

**Sean Lemass Oral History Interview – 8/8/1966**  
Administrative Information

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**Interviewer:** Joseph E. O'Connor  
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**Biographical Note**

Lemass, Prime Minister of Ireland from 1959 to 1966 discusses his impressions of President Kennedy, the 1963 visit to Ireland, Lemass' official visit to the United States, North Atlantic fisheries, the Irish-American vote, as well as his impressions of Robert and Edward Kennedy, among other issues.

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Sean Lemass

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Oral History Interview

With

SEAN LEMASS

August 8, 1966  
Dublin, Ireland

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

LEMASS: I met President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] on two occasions. I met him in 1953, but that was really just to shake hands with him, and later when he visited Ireland as President, and again later in that year when I, at his invitation, returned to the United States and spent some time in Washington. I gather from his biographers that President Kennedy was regarded generally as a man of extraordinarily lively mind, a man who was intensely interested in the current event, in the things he saw, in the people he met, in the things they said to him. And certainly this was the characteristic of him that struck me most forcefully immediately after I met him. He was continuously asking questions about everything he saw, inquiring about the people whom he'd been introduced to, allowing no statement which interested him to pass without requiring an elaboration of it. Even during our drive together after his arrival at the airport to the city of Dublin, up to the Aras an Uachtarain where he met the President, this type of conversation was going on all the time. He wanted an explanation of everything, and he was asking questions from an intense and lively interest. At first, I

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may say, I thought this was attributable to his interest in Ireland, to the emotional impact of his visiting Ireland as the first United States President ever to come here while in office, and as the first President of Irish ancestry ever to include Ireland in a state visit. But later on, I came to the conclusion that this was a natural characteristic of him; that this lively interest in

everything was something which he had all through his life. And certainly I encountered it again when I went back to Washington later in that year, and thought it was very natural on his home ground.

I thought that his visit to Ireland did mean something to him, something much beyond the political implications of the visit. Undoubtedly, he fully appreciated the significance, for his own political interests, of coming to Ireland. He, I think, reveled in the role of being the first United States President ever to come here, to be the first completely Irish-American President to be elected. But nevertheless, there was an emotional response, too, which I think was deeply personal. This, no doubt, was attributable to the fact that he was coming to Ireland, the country which, you know, his parents had come from, and his grandparents. He must have heard them talking about it in their homes. While it may not have had great political significance for him, nevertheless, it did, I think, have this emotional impact, as I said, this effect upon him, because he certainly spoke later very frequently about it, and some of his friends who were with him on the visit told me that they had to see the film of the visit on several occasions, as he would look at it again and again.

Well, there were occasions when it seemed to me that there was a certain calculation in his public comments upon the visit to Ireland and our discussion upon the world situation, which was a very general discussion because we don't have any great problems of foreign affairs, as it were, in that regard. He then revealed what were his most pressing concerns of that time. In my recollection, in our formal conversations, apart from the questions he was asking about affairs in Ireland, that he referred, particularly, to our participation in the United Nations operations in the Congo. The matters he spoke

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about most frequently at that time were, first of all, this French thesis that there should be a tripartite commission which would have the right to decide where atomic weapons would be used, anywhere in the world. His rejection of this thesis on purely practical grounds – it was quite unworkable. This worried him a bit, because the logic of the French argument was evident: If atomic weapons were to be used anywhere, the retaliation was going probably to be in Western Europe.

O'CONNOR: Sure, all countries would be affected by it.

LEMASS: Yes, and that, therefore, the people in Western Europe should have some say before the weapons were used. But, at the same time, he realized the impracticability of having a committee with powers in this manner, where action might be required in a very short moment; and, because of the bulk of the atomic power of the democracies in the hands of the United States, the only person who had, really should have, the effective power to take the final decision was the President of the United States of America. But the other one I think he referred to most frequently in our conversation was, at that time, the problem of international liquidity.

O'CONNOR: Oh yes, that problem bothered him.

LEMASS: He seemed worried about the drain of gold from the United States and the balance of payments.

O'CONNOR: Did he seem to know much about it?

LEMASS: This surprised me because it didn't occur to me that he was likely to be on par with some of the experts in this league, and perhaps he wasn't, but he certainly spoke about it often enough to show that this was something that was very much in the forefront of his mind. Not that he had any solution to the problem to present, but other than seeking ideas, how to put up with it was part of his problem, such that he continued to talk about it until he

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went home. However, I can't say that we had any very serious discussion about Irish-American relations. There weren't any problems between....

O'CONNOR: Not between Ireland and the United States.

LEMASS: I think he was very, very, very deeply moved by the warmth of the reception he got here. It wasn't so much the enthusiasm of the crowd, the cheers, the general outpouring of welcome to him as what he sensed in them, meaning that there was no political significance in this. They weren't beseeching anything from him; they weren't asking for anything; it was just enthusiasm for himself as a person. He broached it to me on one occasion when we were out in the streets. He said that he had addressed many large meetings in the United States, he was very well received and welcomed by enormous crowds in many United States cities, but that he always realized that half of those who were there were Republicans and had qualifications about him. But he sensed in the reception in Ireland that there was no such qualification.

He was, of course, intensely interested in his Irish ancestry. I think there was no question about this. At the dinner which I gave in his honor, and the State Department, at Dublin Castle, I presented him with a document which had been produced from.... Some time before that a great wealth of historical documents had been discovered in the Ormonde Castle in Kilkenny. Amongst the papers was the original treaty, made in the thirteenth century between the chief of the O'Kenedy's and Prince of Ormonde. And when we were considering what form of presentation we could make to President Kennedy, we decided that he should be presented with this document, the original of the treaty. He was intensely interested in it. And later on, when I was in Washington, I noticed that this treaty, which was framed in a leather case, was on the table behind his desk in the presidential office. Now it may have been put there especially for the occasion.

O'CONNOR: Yes, but he may have been interested...

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LEMASS: I think he was interested in this evidence that the O’Kenedy’s were a power in this land a couple hundred years before Columbus sailed to discover America. I had to warn him, of course, that the treaty, which was an agreement between the O’Kenedys and the Ormondes to stop raiding each other’s territories and stealing each other’s cattle and women and that sort of thing, but the O’Kenedys hadn’t kept it. In the following year, according to the history books, they had stormed the principal stronghold of the Earl of Ormonde in Tipperary. And I mentioned that some of his political opponents, as he recognized, would point it out again, the historical fact there, to the confusion of the Kennedys because of it. But all throughout the visit he was asking questions all of the time relating to the economy of the country, to the history of the localities we were in, to the particular problems, not in relation to the country, but in relation to each locality.

O’CONNOR: Did he show much sympathy for the problems that you talked about?

LEMASS: Yes, yes, in some respects. Mind you, he was, I’d say, in complete disagreement, expressed disagreement, with our efforts here to revive the Irish language.

O’CONNOR: He was?

LEMASS: Yes, to revive it.

O’CONNOR: Why was this?

LEMASS: He thought this was such a waste of national effort, and various efforts which we made to convince him that it was an important question of national revival involved in this which had its economic implication, although it wasn’t entirely related to economics, did not convince him altogether. Here’s a story I can remember also: During his address to the joint session of the Dail and Seanad, he used a phrase which was an extract from a letter written by

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Lord Edward Fitzgerald to the effect that nothing good ever came out of Leinster House. At that time, Leinster House was the town residence of the Fitzgerald family, and it’s now, of course, the seat of the Dail. Later on, we went up from the Dail to Aras an Uachtarain there, and President de Valera [Eamon de Valera] said to him that he had done no service to Irish politicians by this quotation. And I don’t know what he did, or how he did it, but it has disappeared completely. It hasn’t appeared in any of the records of the speech that have been published. It doesn’t even appear in the taped performance of the speech or in the film of the speech which was made simultaneously by Telefis Eireman. How he managed this complete suppression of this sentence, I do not know.

O’CONNOR: Why did he make that statement? Was that...

LEMASS: Well, his speech contained a number of historical references, quotations from various poems and statements, in passing, and no doubt this one appeared, in foresight, to be appropriate. And it would have been appropriate provided it had been elaborated a bit so that the Leinster House of 1963 was not the Leinster House of 1798, or whenever it was. But it was the speed with which he acted and the totality of the effect of his whole action in suppressing the statement that surprised me.

He was always interested in suitable quotations from poems or songs. He, of course, had “The Boys of Wexford” got by heart. And in that connection, shortly before his assassination, his sister, Mrs. Shriver [Eunice Kennedy Shriver], said she wanted to make a Christmas present to the President, and what she wanted was a recording of the song “The Boys of Wexford,” which I got for her and posted – I posted it actually on the day of his assassination. It was the indication of his interest in history, the form of historical recollection. At one dinner in Aras an Uachtarain, Mrs. de Valera [Sinead de Valera], who herself is capable of quoting almost any poem completely when the thought crossed her, had quoted to him this thing about Shannon, “To see old Shannon’s face again....” I forget now the full quotation. But he immediately started to write it down, wrote, and did, in fact,

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use it in his final speech at Shannon Airport. And the only thing in that regard was that he was a very bad handwriter. And when we were going down in the helicopter into Shannon, he produced this note he had made of this quotation, and there was one word on it he couldn’t make out.

O’CONNOR: It was his own handwriting?

LEMASS: His own writing. Nobody in the plane – I know, certainly I couldn’t read what it was, so we guessed; we filled in a word to suit the rhyme and the sense of the poem, and I think we did it wrong.

O’CONNOR: I’ll have to ask Mrs. de Valera about that.

LEMASS: When we were driving down from the American Embassy to the Dail.... Well, it wasn’t direct to the Dail. We first went to the Arbour Hill Memorial Garden where he laid a wreath on the graves of the 1916 leaders. I want you to understand that this was, itself, an event for us of great emotional significance. He was, I think, the first head of state ever to go through the ceremony of honoring the executive leaders of the 1916 rising. Many heads of state have done it since, but he was the first. The fact that he, as the President of the United States, the greatest nation in the world, or Irish origin, performed the ceremony had to have a tremendously emotional effect upon the Irish people. And he himself was intensely impressed with the ceremony. The Guard of Honour at the graveside was drawn from the Irish Army Cadet School, and these cadets went through a ceremonial drill which was very impressive. I know it certainly

impressed him, so much so that he asked immediately for the details of the drill, the film of the ceremony. He even asked them to do it all over again. He said that the formal drill used on these occasions in the United States was not very suitable. And as you know, when he died, his widow asked us to send this cadet contingent to the graveside at Arlington, which we did. This is in passing.

I was talking to him as we were coming down to deliver this address at that time. He had the script with him, and he was correcting the script as he drove along in the car, which

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I thought it was quite a performance because, of course, he was acknowledging the cheers of the crowds along the road and then reading and correcting the script at the same time. And I said to him I was interested in his performance because while I often, myself, in similar circumstances, make corrections in a script, going to a meeting at which I am going to make a speech, my trouble was that I can never make out my own handwriting, in many instances. And he said, "Neither can I." But he added, "This way, in the margin, it puts points in mind, and helps me to find the words that I want to use in addition to the script." He made quite a number of changes in the script in this manner, slicing out paragraphs, putting in additional...

O'CONNOR: Yes, he had a reputation for making changes right up to the last minute.

LEMASS: Well, he was doing it, and in his appalling handwriting which he couldn't understand, as I mentioned. Not even he could understand or read it. I remember going down to Galway, he wanted to use the quotation from the song "Come Back to Erin, Mavourneen, Mavourneen," and he knew the first two lines, "Come back to Erin, Mavourneen, Mavourneen. Come back again to the land of thy birth." And he asked me what went on after that, and I didn't know what went on after that. Nobody could help him from that on so that he had to provide a bit of it himself.

O'CONNOR: Even I know that.

LEMASS: Yes. Well, he had heard of these two lines, but none of us could, with any confidence anyway, tell him what went after it. It was this liking for using quotations of that kind in his speeches and this interest in principal characteristics. And that's why in this address which he made to the joint houses of our Parliament here there were quite a number of quotations, no doubt arranged by for his staff, but to which he must have applied some selection of his own.

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He was a man, of course, of a really lively sense of humor. This is not an exaggeration. No matter how serious the conversation is or solemn the occasion, in the end you would see bubbling up some humorous comment on it. He'd see some humor where others wouldn't see it, some situation which could be a cause of light comment in circumstances where other

people would be afraid to make a comment of that character. And he must have had, therefore, a very lively mind in all circumstances.

This I found, also, when I visited the United States afterwards. Again, notwithstanding all the solemnity of the reception service and the subsequent banquet and all the rest of it which was done with great ceremony, there was continuously coming from him lighthearted comments which made me feel very, very easy. On that occasion we proceeded, I know, along a corridor of the White House from the room where we assembled in solemn processional order down the stairs. But in the middle of the corridor he said, "By the way, have you seen Lincoln's bedroom?" And everyone stopped. The door to the bedroom was opened, but what he hadn't known was that his sister had been using the bedroom, and her underclothes [Laughter] all were scattered over the floor. To his office, he says, very hastily. But again, this was the type of situation you'd expect. And then the son, young John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.], came rushing out of another room with a lump of bread in his hand, again interrupting the ceremony of the proceedings – escaped from his nurse to be with his father. But nevertheless, the whole ceremony we went through, with all the traditional and appropriate...

O'CONNOR: Appropriate bits of protocol.

LEMASS: Guards and all this. At the dinner there was a pipe band which played a composition which had the fairly unlikely name of "President Kennedy's Salute to Minister Sean Lemass." I was somewhat appalled at this. I don't know what the original music was, but it was the name that always intrigued me. It was a very pretentious and long title.

O'CONNOR: "President Kennedy's Salute to Prime Minister Sean Lemass?"

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LEMASS: Yes. Everything really worked driving through Washington. It was this continuous flow of comment from him as he was driven along which I particularly remember. He was, I think, a little bit worried that I wouldn't get in Washington anything like the same turnout of people along the street for the ceremony there that he got in Dublin, and no doubt that this would have been so. But he apparently gave orders that all the Civil Service staffs in Washington were to take the morning off on condition that they be there. [Laughter] And there was quite a considerable turnout along the main thoroughfares. But this, I gathered, was contrived for me. There were, of course, a number of Irish people that came along officially to be received in the White House.

O'CONNOR: Surely, surely.

LEMASS: He, of course, was greatly handicapped by his physical problems. There are two occasions which I should mention. One was, while in Dublin, I noticed him coming down.... When I went up to see him in the American Embassy early in the morning for formal talks, you know, as he came down the

stairs, I noticed he came fairly heavily. His feet came fairly heavily on the steps as he came down as if he had some difficulty in walking down, whereas normally he liked to give the appearance of being agile and lightfooted.

But the second occasion was more pronounced still. And that was in Washington I arranged a reception to which he agreed to come. Many people were invited to come; there were a couple of thousand who were invited to the reception. Before the reception, he had brought to me a film in color of the ceremony earlier that morning on the White House lawn when I arrived which was shown in a special contraption. But while we were looking at this, he sort of, he got very uneasy, and I said, "Is there something the matter?" And he says, "My brace has become undone, and I have to retire." Obviously, he had to retire, and he rectified it. And then later on, as we were in the reception line, after a thousand or so had gone through, he said, "I can't stand this anymore; I have to break off." He,

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apparently, was enduring a great deal of pain while he was standing there receiving these people.

O'CONNOR: And yet his back was better than it had been years before.

LEMASS: That's right. Halfway through the reception, he had to call it off and go to another room there to wait. It is, of course, a tremendous physical strain to stand in a line receiving...

O'CONNOR: Shake hands.

LEMASS: Shake hands with everybody, and trying to say the appropriate words to them. But it was the pure physical pain caused by the exertion that required him to break it off. This must have been a real problem all his life. This constant source of pain.

O'CONNOR: Oh yes. It's amazing to think of a politician who has yet to shake thousands and thousands and thousands of hands and stand for such a long time to be able to do that with back problems. Did he ever talk to you in your discussions with him about some of the problems of Ireland such as – the major problem I can think of immediately is unification?

LEMASS: No, not really, in the sense of having any solution of our problems to offer. He was certainly interested in them and asked of them. Well, there was one situation which arose in that regard that I should mention. While we were in Washington, we discussed various forms of cooperation between the two countries, showing his desire to help us if there was any way in which we needed help. There wasn't anything that I could specifically suggest that was of great importance to us that was immediately preferable for him to do. But we did get on to discussing the question of the

development of fisheries in the North Atlantic. He was tremendously interested in the fisheries.

O'CONNOR: Did he offer that, or did you?

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LEMASS: No, he brought the subject up, and it arose out of his interest in the achievement of the Japanese in developing the fishing industry in the Pacific and his recognition that they were far ahead of the United States both in the systematic exploration of the fisheries and in the development of techniques for catching fish. And he felt that it was the duty of the United States to try to undertake a similar development in the North Atlantic where the fisheries, other than on the continental shelf, have not been explored at all. And he proposed that there should be a joint operation – the utilization of a number of research vessels between America and ourselves on this North Atlantic fishery exploration. He visualized these researches as being based in Irish ports in the North Atlantic, and a sharing of the knowledge which we got from them. And he said he would set this up. Now I gather that in the United States, it is not usual for ideas for action of this kind to come from the presidential office down to the administration. It usually comes the other way up, you see. And there was, perhaps, even a certain amount of resentment at this sort of presidential direction to do things which had not been fully thought out in the lower department. But nevertheless, subsequently, a team of American experts in fisheries came here and carried out a full survey of our fishing resources and potential and published a report which has been quite useful to us. But the exploration, the systematic exploration of the fisheries of the North Atlantic has never yet, so far as I know, taken place. It may be that there's an expert opinion that it's not worthwhile doing it, that the fish to be caught out in the deep waters, say, from the Atlantic are not edible or suitable, or they just don't exist.

O'CONNOR: Do you think there would still be enough communication to know whether it's going to take place or whether it has been decided not to take any action?

LEMASS: Well, in fact, we do ourselves a certain amount of fishing exploration, but it's confined to the inshore kind of fishing, to the continental shelf fisheries, which is our chief concern. But there was apparently some idea, in his mind anyway, that out in the deep part of the

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Atlantic, as there has been in the Pacific, there are commercially viable, exploitable fisheries. But as far as I know, the Americans have not done this themselves either, so this hasn't happened. It may be the equipment for doing this has not yet been developed. This was, I think I would say, the one practical measure that was under discussion in Washington, at that time. There were other inquiries that pertain to our more general activities, such as

scholarship exchanges, exchange of professors between Irish and American universities, and all that sort, but these had been more or less moving anyway.

O'CONNOR: But not much to do with increasing trade or anything?

LEMASS: You see, while undoubtedly we have a tremendous interest, in trade with the United States of America, we didn't feel, as I've suggested, there were specific changes in the United States policy which would benefit us, and which would benefit us exclusively, so far as the American market. And insofar as some problems of that kind had arisen, we had discussed them with the Department of Commerce, and arrangements were made in regard to them, and we didn't discuss them at all in the presidential office. Indeed, in our discussion in Washington, a very large part of it was confined to a recollection of the visit to Ireland, inquiries about the people he had met here, and about things he had seen in progress here, what had happened, and so on.

O'CONNOR: He must have enjoyed that a lot then.

LEMASS: Yes, as I have said, his visit to Ireland had a personal and an emotional significance for him which had nothing whatever to do with politics, nothing whatever to do with its possible effect upon his re-election as President or the interests of the Democratic Party. He told me that. I thought it surprising that he was convinced that in the election, when he was elected as president, he didn't get much more than 60 per cent of what would be called the Irish-American vote.

O'CONNOR: I wonder why.

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LEMASS: Well, he attributed this first of all to the, I suppose.... I think there was some opposition to him by the Catholic hierarchy in the United States of America, some anxiety on their part that a Catholic President would mean that the Catholic Church would be blamed for everything that went wrong during his term and, consequently, a desire, certainly, not to be associated with him and, in some instances, actual opposition.

And also a social phenomenon which was, I think, noticeable, a bit noticeable. Irishmen went originally to America, of course, as laborers, paupers of the lowest grade, taking any employment then, but as they moved up in the world, they tended to signalize their new social status by turning Republican. And that the American Irish have moved up sufficiently in the scale, indeed, so that not more than 50 per cent are still Democratic. Now, this may have been so upon his first election; I doubt that it would have been so if he'd been up for election again; I think he would have come out with a much higher percentage of support.

But I don't think he was, in any way, calculating upon the political consequence of his visit to Ireland. This may have been on his mind, but it wasn't very much on it. It's true I

said to him on one occasion when he was addressing some meeting, or traveling through some town, I said to him that probably everybody in that crowd had some relation in the United States of America and would be writing next week to report the fact that they'd seen the President.

O'CONNOR: It would have a tremendous effect.

LEMASS: That's right. And he said this was going to do him no harm at all. His extraordinarily easy style of speaking at public meetings also impressed me very much. He developed a technique of establishing a rapport with an audience which was extraordinarily effective. Personal identification with them was always so easily established.

O'CONNOR: It's a wonderful gift for a politician to have.

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LEMASS: Wonderful gift for a politician, that's so. While no doubt it was a technique in which he trained himself, it appeared to be so natural that there was no suggestion of artificiality about it at all.

O'CONNOR: Did you have any problems at all that came up of any sort in connection with his visit here? Problems of arranging things, problems of security, things like that?

LEMASS: Well, security was very largely taken care of by the American Secret Service.

O'CONNOR: This didn't cause any offense with the Department of External Affairs?

LEMASS: It didn't, no. Indeed, we were rather glad to have responsibility for the situation in their hands. No doubt there were the excessive, or what had seemed to us to be the excessive, security precautions taken. I'll relate a facetious comment. On television there was a musical ensemble immediately after he left. I don't recall now the title of it, but the catch-line was, "The men who looked after your man," which I haven't heard since, of course, as he died.

But there's something else I wanted to say in that regard. This security end of it appeared to worry him a bit. I noticed that on every occasion where he appeared in the presence of large crowds surrounded by the security people, he always made the gesture of breaking through the security guards, go out in the crowd, and shake hands with the people and meet them personally. And I can understand the logic in this because he didn't want to appear to be cut off from the people by this security guard, and, therefore, he demonstrated in this way that this was not of his wish, that he'd much rather be out there with them rather than protected behind the security. But they were naturally concerned, too. It was not so

much, I think, that they were worried about the danger of any hostile demonstration, but of over-enthusiasm. And I remember one occasion,

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when we were driving down to Galway, when he was standing in the car and shaking hands with people, they were particularly anxious to make sure that nobody held on too long because the car moving could seriously damage him.

O'CONNOR: Sure.

LEMASS: And they quite roughly, quite roughly, knocked away hands who were tending to hold on too long, either at risk to themselves, or particularly, at risk to him, to knocking him down. As we were driving out of Galway to Salt Hill, it was the end of June, and we had rather unseasonable weather. The weather was fine, but the wind had turned north, and there was quite a bite in the wind. And he said to me, "What's this place Salt Hill that we're going to?" This was where the helicopter was to take off for the next stage of the journey. I said, "It's a seaside resort." He said, "What people would bathe in the sea when..." This was a rather cold morning. He shivered at the prospect and said, "Only the Spartans would do it." But I never reported this down in Salt Hill because it would damage their publicity as a tourist resort. But it certainly struck me also as humorous because there was quite a cold morning with the sharp air, and the thought of getting into the Atlantic Ocean was not very encouraging. But, again, it was this type of spontaneous response to a situation, the constant asking questions, certainly lighthearted and occasionally humorous, would light on every comment, on any situation in general, which was certainly characteristic, as I remember him.

O'CONNOR: Did you meet any other people that were involved with the Kennedy regime or the Kennedy Administration?

LEMASS: Oh yes.

O'CONNOR: I'm sure you met many of them, but I wondered if you met any and had close contacts at all with...

LEMASS: Oh yes. Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen],

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O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell, Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger], they've all been here, and they came here fairly regularly, both while he was in office and since he was in office. I, of course, read the books on Kennedy by Sorensen and Schlesinger, both of whom were here – indeed, they both presented me with copies of their books – and others who were associated with him. I had a long talk with them. While, of course, they were not critical as far as President Kennedy was

concerned, I mean, they were just people who were completely dedicated to him and concerned to serve him. And the critics who must be there haven't yet started to express their criticism.

O'CONNOR: That will come eventually.

LEMASS: They'll come eventually, that's all.

O'CONNOR: You must also have met Robert Kennedy, and I was wondering how....

LEMASS: Yes, I'd met him on a number of occasions. He's been here, and I met him again in New York last year, and all the Kennedy family, when I went over for the visit of Pope Paul [Pope Paul VI]...

O'CONNOR: Oh yes, oh yes.

LEMASS: ...in the United Nations. I met them all on that occasion.

O'CONNOR: I wonder if you'd care to comment on the differences, perhaps, between Robert and John.

LEMASS: Yes, well, I don't know. I should say Robert Kennedy is probably a much more energetic person. That's the impression he gave. A man who is perhaps a little more decisive. I don't know whether President Kennedy was decisive in the sense that having made up his mind on something, he made absolutely sure that it was done. Robert Kennedy certainly gave me the impression that he was this type. The type of man that, having decided that something was the right thing to do, would brush aside all opposition and see that it was done. President John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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didn't give me quite this impression. I should say a main interest in his life was to make politics something more than the business of professional politicians and of enlisting into politics people who were not known in all the public sense – intellectuals, thinkers of one sort or another – to try to give them to understand that any ideas that they might develop bearing in any respect upon the community interests would be received in the White House and be considered in the White House. And he had this wider field of intellectual interests, whereas I'd say Robert Kennedy was almost completely the political executive, the man who was concerned only with the exercise of political power. Now this may be a superficial judgment, but it is the impression that set with me.

O'CONNOR: Yes, yes.

LEMASS: Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy], the younger brother, also struck

me as a man who's far more like John Fitzgerald Kennedy in this regard.

O'CONNOR: Everyone says that.

LEMASS: Yes, capable of these wider intellectual interests and this effort to link up these intellectual interests with the business of political power.

O'CONNOR: There is the same comment I've heard again and again, that there is a great similarity between Ted and John Kennedy.

LEMASS: I think this is so.

O'CONNOR: Robert Kennedy is a different personality altogether.

LEMASS: A different personality altogether – different and far more aggressive personality, I'd say, too. I'd say the type of man who just didn't like opposition and would make up his mind that something was the right thing to do and go ahead and do it no matter who got in the way, and that would have to be the way it would be. He wouldn't be afraid of it, and that's what he would do. They

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say in order to be a good politician, one has to be capable of losing his temper. I'd say Robert Kennedy has this highly developed. [Laughter]

O'CONNOR: You think he could lose his temper?

LEMASS: I think he could lose his temper, and do so far more quickly than either John Fitzgerald Kennedy or Ted.

O'CONNOR: Yes, oh yes.

LEMASS: They say this is a necessary qualification, you see, it's only when you have this capacity....

O'CONNOR: It may come in handy in a few years. Yes, that's so. Can you think of any instances – now this is something that you might not be able to think of, but any instances during the administration of John Kennedy where Irish and American policy were in particular conflict, or especially close.

LEMASS: I don't think so. You understand, we're a European country and were naturally, therefore, concerned with the European approach to matters that could arise in discussion between Europe and the United States in context of defense between Europe and the United States in context of defense and every

aspect of our foreign or economic policy. I was in Germany when the Cuban crisis blew up. I was, in fact, in conference with Konrad Chancellor Adenauer when a messenger brought him a paper he read, and of which he informed me, that the announcement had been made of the intention of the President to initiate the blockade of Cuba. And everybody, of course, wondered what the consequence was going to be, whether we were on the verge of nuclear war or what there would be – how the Russians would retaliate, as it was assumed they would, to this action. My immediate concern here was that I was due to leave for Berlin the next day.

O'CONNOR: [Laughter] That's the worst place in the world to go.

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LEMASS: He agreed that a likely Russian reaction would be a blockade of Berlin. I went on to Berlin and talked with him later about what happened. While I had been assured by Chancellor Adenauer that the danger was not very great, whatever information he had gotten, he didn't think I should go on to Berlin without his approval and was greatly concerned about my intention to enter. But at that time, I must confess that we were gravely concerned whether this situation in Cuba was going to involve the atomic holocaust of an attack on Western Europe. But surprisingly enough, I found not only was Adenauer completely sympathetic to the U.S. position but convinced that vigorous action ought to be taken by the U.S. government. And he told me that the United States should be generally supported in those actions, and that General de Gaulle's [Charles de Gaulle] reactions were even stronger. The General felt that Kennedy hadn't gone far enough, that if he had been there, he would have sent in the troops. There was this sort of strong immediate support which Kennedy got from these two powers in Europe and must have been a great encouragement to him.

O'CONNOR: Yes, indeed.

LEMASS: Now, I'd say we were naturally concerned very much about the development of United States policy at that time, but only insofar as it appeared to affect the situation in Europe and our object to become a member of the European Economic Community. They had turned down the British and Irish bid for membership. Our trade with Britain is so substantial, and we couldn't move much until Britain had moved, but all the time it seemed to me that the United States government were pressing for the solution that we wanted. We will be discussing in the next few months trade in the context of the Kennedy Round of tariff reductions and the negotiations with GATT [General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs] – trade matters of various kinds. And again, there may be some minor conflicts between our position as a European country in the European market and the Americans who are anxious, naturally, to open up that market for various prospects and to exploit it. But this is not serious at all.

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O'CONNOR: What was an area of cooperation, for example? I was thinking not only of conflicts but of cooperation, in that light specifically of the U.N. Can you think of any instances where American policy and Irish policy were in conflict?

LEMASS: Well, by and large, in the United Nations we had been able always to act in concert with the United States. A couple of cases where we didn't: One was the question of the vote on the discussion in the Assembly on the admission of China where the United States didn't want it, was against discussion. We voted in favor of the general discussion on the general principle that where any situation of major importance arose, the right of the Assembly to discuss should be asserted, and this should not be frustrated by any power. But we hadn't – we were really concerned with the right of the Assembly to discuss, not with the question of the admission of China, which was not at issue at that time. And here, again, I think that our view would be that United States policy was wrong, or has been wrong up to the present. I think there is some sign of change now. The effort should be to bring China into some sort of relationship with the rest of the world.

In other cases, we were always, I think, in conformity with the United States. I can think of one occasion when the question of Kashmir was at issue. We were a member of the Security Council at the time, and there was a resolution before the Council dealing with Kashmir which, for reasons of her own policy, the United States was anxious to get discharged and get it off the agenda of the Security Council. They asked us to...

O'CONNOR: Now who was anxious to get it discharged?

LEMASS: The United States government.

O'CONNOR: I see.

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LEMASS: To get this resolution off the agenda, swiftly. So they asked us to propose a resolution which was directed to this end, to close the issue in the Council, by just asking the two countries to consider the problems, the two of them together. Initially, this was sponsored by five other countries as well as ourselves, but the Indian government objected very strongly to it. And they exercised all the pressure they could, to prevent it being put forward. One by one the other co-sponsors dropped out. We were left alone with the resolution. The reason the Indian government wanted to prevent the resolution being moved was because they knew that it would be vetoed by the Russians, and they didn't want to be saved by a Russian veto. But at the request of the United States government, we persisted with the resolution. One by one all the other sponsors had disappeared under the Indian pressure. And the inevitable happened. The resolution was put to a vote, and vetoed by the Russian government. This mixed up our relationship with the Indians for a time.

O'CONNOR: I can imagine.

LEMASS: But the President of India has visited here since, and our relations have been restored and are normal, accordingly.

O'CONNOR: In politics, if our policy is always domestic policy, when one country or one man does you a favor, you think there's a favor in return. Was there any certain horsetrading in this business at all?

LEMASS: I didn't follow that.

O'CONNOR: Well, when one country does you a favor, usually you do them a favor in return. And I wondered if there was any connection with this.

LEMASS: No. And indeed our attitude in the United Nations is not along this line. We, as a country which is not a member of any political grouping at all,

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have regarded our position as one which required us to act upon the merits of a proposition without seeking any compensation at all. This is the one service we can render in the United Nations.

O'CONNOR: That's a position unique in the United Nations.

LEMASS: Yes, where group positions are regarded as important. I suppose we have some influence with the newly free countries of Africa and Asia because our being the first of the small countries to win freedom in this century, and they look to us to some extent for advice, anyway, upon these problems, which we always give in favor of this course of action on establishing the principle of the thing and adhere to these principles irrespective of the current political interests of any of the greater powers.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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