. So I'd say on balance, their score card was higher than ours.

MOSS: Yes. What sort of appeals did you have on this?

AKERS: The appeals, I'll give you exactly.... The denouement of this whole thing points up these appeals. The appeal first is to the campaign manager. Well first the appeal is to the coordinator, William Walton. We are two contending groups so, Bill Walton make the decision now, what are we going to do and get on the phone and talk to Bobby Kennedy and get this straightened out, and so on. The next step if that doesn't work is that you get on the phone

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and talk to Bobby Kennedy yourself. And then the next step after that is to talk to the presidential candidate himself when he's in New York or try to get him on the phone or whatever is to be done. Well, one doesn't want to be in the position of calling a presidential candidate about scheduling. Although he was talked to about this in New York by the traditional party leaders and so on, I never did this. I got my results, whatever they were, I lived with them, and I didn't bother the presidential candidate with them. But at one point we did and that was final point. And that was the Coliseum, this grand unity meeting of the Democratic party, all elements, all factions to be represented in this great assemblage hall, and everybody was to be unified, loyal, all for one man, forget past differences, the election

is the day after tomorrow--or tomorrow, I've forgotten. now--and so this is the end of the line with contentions.

Well, part of what we wanted in citizens' committee was for Governor Lehman who was one of the outstanding--former governor, former senator--political leaders in the state and the honorary chairman of the citizens' committee, and Mrs. Roosevelt, who we don't need to describe at all, to be on the stage in the Coliseum along with the other people who were going to be there and speak such as Averell Harriman and DeSapio and Mike Prendergast and all of those who may have something to say in one way or another. I was represented in this group. Obviously I didn't speak, I simply sat there as a symbol. But we wanted Mrs. Roosevelt and Governor Lehman each to say something, not any great long speech, but to say something. This seemed to me a quite reasonable request.

Well, Kennedy came to New York in the morning and was going to leave that night and go to Connecticut, and then the day after that was the election. The regular Democratic party forces scheduled him in such a way--I don't know who was doing the scheduling at that point for Kennedy but they succeeded in scheduling him in such a way that he was delayed on Long Island. And it rained and some other things. And it was difficult for, we had the.... The business of appeal goes like this: We went first to Bill Walton and told him what we wanted, he was all for it; he and I talked to Bobby Kennedy on the telephone, he was all for it; we told DeSapio this and DeSapio said, "Well, is it or isn't it the candidate's wishes that this be done, or is it Robert Kennedy's wishes?" and we had Robert Kennedy call DeSapio to tell him that. We thought we had that commitment but there seemed still to be a question whether or not they were going to be allowed to speak, they were going to be allowed to be present but whether they'd be allowed to speak.

Well, this seemed to me to be pretty small potatoes at this point to, at the end of the campaign and so on, to prevent.... The reason was, well the obvious reason was the leaders of the Democratic party,

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represented by DeSapio and Prendergast at that point, wanted to project to the world in this rally that this was their show in New York and that they had produced and that was it before the election, the day before the election. And we seemed still to be having difficulty about whether or not they were--and Senator Lehman and Mrs. Roosevelt did not want to be present if they were not going to speak. So we finally at the breakfast where we raised money for the president just before the election, we--Bill Walton and Justin Feldman and I--went with the president into another room after we'd had the breakfast meeting and called DeSapio on the phone and the president told him that he wanted Mrs. Roosevelt and Governor Lehman to be there and to speak and that he assumed that this had all now been done since he sent word. DeSapio agreed to that. Since this was the candidate's wishes there was no further choice in the matter.

Then the day progresses and the delays are invoked and he is left more and more out on Long Island and coming down through the reaches of Brooklyn and Queens and so on, to the Biltmore Hotel in New York where he arrived quite late. And he was taken straight to the Coliseum where he was to speak.

After he had spoken--I believe Lyndon Johnson spoke first, then the president spoke; Lyndon Johnson was with him at that time, traveling with him--they left the stage and they stopped to shake hands with Mrs. Roosevelt and Governor Lehman. And they received something of a frigid reception in that Governor Lehman said to Senator Kennedy at that point, "Senator, I have never had the word of a colleague broken before." And Kennedy didn't know what he was talking about; he had arrived late and thought that everybody had already spoken and so on and he didn't know what this was about. And he said something to him, "Well, I want to talk to you later about it." But Kennedy went out and got into the car and went back to the hotel. No, they didn't go back to the hotel; they went to a rally on the West Side, which had been held up for seven or eight hours.

MOSS: Yeah, the 90<sup>th</sup> Street rally.

AKERS: The 90<sup>th</sup> Street rally which had been held up for seven to eight hours because of delays that had been done along the way. And this was a rally of the reform group. Bill Ryan [William Fitts Ryan] was congressional candidate. It was the first time he was elected to Congress. Governor Lehman was there, I was there and some others. Governor Lehman stayed quite late and then left.

Kennedy was furious about this, of course, when he learned what had transpired. He told Bill Walton that this had finally finished him with the leadership in the Democratic party in New York. And it transpired thereafter that I think this was the turning point for DeSapio, that he really had no leadership really left after that because the man who

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had been elected president had been put in this position and similar positions along the way.

It demonstrates a lack of political finesse on the part of the leadership. Under different circumstances they would have had a much better go at whatever took place after the election of the president in 1960.

MOSS: If they hadn't been so small about it and been....

AKERS: Well, if they had not euchred themselves, as it were, out--completely out into left field is what happened.

MOSS: All right. Let's go to the election itself. You have John Kennedy elected. What are your prospects? What do you know of your prospects at that point? Did you have any prior indication that you would be appointed to a diplomatic post or were there some other things that you were looking for?

AKERS: No. I had no prior indication of any kind. I never asked for anything. I'm quite certain in my own mind that nobody else had any commitments from Kennedy with reference to various kinds of appointments. I just don't remember.

MOSS: Was there anything that you were particularly interested in?

AKERS: Well, I was interested in the diplomatic framework. I'd been deputy under secretary of Air Force during the Korean War and I had been deputy for international negotiations. I had been working closely with two representatives of the State Department and with the heads of missions in the field around the Mediterranean area. In the Korean War, we had all the bases we needed in the Pacific by virtue of conquests in World War II and so on, but we did not have.... If you recall, there were no intercontinental ballistic missiles at that point. There were no refueling stations. We needed radar sites. We needed overflight rights. We needed air bases, navy bases, army bases in case we had to go against the Russians--which, thank God, we never did.

But, this whole frame of reference caused me to become quite interested in the diplomatic field. I felt after the campaign was over with that if I were to do anything with the administration I would be interested in something with the State Department in one way or another. I can tell you also that a difficult time came upon me about two or three days, no, it was more than that, about a week after the election. I had been through a tremendous amount of energy and effort, as everybody does in a campaign. I was tired and fatigued and hadn't had enough sleep and a lot of other things. My wife and I went to Tucson, Arizona, for a vacation and I woke up in the middle of the night, the first night we were there, with a serious heart attack. So there was a time

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when I was recovering from that, right after the election all the way through until, well, I was pretty much over it by ninety days or so. But those were, as you recall, the critical days when the administration was being formed and the assignments were being given. I wasn't sure at any given point along the way until I got my check-out from the doctors about ninety days later that I would take any job at all. So some of the delay and some of the confusion right in the beginning with reference to myself was related to that aspect of it.

MOSS: When did you first hear of the possibility of the New Zealand post and under what circumstances did you hear of it?

AKERS: Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan], who to my mind was an ideal individual to have in the job of personnel management and so on for the administration called me. Now let's see. After I had recovered, and this of course was later on after the inauguration and things like that--although I was down at the inauguration, I was just barely there--but after I had my check-out from the doctor, I went to see Ralph Dungan, talked to him about assignments. And he was aware of what had, I told him what had happened to me and so on. And I got a telephone call from him not too many days thereafter asking me if I wanted to go to New Zealand. [Interruption]

MOSS: All right. We were talking about your appointment and the role of Ralph Dungan

and so on.

AKERS: Yes. Well, he asked me if I wanted to go to New Zealand as ambassador. I said that, as I said before, I had certain commitments with a newly formed law firm that wasn't very old at this point. I'd think quite a while before I'd detach myself suddenly from this. Also I wanted to talk to my wife and my children who were at certain school age, and things like that, which I did. We decided after a few days that it would be an interesting mission to do, and I accepted and we were on our way. This was, I believe, in, by then, June of 1961.

MOSS: Yes. Yes. All right. What sort of briefing did you have before you went? Who was clueing you in as to the U.S. policy position and so on?

AKERS: Well, of course, I met with secretary of state, Mr. Rusk [Dean Rusk]; I met with George McGhee [George C. McGhee] who was policy planning at State at that point; I met with Under Secretary Chester Bowles [Chester B. Bowles] and with the assistant secretary of state for Far East and, of course, with the desk people, the New Zealand desk and so on. As you probably know, New Zealand is not a country in which we have ongoing crises. It's a very friendly country toward us, very well disposed toward us. We are a member with them, with New Zealand and Australia, in the ANZUS

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[Tripartite Security Pact] framework, and, of course, they are and have been along with Australia for years partners in SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization]. Their government is, you know, a commonwealth government, a parliamentary form of government, a very democratic form of government, and they are very, very well disposed toward the United States. So I did not go there with the idea that we would have ongoing problems.

The item on the agenda when I went to that part of the world was to get the ANZUS partners, Australia and New Zealand--Australia at that point did not have an ambassador and that ambassadorship was left open for some time until it was filled several months later--but the item on the agenda was to get the countries and nations in that region of the world to participate in a framework of endeavor in Vietnam that would give multilateral involvement. In other words there was a problem in the region and the nations around the problem should have an ongoing continuing day-to-day interest in the problem, and to get them to be present, to fly their flags, to send advisory personnel and to help us in what we were doing there then, which was in the advisory stage, as you recall.

MOSS: How was this put to you, as an attempt to diversify and share the American commitment or to awaken the people of the area to what was manifestly their responsibility?

AKERS: It was put to us briefly in the following ways. We wanted to have the nations in the area perform the roles of interested neighbors, whatever those roles might be,

to fulfill the role of.... We have a problem in the region and we ought to solve it in the region. Of course those nations that were closer to Southeast Asia were the ones that were more important. Those who were on the periphery also had importance. Since we had an alliance already under the ANZUS framework, it was logical that such nations should participate in an advisory capacity, flying the flag, sending up engineering teams, various kinds of participation that they finally did. Understandable neither New Zealand nor Australia were anxious to do this. It was not that they were wholly removed from the problems at all. They were in the region, there's no question about that. But they obviously would have certain kinds of problems domestically the minute they started making commitments in a foreign country.

MOSS: They were a little bit disturbed--I think I understood from the cables and so on--over the use of SEATO as a counterinsurgency vehicle, that SEATO was designed to do something else really, from their point of view, to combat overt aggression instead of indigenous wars and this kind of thing.

AKERS: Well, yes, they had that objection. I think it was a reasonable one.

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MOSS: How sticky were they on this? How much did they push it?

AKERS: Well, I don't think that.... This particular thing did bother them all the way through. It bothered all the members of SEATO. SEATO was not necessarily established for this purpose. France finally withdrew from SEATO as you know, or never attended, didn't withdraw, but never attended the meetings and so on. I think the considerations that were more important to them were the logical, natural considerations that would flow from making any kind of commitment, no matter how large or how small, in the commitment of manpower to any overseas ventures. And they were right in their reluctance and in their caution.

MOSS: They did send a contingent in when the Laos thing flared up. They sent a contingent to Thailand.

AKERS: Yes they did. They sent a contingent to Thailand, an air arm to Thailand with some limited number of personnel. And this was helpful. Wherever we may be involved in the world, it's always helpful to have the nations in that region multilaterally involved with us. This is simply a course of logic.

MOSS: I have a thirty-man special air service unit, three Bristol transport air craft and a frigate was offered but not needed.

AKERS: Right. These are ostensibly token forces. The symbolic role was more important.

MOSS: One of the problems that I noted was that New Zealand very much wanted to get

into the transpacific air route business and that this gave us some problems with the CAB [Civil Aeronautics Board] and with Pan Am [Pan American World Airways] and TTAA [Trans World Airlines Inc.] and I guess Northwest Orient Airlines by that time.

AKERS: Yeah. All of the smaller countries in the world--not all of them but many of them--want airlines, want their flag line, and they want choice routes, to trade off the choice routes and things like that. Some of them are capable of manning and supporting a flag service, a national airlines, some of them are not. New Zealand was capable of supporting a small enterprise--an international airline that would and did prove feasible. They wanted certain rights and we wanted certain rights and these things always have to be traded off, and these are questions that are usually high up on the agenda. They are either that or they are postponed completely.

MOSS: Yes. Yes.

AKERS: I think they finally now have resolved their airline relationship with us.

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MOSS: I noticed another concern was the question of Japanese wanting foreign representation in Western Samoa. New Zealand evidently guards for Western Samoa diplomatically.

AKERS: They do.

MOSS: And we were very worried that the Japanese representative would be a thin edge of the wedge in the Western Pacific for all kinds of things, the Chinese...

AKERS: Right.

MOSS: ... the Russians and so on.

AKERS: Right. The Russians, the Chinese, others might....

MOSS: Particularly with that area of the Pacific being a target area for missile tests.

AKERS: Nuclear missile tests.

MOSS: Right.

AKERS: And of course we had problems with that too in New Zealand. As a matter of fact, in New Zealand many people saw some of our--over the horizon they saw the flare, some of the light in the sky of some of our atomic testing. So that gets rather close when you can see it like an Aurora-Borealis in the vast Pacific distances.

It created some problems for us but they didn't last that long. Yes, that was a concern and a problem that I think was resolved finally.

MOSS: Without any trouble. What about the story of the Air Force trying to put a U-2 into Christ Church, wasn't it. When you were first over there--oh, about September I guess--a cable came back and you said that the Air Force was intending to bring a U-2 in and that we had no existing agreement with New Zealand on this kind of thing and we better watch our step. Do you recall that?

AKERS: Yes. I do recall it. I don't recall the details of it. It did not create any great flurry or problem for us because it simply wasn't done.

MOSS: Let me come back to the Vietnam thing a minute or two. With all the current furor and *The Pentagon Papers* and so on, was there any conscientious effort by the New Zealanders to press for a different kind of policy than the United States seemed to be pursuing in 1961 and '62? Or was the extent of it realized at that time?

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AKERS: No. I've already emphasized their reasoned caution and reluctance about participation in Vietnam. One of the things that I did.... And it must be recalled that at that time we were not, there were no Americans fighting in Vietnam, there were no Americans being killed in Vietnam. We had advisory personnel there at that point, and we were trying to help the Vietnamese build themselves up as much as possible and trying to give them some guidance and direction in their efforts. Now this is an entirely different proposition than we came into later on in 1965 after Johnson took office and made the major commitment of troops for which history will judge him one way or another.

I spent a great deal of my first year in New Zealand.... New Zealand has about ten major cities. It doesn't have a large population. It has a very good communications network land system and so on, good press. I spent about, I spoke at least in fifteen different forums about what we were doing in Vietnam to explain what we were doing and what we were trying to do at that time which was a much lesser thing than Vietnam later became. At that time we were still in the advisory capacity stage. One of the roles I fulfilled there was to explain to the people of New Zealand generally, the public through the press and other media, what it was, what our limited aims were.

MOSS: Yes. I have two items here that come from the papers. There's one that's intriguing.... Wait a minute, let me put this new tape on.

[END SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

MOSS: All right. There's one item that I found. It was a handwritten note of yours dated

10 April 1962 to Evelyn Lincoln, and it reads: "Dear Mrs. Lincoln, would you be good enough to give the enclosed card to the President, and to say that this seemed to be the only way to relay the message to him without involving others along the way.

AKERS: That's it.

MOSS: It's just there by itself. The enclosed card is not there and it's the kind of thing that just aggravates, you know. You don't know quite what it is. Do you recall what it might be?

AKERS: No, I don't recall.

MOSS: Okay. All right. Well the second one that I'm going to ask about obviously involves the question of what you are to do next after New Zealand.

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AKERS: Yes. You might want, before we leave maybe, talk about the Common Market spectre.

MOSS: Yes.

AKERS: When I first went to New Zealand in a 1961, the United Kingdom was about to, was contemplating whether or not to go into Common Market.

MOSS: This was before de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle] pulled the rug out.

AKERS: Before de Gaulle pulled the rug out. And it appeared that it might come off, and there was a tremendous amount of press discussion on both sides of the Atlantic, Pacific and everywhere. It would have been a momentous step had it been done, of course. New Zealand was in a particular position vis-a-vis all of this because unless they had some special framework arrived at before such a thing were done, they would really be left out in the cold with reference to their--ninety percent, of their overseas exchange comes from agricultural products: beef, veal, lamb, butter, wool, whatever, from United Kingdom, which has a special relationship with New Zealand for agricultural products. Now it would be very difficult for the United Kingdom as a member of the Common Market.... Well, it would be difficult for New Zealand when the United Kingdom was a member of the Common Market to go through that barrier of the Common Market and then sell, having shipped it halfway around the world competing with the Germans and the French and other things, the Danes, the Belgians in some cases, and others in agricultural products. They simply couldn't do it. So, unless there were some special relationship worked out for New Zealand vis-a-vis the Common Market entry problem, they would have been in great economic trouble they thought, on the South Pacific. They would be in dire trouble economically. This was very much on the agenda when I went out there, and

they were concerned with it all the way through, and there was.... New Zealanders are very circumspect in their reactions publicly to things, but there was an audible sigh of relief of certain kinds went out when de Gaulle did slam the door and they did not go in the Common Market. Now, of course, currently they're going through the same thing.

MOSS: Right. Right. Of course this was on the agenda when Holyoake [Keith Jacka Holyoake] came through and visited.

AKERS: Yes. Yes, it was.

MOSS: Both the first time and then after his visit to London to talk with the British.

AKERS: Yes, Yes.

MOSS: Let me ask you then about your coming back. Do You want to talk about that at all?

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AKERS: Yes. Yes. I came back in 1963, in August, I believe I left New Zealand or early September. I've forgotten.

MOSS: I have the resignation being accepted in July, so August sounds good.

AKERS: August, yes. And I was ordered back to take over the job of chief of protocol from Angie Biddle Duke [Angier Biddle Duke]. He was going to a European embassy. On the way back we were delayed somewhat in Hawaii because my wife was ill there--had the measles of all things for a while, a rather serious case of the measles. We got back and I then went to Washington two or three times and had long conversations with Angie about taking over the role that he was playing. We were going to meet with the president when he got back from Dallas, some reasonable time after he got back from Dallas, and then the switchover would be at the first of the year. December 31 Angie would leave his job and I would take over the job of chief of protocol. Of course, the president did not get back from Dallas and that went by the boards. I wasn't anxious to do the job of chief of protocol in the first place. I preferred to go to another post, but was delighted to do the job for Kennedy, and I simply did not follow up on that end afterwards.

Obviously and ostensibly this is a job that has a very daily close association with the president, and he would want his own man and that is what transpired.

MOSS: All right. Well after the assassination then, what do you do? Go back to the law practice?

AKERS: I went back to the law.

MOSS: And when Robert Kennedy began to run for the presidency, first for senator and then for presidency, how did you get involved in this? What did you do in the senate thing?

AKERS: Well, I was involved in Robert Kennedy's campaign first through.... He was not a resident of New York as you remember, and this caused a problem for him in the campaign. But I and Sam Stratton [Samuel S. Stratton] and Paul O'Dwyer [P. Paul O'Dwyer] and Louis Nizer--I don't know how many others--but there were several of us who were seeking the nomination for the Senate from New York that year. And of course the convention is the vehicle under which this nomination is arrived at. As soon as Robert Kennedy.... As soon as there was discussion of his possible role seeking this nomination, I told him that I would be glad to support him all the way through for it, but I did not make this a public statement until an appropriate time along the way, which was some time before the convention--I've forgotten how many days or so before the convention. But it was more effective and appropriate to do it at a certain time and so it was done that way. But he knew all along that I was for him and would support him all the way through.

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In retrospect, I did not have any very good prospect of getting the nomination. I don't know who would have gotten the nomination had not Kennedy come in. It suddenly became a very confused picture when he entered.

That is how I first came into his own Senate campaign. Then I was the working chairman of the lawyers' group for him in the Senate campaign. Then in his primary campaign for the presidency--his campaign in the primaries, that is--I helped him somewhat here in New York in that primary in the initial stages. Before that ever came off, I went off to Oregon to do a little trouble-shooting for him up there. I went back through California and he was in California at the time and I left him quite a bit of material. I didn't have time to talk to him on Oregon and what I had found in Oregon.

Then I had to come back. I was in the middle of law business again. I came back to New York and I was asked to go to California to help him in that set-up out there. I had a very minor role in California. Chuck Spalding [Charles Spalding] and I went out first as the advance people to work with Jess Unruh [Jesse M. Unruh] and his lieutenants. Chuck Spalding finally ended up in San Francisco, the northern part of California; I stayed in the southern part of California. Before we had gotten very far into the campaign in California, of course, Steve Smith came out and took over the entire direction of it--or the principal direction of it. We did various kinds of trouble-shooting roles in one sort or another.

MOSS: What particular problems did you have trying to put that California thing together? California, if anything, was even more confused than New York politically. They've got that CDC [California Democratic Council] and the regular crowd and Unruh.

AKERS: Well, I thought that I had seen problems in New York that were not to be solved, but there were plenty in California that were not to be solved, too. Unruh, of course, was speaker of the assembly and was a power at that point in California politics, and he was the campaign chairman. The CDC was the counterpart, shall we say, of the reform group in New York, and they were a very articulate and very energetic group. Some of them had valid claims on what they proposed, others did not. There were quite a few different kinds of problems, somewhat different in California than in New York.

But generally the campaign was a very difficult campaign. I'm not speaking principally from my role, but it was very difficult to reconcile the forces and get them to work, especially in a primary campaign. You see, if this were a general election it's one thing. We finally learned how to solve it in New York for general elections successfully, but in California in a primary campaign everybody wants to hold back and

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see who is moving ahead, and the CDC wants to form a special independent group, and the regulars don't want them to do that, and it's the same kind of thing we went through. We finally ended by not forming any special independent group in California as we did in New York. But the same problems existed, comparable problems existed, plus various kinds of minority problems in California--the Black community and the Chicano community and so on.

MOSS: You did start setting up some special groups though, didn't you, did you not?

AKERS: We set up special groups within some of the Chicano groups and the Mexican-American groups and the Black community groups. We did set up special groups in both Northern and Southern California, some of which were fairly successful and some were not. But the CDC posture was that Unruh was doing all the things that he was doing in order to further his options and potential for upcoming governor race against Reagan [Ronald W. Reagan]. The regulars felt that the CDC wanted to start groups in order to oppose Unruh in the gubernatorial primary. This went on and on and on. Lots of discord and lack of harmony and things like that, but we finally got them all to work enough together down the line in order to prevail on election day, and after all that's what counts.

We didn't win by quite the number of percentage points we thought we would. I told Robert Kennedy, in riding to the airport one day with him, that he was going to win in California--we weren't sure by how many percentage points--and he looked rather quizzically at me and said, "I don't know how anybody could ever make that kind of statement." [Laughter] But we came out with a few percentage points ahead. We were up in his quarters on the night of the election returns, and I went down with him with one of the local leaders. We were in the Ambassador Hotel as everybody knows, I think, by now. And there were two auditoriums filled with people that night come to cheer Robert Kennedy on. And I might say, I have said previously that he had some problems in dealing with people as everybody does in politics, but I've never seen anyone, except his

brother, mature politically and grow as much in a short span of time as did Robert Kennedy in the last four years of his life or five.

With one of the other leaders, I went down with him--I didn't take him down--to the platform where he was going to address his first group--this was going to be on television. And we went down the back stairs sort of thing and through the kitchen in order to avoid the crowds out front and pragmatically just to get in the place. If you went the other way, you couldn't even get in, you'd be mobbed. So, we went to this kitchen area and I went up near the stage with him and left him on his way on up. It was a very small stage, it was not much bigger than this room we're in right now. And it was loaded with people; I mean, there were just hundreds

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of people wanting to be there with the candidate and television, you see. And I left him with the understanding that I was going to be on the other side of the stage and we were going to make a pathway for him to go down below through another entrance, sort of a back entrance to the auditorium below, as soon as he finished. Then he went on up on the stage and commenced.

And as soon as he was finished, of course, he was sort of mobbed again by the audience coming up and things like that all around him, he was trying to get off that stage. While he was doing that, one of the press people--I still don't know who it was, it was a local California man, I believe--said to him, "Senator, you have to go before the local working press now and talk to them for just a minute before you go down to the other auditorium." And he said, "How do I get to the local working press?" and they said, "Well right back through the kitchen the way you came." Now, we know what happened when he went back through the kitchen. We don't know what would have happened had he gone originally down through the path that we had opened just across the stage and that large welter of bodies on the other side.

So I was standing not too far away from him when he was shot, but I didn't see this. There were so many people in between and there was a kind of a stage curtain flapping and things like that that I didn't see it. I heard all of the commotion and so on, and Steve Smith suddenly appeared on the stage trying to get people out of the auditorium because at that point there was a lot of panic. I went alongside the stage trying to help him get all these people out so that we could clear the place out. And by the time I got back inside there he had already.... There were too many bodies, you just couldn't get through. I heard all these gun shots. They sounded like firecrackers or something and then there was pandemonium and people were screaming, bedlam, and we know all the rest of it. But, I think that we would have had a different country and a different world....

MOSS: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]

Accompanying Documentation:

August 12, 1974

CABLE SENT TO WASHINGTON FROM NEW ZEALAND BY AMBASSADOR ANTHONY B. AKERS DURING THE USSR-USA NUCLEAR CONFRONTATION OVER MISSILES IN CUBA.

Akers: As the nuclear confrontation between United States and the Soviet Union heated up I sat in the American Embassy in Wellington, New Zealand reading with great interest the incoming cables from Washington. There were two main types of incoming cables. The first was a series ordering all posts around the world to stop routine cable traffic and observe "cable silence" unless a very urgent or emergency message was required to be sent. The other type of cable was the ongoing reporting from the Secretary of State of the confrontation itself aimed particularly at instructing Ambassadors with reference to what was to be conveyed to each Foreign Office in the various countries of the world.

Information to be relayed to the Foreign Offices of friendly countries such as New Zealand was fairly comprehensive with reference to ongoing details of the confrontation. As I read the lengthy cable of instructions with care I was struck by a recurrent reference in the body of the cable; and, since I am a lawyer with some background in international law matters, this particular reference gave me considerable pause. The recurrent phrase related to the traditional manner of stopping the ships of an enemy, that is, to fire one or more shots across the bow of the vessel. Then, if the vessel does not stop, the vessel itself is taken under fire. It seemed clear to me that this was a practice that belonged to the gunboat era and not to the nuclear age. I could foresee a situation in which a United States Naval cruiser or destroyer would challenge a Soviet ship running the Cuban blockade. After firing two shots across the bow, and with no suitable response from the Soviet vessel, the United States ship would then sink or badly damage such Soviet vessel. This might provide the incident that would cause Soviet missiles to be launched against the USA, plunging the world into a nuclear holocaust.

As a PT-Boat Commander in World War II and as Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force during the Korean War I had some knowledge of various technical devices and of weapons systems used by the Navy and by the Air Force. It suddenly occurred to me that the Navy possessed one weapons system, when combined with a technical device which the Air Force had, might possibly stop a Soviet ship dead in its tracks without firing a shot or damaging the Soviet vessel or its personnel.

I was fortunate in the expertise which was at hand. Staying with me as overnight guests in the American Embassy were two Navy Admirals with distinguished backgrounds. Admiral David M. Tyree USN was the outgoing commander, United States Naval Support Force, Antarctica. Admiral James (?) Reedy USN was the incoming Commander of this Naval Support Force which was regularly based in New Zealand, and popularly known world-wide as "Operation Deep Freeze". Both Admirals Tyree and Reedy had broad backgrounds in naval and air warfare, in task force commands, in weapons systems and their intricate components, and in technical devices utilized by both naval and air arms in

such Systems. Admiral Tyree had formerly served as Director for Materiel in the Chief of Naval Operations Headquarters in Washington, and had also served as Superintendent of the Naval Gun Factory in Washington in addition to several seagoing commands of Aircraft Carrier Task Forces.

I sat down at once with the Admirals to explore further the idea which had come to me. If component X of a naval weapons system were combined with technical device Y from an air arm system could such combination be accomplished in such manner that its use would stop a Soviet ship dead in its tracks without damage to the vessel or loss of Soviet personnel? Both Admirals were in full agreement that this could be done. Although both Admirals and I were certain that the Navy possessed component X and that the air arm possessed technical device Y, I still had further questions which seemed to me most relevant. Would the Navy and the air arm already have thought of this combination and its use? Both Admirals assured me that this was not the case. Why, I asked? Because this simply was not the way things had been done in the past, and the tried and true manner of stopping an enemy ship was to fire warning shots across the bow, and if the vessel did not respond, then the vessel itself was taken under fire and destroyed. Would component X and technical device Y both be available readily on the east coast of the United States, for example, at the United States Naval Headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia? Undoubtedly so. Could a successful marriage of component X and technical device Y be achieved in, for example, a twenty hour period? And be utilized by the Navy air arm within another twenty-four hour period? Unquestionably, came the Admirals' answers.

The only remaining question then was one of policy. Was such an idea coming from the bottom of the world down in New Zealand important enough to break "cable silence", and to send an explanatory cable to Washington which was in the throes of the nuclear confrontation crisis? For guidance I polled several Foreign Service officers and the Deputy Chief of Mission who were sitting up with me long past midnight considering such a move. The two Admirals were also polled. All not only responded affirmatively but seemed anxious that such a cable be sent. The Embassy coding officer was called in and the message was sent on a highest priority basis.

I knew that President Kennedy would understand the proposal at once, because of his World War II background as a PT-Boat Commander. I also believed that such a method would appeal to him at once. I sensed that if the nuclear confrontation came to push-and-shove between United States ships and Soviet vessels, President Kennedy would take particular satisfaction in seeing Soviet vessels stopped dead in their tracks, unharmed, and floating idly and harmlessly in the Atlantic Ocean. I ordered the cable sent in such manner that the President and his Special Counsel, Theodore Sorensen, would have the opportunity to see it immediately.

Within twenty-four hours, however, the cables which were of lasting importance were those exchanged between Krushchev and Kennedy (although the earliest Krushchev cable was somewhat addled and rambling). We all know the satisfactory ending to the worlds first nuclear confrontation. Undoubtedly, however, Krushchev died never knowing that, had he pressed on, Soviet vessels might have floated idly and uselessly on the Atlantic Ocean, bound for Cuba, but going nowhere.

Signed,  
Anthony B. Akers

**Anthony B. Akers Oral History Transcript  
Name List**

John	Kennedy, John F.
Jacqueline	Kennedy, Jacqueline B.
General MacArthur	MacArthur, Douglas
Bulkeley	Bulkeley, John D.
President Quezon	Quezon, Manuel Luis
Lodge	Lodge, Henry Cabot
Bobby	Kennedy, Robert F.
Alfred	Smith, Alfred E.
Eisenhower	Eisenhower, Dwight D.
Stevenson	Stevenson, Adlai E.
Mrs. Roosevelt	Roosevelt, Eleanor R.
Cardinal Spellman	Spellman, Francis J.
Nick	Katzenbach, Nicholas deB.
Pell	Pell, Claiborne de Borda
Prendergast	Prendergast, Michael H.
Senator Lehman	Lehman, Herbert H.
Stuart	Symington, W. Stuart
Johnson	Johnson, Lyndon B.
Joe	Kennedy, Joseph P. Sr.
Charlie	Buckley, Charles A.
Wagner	Wagner, Robert F.
Ray	Jones, J. Raymond
Adam	Powell, Adam Clayton
DeSapio	DeSapio, Carmine G.
Will	Rogers, Will
Peter	Crotty, Peter J.
English	English, John
Bill	Walton, William
Steve	Smith, Stephen E.
Nixon	Nixon, Richard M.
Justin	Feldman, Justin
Tom	Finletter, Thomas K.
Franklin	Roosevelt, Franklin D. Jr.
Walter	Reuther, Walter
Byron	White, Byron R.
Averell	Harriman, W. Averell
Nelson	Rockefeller, Nelson A.
Edward	Weisl, Edward
Irvin	Engel, Irvin M.
Bob	Benjamin, Robert S.
Joseph	Baird, Joseph

Arthur	Krim, Arthur B.
Marietta	Tree, Marietta
Dorothy	Hirshhorn, Dorothy
Paul	Corbin, Paul
Harry	Truman, Harry S.
Abe	Ribicoff, Abraham A.
Kenny	O'Donnell, Kenneth P.
Bill	Ryan, William Fitts
Ralph	Dungan, Ralph A.
Mr. Rusk	Rusk, Dean
George	McGhee, George C.
Chester	Bowles, Chester B.
Evelyn	Lincoln, Evelyn
DeGaulle	DeGaulle, Charles A.
Holyoake	Holyoake, Keith Jacka
Angie	Duke, Angier Biddle
Sam	Stratton, Samuel S.
Paul	O'Dwyer, Peter Paul
Louis	Nizer, Louis
Chuck	Spalding, Charles
Jess	Unruh, Jesse M.
Reagan	Reagan, Ronald W.
Steve	Smith, Steve