

*The*  
PRESIDENTIAL  
RECORDINGS  
  
JOHN F. KENNEDY

➔➔➔➔ *THE GREAT CRISES, VOLUME TWO* ➔➔➔➔

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SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 21, 1962

Timothy Naftali and Philip Zelikow  
*Editors, Volume Two*

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Ernest May

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Patricia Dunn  
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Philip Zelikow and Ernest May  
*General Editors*



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ments were the same as those Eisenhower had signed in 1957 in the Little Rock case. Schlei said they were, noting the wording had been improved. As Schlei prepared to leave, Kennedy tapped the table, pointing out that it had belonged to General Ulysses S. Grant. Not wanting to antagonize the South, Kennedy advised Schlei not to mention Grant's table to the press.

The South was already agitated. As Kennedy directed the drawing up of the proclamation, Governor Barnett attended an Ole Miss football game at Jackson Memorial Stadium, where 46,000 fans cheered not only for their beloved university against the Kentucky Wildcats but also for their Governor. It was then that Barnett, responding to the chant of "We want Ross," strode onto the floodlit field, stepped to the microphone, and declared, "I love Mississippi. I love her people. I love our customs."

Just after midnight, President Kennedy went to sleep. The crisis he had predicted that fall was starting, but it was starting in Oxford, Mississippi, not West Berlin.

### **Sunday, September 30—Monday, October 1, 1962**

After attending mass at St. Stephen's Church, the President hosted a lunch for the British foreign secretary, Lord Home, at the White House. The Anglo-American agenda was full. But Berlin, the Congo, and Cuba dominated the conversation. The discussion continued for a while after lunch.

For the moment, Mississippi was the most dangerous place in the world for the federal government. After the British delegation left, Kennedy turned his principal attention to the problem of safely registering an African American, James Meredith, at the all-white University of Mississippi in Oxford. Governor Barnett had come up with a new plan for ending this stalemate peacefully. He proposed that Meredith be brought to the campus surrounded by a large group of federal agents. Barnett was looking for a dramatic way to save face. The defenders of a white Ole Miss would attempt to stare down Meredith but would then retreat in the face of a much larger force. The Attorney General, to whom the Governor had suggested the "show of force" scheme, turned it down. Robert Kennedy then threatened Barnett with making public that the Governor had been negotiating with the Kennedy brothers behind the backs of the segregationists. The Attorney General's threat resulted in a new Barnett scheme. He suggested that the federal government sneak Meredith onto the campus that afternoon. Barnett would then announce in a speech that he had

been tricked and Meredith was on campus. The President and Robert Kennedy preferred this plan. At 6:00 P.M., James Meredith flew into Oxford accompanied by some Justice Department officials. Before his arrival, a force of 300 U.S. marshals had assembled around the Lyceum, the main administration building on campus. The deputy attorney general, Nicholas Katzenbach, who was in charge of operations on the campus, had expected that Meredith would be able to register that day. But this was impossible. So, as Governor Barnett issued a press release that Meredith was on campus, U.S. marshals remained posted around the Lyceum, while some distance away, in the dormitory Baxter Hall, Meredith was under federal protective guard for the night. The goal was to keep him safe so that he could register the next morning.

At 10:00 P.M., the President spoke to the nation. He had delayed his speech two hours to await word that Meredith was safely on campus. From that moment on, the unexpected displaced the expected.

*Approximately 10:40 P.M. – 1:00 A.M.*

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*I haven't had such an interesting time since the Bay of Pigs.*

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### **Meeting on Civil Rights<sup>1</sup>**

“Let us preserve both the law and the peace, and then, healing those wounds that are within we can turn to the greater crises that are without and stand united as one people in our pledge to man’s freedom.” With those words, President Kennedy ended his televised address to the nation on the situation in Mississippi. The speech was intended to signal a victory in James Meredith’s struggle to be the first African American to register at the University of Mississippi. Yet words less relevant to a crisis have seldom been spoken by a U.S. president.

As the President began his speech at 10:00 P.M., Eastern Standard Time, the situation was already unraveling in Oxford, Mississippi. James Meredith had arrived on campus with a large escort of U.S. marshals two hours earlier. According to an arrangement fixed earlier in

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1. Including President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Burke Marshall, Lawrence O’Brien, Kenneth O’Donnell, and Theodore Sorensen. Tapes 26 and 26A, John F. Kennedy Library, President’s Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

the day, Kennedy called Mississippi governor Ross Barnett, who was expected to announce ruefully that the state of Mississippi had been “physically overpowered” and Meredith was on campus. Kennedy was then supposed to give a conciliatory speech that stressed the victory of the rule of law.

The rule of law was not winning where it counted this night, on the streets of Oxford. In the interval between the Governor’s concession speech and Kennedy’s address, all hell broke out at the university. A crowd of 2,500 surged toward the Lyceum, the university’s central administrative center. With 300 federalized U.S. marshals and hand-picked border patrol officers now on campus and ringing the Lyceum, the Governor’s representatives on campus decided to withdraw the Mississippi highway patrol officers who had given a semblance of calm to the campus in the tense days since the appeals court had ordered Barnett to admit Meredith. Sensing a shift in the balance of power, the crowd surged forward, and in self-defense the federal marshals launched a volley of tear gas canisters. “I would like to take this occasion to express the thanks of this nation to those southerners who have contributed to the progress of our democratic development. . . .” A cloud of tear gas was rising from the campus and Kennedy gave this discordant speech. Aides had tried to stop him as news of the growing riot reached the White House. But the telecast had begun.

In the half-hour following the speech, the news from Mississippi has gotten progressively worse. A jerry-built communications set-up relayed information from the campus to the White House. A series of walkie-talkies carried by the marshals and Justice Department aides in and around the Lyceum kept Nicholas Katzenbach, Attorney General Robert Kennedy’s field commander, informed. Using a pay telephone in the basement of the building, Katzenbach or the Attorney General’s press secretary, Ed Guthman, conveyed this information to Robert Kennedy or his assistant Burke Marshall in the White House. Meanwhile down the mall at the Justice Department another Kennedy aide, Ramsey Clark, the assistant attorney general, maintained a direct line to the Justice Department’s makeshift Oxford headquarters, which was in a post office building a few minutes from campus. Periodically, Clark called the Attorney General at the White House with updates.

President Kennedy started taping as the impromptu domestic crisis team was absorbing news that the mob had turned violent. Burke Marshall was handling the telephone in the Cabinet Room for the Attorney General, with the President a worried observer.

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**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Now don't you have to . . . Do you have some other men? Yeah. Did you get all the marshals there now?<sup>2</sup>

**President Kennedy:** State police or . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] How many you've got? And they're all there? Yeah. How are the state police? Is the crowd getting bigger?

**Unidentified:** [*talking to Robert Kennedy in the room*] [*Unclear*] wants you?

**Robert Kennedy:** That's fine.

[*on the phone*] OK, well I'll get back. I'll let you know.

[*off the phone*] Well, I think that—

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** They think they have it in pretty good shape. [*Puts down the receiver.*]

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** Did one marshal get his arm broken?

**President Kennedy:** His arm broken?

**Robert Kennedy:** The lousy, I mean, there you are appointed, some politician gets you appointed deputy marshal and you're sitting in the courtroom . . . [*telephone rings*] moving . . . close to the judge . . . and suddenly . . .

**Burke Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Hello. Yes, he is.

**President Kennedy:** His arm broken, what, by a bottle?

**Unidentified:** No, but he said they're throwing [*unclear*]. It's Ed.

**President Kennedy:** Who?

**Unidentified:** Ed.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Oh, Ed.<sup>3</sup> Well, how's it look to you?

**Kenneth O'Donnell:** Yeah, there might not be quite as much rush for those bumps they're handing out right after . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Is it under control? Would you bring the guard in?<sup>4</sup>

**Theodore Sorensen:** Yeah, but tomorrow's going to be worse than today.

**Marshall:** Yeah, I was . . . even tonight.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

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2. The civilian contingent of U.S. marshals, border police, and federalized prison guards arrived in stages between 7:00 and 9:00 P.M. Washington time (5:00 and 7:00 P.M. Mississippi time).

3. Probably Edwin Guthman, director of public information, Department of Justice.

4. Earlier in the day President Kennedy federalized the Mississippi National Guard. There were units in Oxford and Jackson, Mississippi, that could be deployed if necessary.

**Marshall:** . . . where the [unclear] keep up with him tonight.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. You can't help but get at it.

**O'Donnell:** That was the last [unclear] from the outside of the campus [unclear].

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.]

**Sorensen:** Most people like to—

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.]

**Sorensen:** Most people like [unclear] and then [unclear].

**Lawrence O'Brien:** I wish they were. Got to keep them in line though.

**Robert Kennedy:** [on the phone] Are they mad at the marshals?

**O'Brien:** . . . otherwise [unclear].

**Sorensen:** As I say [unclear].

**Robert Kennedy:** Evidently they just . . .

**President Kennedy:** [Unclear] from Alabama, who's come to think a lot of them are [unclear].

**Unidentified:** Get the judge to say that [unclear].

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.]

**Unidentified:** I [unclear] . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [on the phone] OK, well, I'm going to see if I can get these troops started anyway.<sup>5</sup> We can see. Well, I think if they, I think it's better that we can control the situation. I don't think it's worth screwing around. The weekend.<sup>6</sup>

**President Kennedy:** It's going to be a long fall in Oxford, I think.

**Robert Kennedy:** [on the phone] I'll see if I can't get them going anyway. OK.

*While Robert Kennedy is speaking on the telephone, in the background an unidentified man says, "Kermit's having trouble with his homework."*

**Unidentified:** What's the story now?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, he thinks the situation's under control now, but you know—

**President Kennedy:** —I think we ought to get the guard within, you know, shouting distance outside of town. I think it's probably [unclear].

**Unidentified:** Blocked off those roads?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. There's enough people coming in from . . . They got the . . .

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5. The crisis has entered a new phase. It is about 10:45 P.M. in Washington, two hours earlier in Mississippi, and the Kennedy administration is preparing to deploy the U.S. Army in Oxford.

6. Task Force Alpha is waiting for orders in Memphis. Organized in the last 24 hours, it includes the 503rd Military Police Battalion, the 31st Light Helicopter Company, the 138th Truck Company, a medical detachment, and two tear gas experts. The Attorney General is pressing the introduction of these troops on his men in Oxford.

**Unidentified:** That's [unclear].

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, [unclear] they got the people on the roads, just to keep them informed about it.

**Marshall:** [on the phone] Hello?

**Robert Kennedy:** Then we get all around the city so as to [unclear].

**Marshall:** [on the phone] This is Burke Marshall.

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . came in and get control of . . . and then we have control over the air. But if you have gas, you've got a pretty good operation going. They got 500 marshals . . .<sup>7</sup> [Laughter in the background.]

**Marshall:** [on the phone] [Unclear.]

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.]

**Robert Kennedy:** You see, they're sitting there and they're throwing iron . . .

**President Kennedy:** Spikes?

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . spikes, and they're throwing Coke bottles, and they're throwing rocks.

**Unidentified:** I gather they're [unclear] —

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, you tell that guy that just came out of Cleveland from . . . just appointed by . . .

**Marshall:** [on the phone] Dean?<sup>8</sup>

**President Kennedy:** [Unclear.]

**Robert Kennedy:** Miller.

**Marshall:** [on the phone] I know that [unclear].

**President Kennedy:** But Bobby [unclear]'s a bookie from [unclear] —

**Sorensen:** [Unclear.]

**O'Brien:** That isn't the way the American people envision marshals [unclear].

**Marshall:** [talking to people in the room] Is it Johnny Vaught?<sup>9</sup>

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.]

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, the coach. What's the good coach's name?

**Unidentified:** Johnny Vaught.

**Robert Kennedy:** Let's see if we can get him.

**Unidentified:** He won't believe it.

**Robert Kennedy:** He might . . .

**President Kennedy:** What's Barnett doing?

**Marshall:** [on the phone] . . . TCU or . . .

7. Apparently there were only 300. See Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), pp. 662–63.

8. Dean P. Markham.

9. John H. Vaught was a University of Mississippi coach.



**Robert Kennedy:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**Marshall:** Did he come from Tennessee? TCU, wasn't it?

**President Kennedy:** Texas Christian University then.

**Robert Kennedy:** Where he came from originally?

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** I think he was out of Texas. Yeah.

**Unidentified:** He was.

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Dean [Markham]?

**President Kennedy:** What are we waiting for . . . Cy Vance to tell us how long it will take?

*The U.S. Army had forces on standby in Memphis, Tennessee, to calm the situation in Oxford, Mississippi, and there was supposed to be a local Mississippi National Guard unit available for reinforcing the federal marshals on campus.*

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Do you think you could find him and talk to him?

**President Kennedy:** Why don't we just tell him to get on and tell him to take them out [ *unclear* ].

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Yeah. Vaught saw the [ *unclear* ].

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** Let's see this article.

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] See if he talks to the kids, yeah.

**President Kennedy:** [ *reading* ] "Ross Barnett, Jr., son of the Mississippi governor [ *unclear* ]."<sup>10</sup>

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Well, did Vaught talk to them tonight?

**President Kennedy:** [ *reading* ] "[ *Unclear* ] National Guard Patrol [ *unclear* ]."

[ *Laughter.* ]

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Why don't you do it, and then if you think it would do any good to have some.

**Unidentified:** Did he get called up?

**Robert Kennedy:** Do we have any other phone system other than that, this we're using here?

**Marshall:** No.

**Unidentified:** We don't have anything else?

**President Kennedy:** You want to get [ *unclear* ] and Secretary on it.

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10. Ironically, the Governor's son was called up with his Mississippi National Guard unit to fight against his father's segregationism.

**Marshall:** All right.

**Unidentified:** Do you want in or out?

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] All right. [*Pause.*]

**Marshall:** [*to people in the room*] He said he wants to keep all the football squad out of it if there were any demonstrations.

**O'Brien:** That would have been a hell of a squad. [*Unclear*] a couple of hundred [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** They want [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** This reminds me a little bit of the Bay of Pigs.<sup>11</sup>

**Unidentified:** Yech! [*Laughter.*]

**O'Brien:** [*Unclear*], I will say that . . .

**Sorensen:** Well, especially when Bobby said we'd provide air cover.<sup>12</sup> [*Laughter.*]

**O'Brien:** Yeah [*unclear*] they know [*unclear*].

**Sorensen:** We could control the air . . .

**Unidentified:** Except on one of the [*unclear*]. [*Laughter.*]

**O'Brien:** Ed described [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Donnell:** What do you think [of] the response to Jim McShane's men without the President protecting them?<sup>13</sup> As you say, they [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Donnell:** What about Jim? [*Laughter.*]

**Unidentified:** One of the two places.

**Sorensen:** My guess is, Bobby, that we'll have the control of outsiders down pretty good.<sup>14</sup> You may be able to introduce—

**Marshall:** —Well, we don't have . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, the only thing is to keep . . .

**Marshall:** . . . control of outsiders, I don't think [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, we haven't had any trouble from outsiders

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11. In April 1961, the United States backed an invasion force composed of Cuban exiles that sought to overthrow the Castro regime in Cuba. The invasion, marred by a series of errors in planning and execution, failed miserably, much to the chagrin of the new administration.

12. The reference here is to the U.S. decision not to provide air cover to support the invasion force during the Bay of Pigs landing. Some claimed the administration's failure to do so doomed the operation.

13. James McShane was chief of the federal marshals.

14. *Outsiders* was the codeword for Ku Klux Klansmen, John Birchers, and other extremists who had been threatening to descend on Oxford from across the Deep South to keep Ole Miss white.

yet. I suppose you'll always have the difficulty of people storming onto the campus. They have a lot of gates. It's a hell of a big campus, you know. So you have a few marshals and a few people at each gate, and I suppose you can stick a car in [unclear] . . .

**Marshall:** [on the phone]<sup>15</sup> Hello [unclear]. Yeah. All right.

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . we can always storm in there at eight tomorrow morning or ten tomorrow morning. The problem is, you see, when you don't have anybody there that's really interested in maintaining law and order, and where their primary interest is to get us to bring troops in.<sup>16</sup> You can imagine what would have happened if we'd gone through with what he wanted to do tomorrow morning.

**Marshall:** [on the phone] It's now against them.

**Sorensen:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** Walk in there and try to get through and he's there with all his . . . That's what his plan was. That he'd be there with his state police and sheriffs, and then assistant sheriffs and then volunteers behind him, four lanes. And then we were to push our way through.

**Unidentified:** His agreement was they wouldn't fire.

**Marshall:** [on the phone] [Unclear] the state troopers.

**Unidentified:** . . . tend to resist them anyhow.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. With nobody else knowing the plot but him and me.

**Evelyn Lincoln:** Peter Lawford is on the phone.<sup>17</sup>

**Marshall:** [on the phone] Well, he called on the students to act as responsible citizens.

**President Kennedy:** That's slightly ironic. I wish we'd taken that part out.

**Marshall:** [on the phone with Joseph Dolan] Yeah. All right, Joe.

[to the people in the room] He says that the state police are against us.

**President Kennedy:** Who does?

**Marshall:** [on the phone] Hello. Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** Of course, filled with all this poison.

**Unidentified:** This way we'll now [unclear].

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15. Marshall is monitoring a continuously open phone line to Justice Department officials in Mississippi.

16. Robert Kennedy is referring to his failed negotiations with Ross Barnett. The Mississippi Governor's primary concern seemed to be to maneuver the Kennedy White House so that it would overplay its hand in Oxford and make political martyrs out of the Governor and his defenders.

17. According to a White House telephone memorandum, Peter Lawford called the President at 10:50 P.M. (Evelyn Lincoln Collection, Box 5, John F. Kennedy Library).

**Unidentified:** Feel a [*unclear*].

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Well, he could probably do that [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Jack [*unclear*] here in the Cabinet Room, would there be [*unclear*].

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] He may be trying to avoid that.

**Robert Kennedy:** And he just got word they ran him . . . [*Laughter.*]

**Unidentified:** And you said [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*] [*Laughter.*]

**Unidentified:** They court-martialed every last one of them.

**Marshall:** [*to the people in the room*] Dean [Markham] tried to call the coach and his wife says he's out.

**Unidentified:** You should have thought of that quote during the election. I would . . .

**Unidentified:** That's how I get the coach.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*] Why don't I try [*unclear*]?

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Well, Bob will try to call him. Dean?

**Robert Kennedy:** Get the number.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Dean? Oh, Dean. Dean? Listen, why don't we get Bob to try to call him from here? Well, he may . . . His wife may be lying to you.

**Sorensen:** What do you think the chances are that Barnett is being honest with you and he's not . . .

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] All right. Well, we'll see what happens.

**Sorensen:** [*unclear*] . . . the state police? He's just . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** I don't think he would.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] All right.

**Robert Kennedy:** I don't think he's telling them to lay off, but I don't think they're enjoying this. You know, it's one thing to get in for the wrong reason and not have a problem, and they see we're having problems and then, might have a sense of greater problems.

**Sorensen:** He said he didn't want to get anyone killed, though, or does he mind that?<sup>18</sup>

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Sounds like it's out of the country.

**Robert Kennedy:** The only thing, like he said the other day to me, if fifty people get killed down here, it might be embarrassing for the two of us.<sup>19</sup> [*Laughter.*] It might hurt us, and then he went on to say that [*unclear*].

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18. Referring to Ross Barnett.

19. Again referring to Ross Barnett.

**Marshall:** [ *Unclear*] two, three, four.

**Lincoln:** Secretary Vance.

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone*] See, now, we'll give that a try.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *Unclear*.]

*It appears that Robert Kennedy goes to speak with the secretary of the Army, Cyrus Vance, who briefs him on the readiness of the forces in Memphis to intervene.*

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone*] Well, no, I'll stay here.

**Unidentified:** Bobby's had [ *unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Huh?

**Unidentified:** Bobby's had a tough one.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*.]

**Unidentified:** Really a battle plan.

**Unidentified:** The Teamsters in Mississippi.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*].

**Unidentified:** They're just fighting the law.

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone*] Yeah.

*Unintelligible side conversation while Marshall listens on the telephone.*

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone*] No, you mean our marshal?

**Unidentified:** [ *in a side conversation*] You're just saying [ *unclear*].

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone*] Gee whiz. Well, can't we get them some food?

**Unidentified:** Hear that?

**Robert Kennedy:** So they go to the armory in Oxford. And there'll be someone there within an hour.<sup>20</sup>

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone*] I know, but I mean, can't we get . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . company.

**President Kennedy:** They'll be at . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** And they'll be . . .

**President Kennedy:** . . . they'll be at the armory in Oxford?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. Well, in four hours they'll have about 800, 900.

**President Kennedy:** In Oxford? But that's not *in* the, that's not at . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, that's the armory there, so they're not at the university.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** I think that's the . . .

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20. The Attorney General had been given inaccurate information. The first contingent of U.S. troops would not reach the airport at Oxford for another four hours.

**President Kennedy:** That's the best. I think that's fine. The problem is really the time lapse, isn't it?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I think that it's in the . . . They're going to be . . . I mean, if you can tell, from what they say, they're going to be all right for an hour.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Well, I know, but I . . .

**President Kennedy:** Then what happens after that?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, then you could . . . We have [a] company of . . .

**President Kennedy:** Oh, you're, so they're flying them in?

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . couple of hundred. No, we'll have a couple of . . . They'll be a couple of hundred there within an hour.

*The President is relying on the Attorney General for information about the troop movements. The order went out to Memphis at 11 P.M. to load the first contingent of 200 men aboard helicopters for the one-hour flight to Oxford. The White House assumes that the military operation is already in progress. In fact, it hasn't even started.*

**President Kennedy:** Oh, I see. The others . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** And there'll be eight within four hours if he needs them.

**President Kennedy:** Oh, I see.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] said there'd be 200 within . . .

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** Where will they go?

**Robert Kennedy:** They'd all go into the armory.

**President Kennedy:** I see.

**Robert Kennedy:** And they're all Mississippians.

**Unidentified:** They're dying in there.

**Robert Kennedy:** And they got gas masks.

**Marshall:** [*may be on the phone*] How long are they going out to . . .

**Unidentified:** Yes.

**Robert Kennedy:** And the General's getting in touch with Nick, and he can use them any time he wants.<sup>21</sup> I'll tell Nick or you can.

**President Kennedy:** So there'll be 200 there within an hour? [*Unclear exchange.*]

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Oh, Dean? Can we get Nick?

**Robert Kennedy:** He did a hell of a job on the narcotics thing.

**President Kennedy:** Who?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah.

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21. Nick was Nicholas Katzenbach, the deputy attorney general.

**President Kennedy:** Was it a success? The conference?<sup>22</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** Certainly. It really was.

**President Kennedy:** Background.

**Marshall:** How long will it take?

**Robert Kennedy:** They'll have a company there within an hour.

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** And 800 within four hours.

**Marshall:** Oh, I see, a company. [*Unclear*] uniforms [*unclear*] Mississippians.

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*.]

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I think that what we at least show that the marshals couldn't do it by themselves, so.

**President Kennedy:** Are we showing him or are they showing us? [*Laughter*.]

**Unidentified:** Don't you think that this . . . [*Unclear exchange involving the President*.]

**Marshall:** [*talking on the phone*] Hello, Nick?

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] southerners on [*unclear*].

**Marshall:** [*talking on the phone*] Just a minute, Bob wants to tell you about these, and . . .

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*] news at eleven.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hello, Nick? Well, there'll be a company there at the armory within an hour. And there'll be 800 there, as I understand it, within four hours.<sup>23</sup> Now, General Billingslea is going to get in touch with you.<sup>24</sup> Blakerslee or whatever the hell he's named.

**Marshall:** Billingslea.

**Robert Kennedy:** So, how does that sound?

**President Kennedy:** Need any more marshals or some equipment? Are the marshals holding up for some tear gas?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Is the gas coming in there?

**Unidentified:** Now, what is next?

**Marshall:** They gassed some of our own marshals.

22. The White House Conference on Narcotics and Drug Abuse, organized by Dean Markham, was held 27–28 September 1962.

23. This is Task Force Alpha, a 687-man team stationed at Millington Naval Air Station in Memphis. The advance group of 170 was supposed to have left by helicopter already. The rest was to travel by Interstate 55 to reach Oxford in the early morning. At this point, no troops from the Task Force had yet left Millington.

24. Brigadier General Charles Billingslea was commander of the 82nd Infantry Division, Fort Benning, Georgia.

**President Kennedy:** Did they?

**Marshall:** Dean says it's bad for their morale.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** What?

**Unidentified:** Which isn't too high, anyway.

**Marshall:** Well, they're doing a good job.

**O'Brien:** You're not kidding.

**Marshall:** They haven't had anything to eat.

**Unidentified:** They'll manage it.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] I don't mind that.

**Unidentified:** It's [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] And they should be home watching the President on television.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Listen, Nick. You got enough gas there now? OK, you're in pretty good shape now, though?

**Marshall:** [*whispering*] We'll make these decisions tomorrow.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Well, is anybody trying to get . . .  
*With Robert Kennedy on the telephone and another conversation going on simultaneously in the Cabinet Room, the recording becomes very difficult to understand. The President is apparently distracted by word that James Reston has just filed a story for the New York Times alleging that Nikita Khrushchev was inviting Kennedy to a summit meeting.*

**Unidentified:** What is Reston [*unclear*] knock it down anyway. [*Unclear*] ought to knock it down.

**Unidentified:** Do you have an explanation for [*unclear*]?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Is that enough time for you?

**President Kennedy:** . . . see now I can get [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Did anybody else get any [*unclear*]?

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** When we visit Vienna, you . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah.

**Unidentified:** . . . the chairman extended an invitation to you and Mrs. Kennedy.<sup>25</sup> Basically it's a standing invitation.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. That's right.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Well, should we try to find out if they . . .

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25. Nikita Khrushchev, the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, also held the title of chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R.



**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*] the American embassies. I hope your president comes over.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*] for a long time.

**President Kennedy:** [ *Unclear*.] That's exactly it. That's why Reston's words [ *unclear*].<sup>26</sup>

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*] do you see it? What did you say?

**Robert Kennedy:** Is there any other way we can get gas?

**President Kennedy:** At the appropriate time.

**Unidentified:** At the appropriate time. Well, see Reston's hitting the West Coast tomorrow and he wants a story. That's his story.<sup>27</sup>

**President Kennedy:** We ought to knock it down tonight; that's just kicking that Reston right in the balls, isn't it?

**Unidentified:** What's that?

**Unidentified:** It is aimed at that.

*Unclear speakers.*

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*] Udall.<sup>28</sup>

**President Kennedy:** That's for Udall.

**Unidentified:** That's right. Three columns. Head.

**President Kennedy:** Front page?

**Unidentified:** Front page.

**President Kennedy:** It's just an inaccurate story.

**Sorensen:** Sure. Well, it's an irresponsible story.

**President Kennedy:** I'm surprised Reston would do it. He said we got an invitation?

**Unidentified:** Well, I haven't seen the text.

**President Kennedy:** It depends how he words it. Our answer would be that on many occasions, Mr. Khrushchev has said that he would be glad to welcome—he's told visitors—to welcome President and Mrs. Kennedy when conditions would permit, but unfortunately because of the . . .

**Sorensen:** And Adzhubei told you that.<sup>29</sup> And Dobrynin has said that.<sup>30</sup>

**President Kennedy:** He told you . . . yeah. I mean we've all on many occasions have stated that we'd be glad to have President and Mrs.

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26. James Reston was chief Washington correspondent for the *New York Times*.

27. In a front-page story that appeared in the *New York Times* on 1 October, James Reston wrote that Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev had sent a private invitation to Kennedy to visit the Soviet Union. According to Reston, the message was delivered to Kennedy by Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, who had recently returned from the Soviet Union.

28. Stewart L. Udall was secretary of the interior.

29. Aleksei I. Adzhubei was editor of *Izvestia* and Khrushchev's son-in-law.

30. Anatoly Dobrynin was Soviet ambassador to the United States.

Kennedy when the situation was such, but of course with the difficulty we have in Berlin and other areas, it's been generally agreed in both Moscow and the United States that the situation would not have been appropriate to [unclear]. That's our position.

**Unidentified:** [Unclear] outcome.

**President Kennedy:** I don't think we ought to at night knock down Reston, ought we? Do you want to call him up? Or is that just going to make him mad?

**Sorensen:** Well, you can't . . . Don't bother calling *him* up.

**President Kennedy:** But if he knocks it down?

**Sorensen:** He can't. [Unclear.]

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Sorensen:** It's probably too late anyway.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Sorensen:** And his story is gone. [Unclear.]

**President Kennedy:** [Unclear.] I just think he'd be embarrassed about that. This one.

**Unidentified:** Yeah, but I don't think . . . Why don't you just in your morning briefing tomorrow give a routine answer? [Unclear voices.]

*The President's attention returns to the more immediate problem in Oxford, Mississippi.*

**Marshall:** I think that General Abrams and General Billingslea are working on it.<sup>31</sup> Do you want to send those women down there?

**Robert Kennedy:** I guess I better not.

**Marshall:** What about the others? The lawyers?

**President Kennedy:** What women are these?

**Marshall:** Secretaries.

**Robert Kennedy:** Secretaries.

**President Kennedy:** Down to where, Oxford?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** Oh, you mean Nick's secretaries?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. Well, why don't I put a hold on it and I'll talk to him later on tonight.

**Marshall:** Hold on [unclear].

**President Kennedy:** You don't have any men secretaries?

**Marshall:** [Unclear] could probably find them. I would think [unclear].

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31. Major General Creighton Abrams was assistant deputy Army chief of staff for military operations.

**President Kennedy:** The FBI must have them.

**Sorensen:** At least one or two here in the correspondence section.

**Marshall:** They must have one.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

*The conversation becomes unclear and appears to be winding down. Only a few fragments are understandable before there is a break in the tape. When taping resumes, Robert Kennedy is on the telephone while an indistinct conversation goes on beside him involving Evelyn Lincoln.*

**Robert Kennedy:** [*fades in*] Yes [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Who's writing these speeches?

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] the numbers you got.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yes, he did. Well, the Governor's announced it. The President's announced it. Yeah. [*Another phone rings.*]

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Lincoln:** [*Unclear*] be back?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah. What do they think of it?

**Lincoln:** [*answering the second phone*] Hello?

*President Kennedy and Theodore Sorensen are having a separate conversation.*

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*] says the debates didn't do any good.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] No.

**Sorensen:** I just knew that's a crock. I just can't believe that. I know that [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** I know it didn't change Republican votes, but the point is, my trouble was to keep the Democrats.

**Sorensen:** I know. [*Evelyn Lincoln can be heard in the background.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Does it look under control? Yeah. Where are you going to get the guards to? Well, we've got a couple of hundred in the beginning and eight, seven or eight [*unclear*].

**Sorensen:** And then the undecided on this, well, that's a major part, the undecided. [*Unclear*] poll shows that you . . . the effect of a campaign is to move the undecided into your camp.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Sorensen:** . . . and that included the debates and the Houston speech. I'm sure the call had a lot [*unclear*].<sup>32</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** [*continues on the phone*] Do you? [*Pause.*] Well, would you favor that I had troops coming in there? Yeah. Well, they're

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32. Sorensen is reminiscing about the key moments in the 1960 campaign. "The call" probably refers to then Senator Kennedy's telephone call to Coretta Scott King in October 1960 when her husband, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., was in a Georgia jail.

on their way. [*Pause.*] OK. No. [*Pause.*] Well, you can just stay there. What about . . . Is Nick there? Well, I'd just like to find out what he's heard on getting that gas in there.

**Marshall:** Do you want to talk to Cy [Vance]? Cy would know.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah. Well.

**President Kennedy:** Can we get, what's his name? The Governor's man?<sup>33</sup>

**Marshall:** [*starts speaking on the phone*] Hello?

**Robert Kennedy:** He's getting him.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Oh, listen, he went off and I'm on.

**Unidentified:** [*in the background*] What about gas?

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Well, are they on their way, do you know? [*A telephone rings.*]

**President Kennedy:** [*faintly in the background*] Should I talk with the General directly?<sup>34</sup>

**Lincoln:** Jim, did you want your girl to stay?

**Unidentified:** If she could do me one last favor, which is to bring me a glass of milk

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] All right. Where were they, at the airport?

**Lincoln:** A glass of milk? [*Unintelligible exchange.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*Unclear*] from now?

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] [*Unclear*] well that's something to . . .

**Unidentified:** Evelyn's got some beers in the refrigerator.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Well, they're coming in. Well, have they walked out on you? They don't have any gas masks.

*It appears that Sorensen and the President have reentered the room.*

**Sorensen:** [*Unclear*] matter, did we like [*unclear*] the troops on the ground?

**President Kennedy:** It seems to me [*unclear*].

**Sorensen:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** The governor has said the troops withdrew. The marshals were . . . with nothing to do.

**Sorensen:** We'll announce that. Yeah, but . . .

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] The gas should be in there in a few minutes.<sup>35</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** Is that Nick?

**Marshall:** [*to Robert Kennedy*] This is Ed.

33. Apparently a reference to Tom Watkins, the intermediary in the Barnett-Kennedy negotiations.

34. Up to now, the White House team has relied on Secretary Vance's descriptions of the movements of Task Force Alpha in Memphis.

35. The federal force protecting the Lyceum ran out of tear gas. Because the Mississippi National Guard lacked their own supply, canisters of tear gas had to be flown in from Memphis.

**President Kennedy:** How do we get the gas in and out of there?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*apparently speaking to someone else*] I guess you can come in.

**Unidentified:** I know, but one of us. [*Chuckles.*]

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] They have?

**Unidentified:** Students [*unclear*] when they have a riot like this one, do they?

**President Kennedy:** Well, that's what I said. [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** You what?

**President Kennedy:** There weren't any riots like this at Harvard just because some guy yells . . . [*Chuckling.*]

**Unidentified:** What's that?

**Unidentified:** That's the only thing that [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Um huh.

**Unidentified:** Move [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*could be on phone*] Well, you ought to leave it to the [*unclear*].

**Sorensen:** [*Unclear*] have student riots like this and it is [*unclear*] you ought to be prepared for the worst, but . . .

**President Kennedy:** That's it. That's what we're preparing for. [*Laughter.*]

**Unidentified:** Yeah, and evidently we got it.

**President Kennedy:** Where is Nick? Is he up in the attic or just . . . [*Laughter.*]

**Sorensen:** He's in the pillbox.

**President Kennedy:** He's a candidate [*unclear*]. Get him out of there.

**O'Donnell:** Nick might see that this is a job that he was [*unclear*] every year.

**Unidentified:** And almost died [*unclear*]. [*Unclear exchange.*]

**O'Brien:** You know, with the marshals, Bobby, at least they were out booking numbers or something . . . [*unclear*] in Chicago.

**Marshall:** [*possibly on the phone*] No one saw it [down there]. [*Laughter.*]

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] No, no. [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*]

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Soon the White House would face the problem of arranging a convoy to bring the gas from the airport in Oxford to the campus.

**Marshall:** [*possibly on the phone*] No. [*Unclear*.]

**President Kennedy:** There are no Boston marshals, are there?

**Marshall:** [*to the President*] The coach is going to go out and talk to them.

**President Kennedy:** Perhaps, perhaps . . .

**Marshall:** [*to the people in the room*] Perhaps?

**Unidentified:** Yeah [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** That's why the . . . police . . . I remember in a riot at Harvard, these guys go around and start asking for your identity card.

**Unidentified:** University police.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. That's the only one that scared the shit out of me.

*While Marshall continues on the phone, some voices can be heard.*

*Someone says, "If you could only ask her about . . . " And Evelyn*

*Lincoln says, "That would be fine."*

**Unidentified:** We just got three points in the [*unclear*] match.

**President Kennedy:** This [*unclear*] department.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] He wants . . . Well, here's Bob. He'll talk to you himself.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Yeah. Right. Okay. Now, the question I think we have to decide, and Nick's going to have to talk to that general, if 200 fellows walking up there in uniforms, whether that's going to help or whether it's going to really make it a . . . They're all Mississippians. No, I don't know. They all have tear gas. But I think he should talk to the military fellow there and see whether that would be of . . . Well, they said he'd been in touch with them. [*Pause*.] All right. Have we got the gas in there yet? [*Pause*.] Yeah. Could you if you had your uniform on?

**President Kennedy:** Are we going to get this every night?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hello?

**Unidentified:** [*responding to the President*] Huh?

**President Kennedy:** Are we going to get this every night?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Are you in touch with the military?

**Sorensen:** [*to the President*] I think that may well be Barnett's strategy.

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*.]

**Sorensen:** You know it's what happened to Autherine Lucy.<sup>36</sup> She had some trouble—

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36. In February 1956, an African American woman, Autherine Lucy, entered the University of Alabama under a court order. Rioting ensued, and university officials suspended Lucy for her

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Well now, is the gas on the way?<sup>37</sup>

**Unidentified:** What did she do, withdraw?

**Unidentified:** Yeah, personally [*unclear*]. Isn't that right?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Will you? Do you want these troops in there?<sup>38</sup> Yeah. OK. [*Pause.*] He got hit by what? Yeah.

**Unidentified:** Who?

**Robert Kennedy:** Is he going to live? The state police have left? [*Unclear*] put them in?

**Marshall:** I [*unclear*] talk with the Governor.

**President Kennedy:** What'd he say?

**Marshall:** He said they can't have pulled them out.

**Sorensen:** What?

**Marshall:** Watkins.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*having heard Marshall's exchange with the President*] And he said, Watkins says, "They can't have pulled out of there." Yeah. They have, though?

**President Kennedy:** What's Watkins say otherwise?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Six what?

**Marshall:** [*to the President*] He said it's dead.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] [*Unclear.*]

**Marshall:** He just talked to the Governor and the Governor had just talked to the highway patrol [and] that everything was under control.

*Concern rises in the Cabinet Room as news arrives that General Edwin Walker is in Oxford to rally extremists in defense of a segregated University of Mississippi. The President and the Attorney General begin to take more seriously the need to deploy the U.S. Army on campus.*

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Oh why? There's going to be a fight in the infirm[ary] . . . Have the marshals done pretty well?

**Marshall:** The Bureau says there are people coming in from out of town.

**Unidentified:** There are, huh?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*to the people in the room*] General Walker's been out downtown getting people stirred up.<sup>39</sup>

[*on the phone*] Can we get it arranged to get him arrested?

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own protection. When she criticized the decision, she was expelled from the university, a ruling upheld by a federal judge.

37. The Mississippi National Guard stationed at the Lyceum had run out of tear gas and were waiting for a new supply. It wouldn't reach them until much later.

38. At this point Katzenbach tells the Attorney General that he doesn't need any troops.

39. Major General Edwin A. Walker, retired. For additional information on Walker, see "Conversation with Archibald Cox," 1 October 1962, note 5.

**President Kennedy:** By the FBI.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] [*Unclear.*] Well, let's see if we can arrest him. Will you tell the FBI that we need an arrest warrant.

**President Kennedy:** What's his crime?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*to the people in the room*] He's been stirring people up.

**Sorensen:** Incitement.

**President Kennedy:** Inciting.

**Sorensen:** Inciting insurrection.

**Robert Kennedy:** Obstruction of justice.

**President Kennedy:** [*Grunts.*] Would the FBI have trouble arresting him on . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** How many agents do you have down there? I think you ought to get those MPs into there and over near the airport. I don't see what you've got to lose, if they're at the airport. You can always send them back.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah. OK. All right. I'll do that. Now, will you clear it with Nick? He said we didn't need them a minute ago.

**O'Brien:** As far as [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] is no longer . . .

**O'Brien:** . . . it depends on which is, you know, but I think that the thing is, you have less risk [*unclear*] they do and bring 'em in.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah. All right. Oh, can somebody sit on this? That's it. [*Hangs up the phone.*]

[*to the people in the room*] He said that if they get the gas, they don't have a problem.<sup>40</sup>

**President Kennedy:** When do they think they are going to get it?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, they think a couple of minutes, at least.<sup>41</sup>

**Unidentified:** Somebody's injured? [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** Who got hurt?

**Robert Kennedy:** They're going to have . . .

**Unidentified:** No way, I tell you.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] [*Unclear*] terrible [*unclear*].

**President Kennedy:** Imagine them coming in there with gas masks and beginning again.

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** That's what happens to all of these wonderful operations. War.

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40. Referring to Katzenbach.

41. A new supply of tear gas was about ten minutes away.



**O'Brien:** They haven't [*unclear*] some of the gas in those gas masks so they all be [*sound of sniffing*].

**Unidentified:** And the next group. [*Laughter.*]

**Unidentified:** Well do you have . . .

**President Kennedy:** General Walker. Imagine that son of a bitch having been commander of a division up till last year. And the Army promoting him.

**Unidentified:** You're right.

**Unidentified:** Yes.

**Sorensen:** Have you read *Seven Days in May*?<sup>42</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** Damned good book.

**President Kennedy:** I thought that . . .

**Sorensen:** It's pretty interesting.

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Sorensen:** I read it straight through. It's interesting.

**Unidentified:** I didn't really like it.

**O'Brien:** Unrealistic? [*Laughter.*]

**Sorensen:** And you thought it was too far-fetched, then?

**President Kennedy:** No, I thought this [had a] sort of awful amateur's dialogue.

**Unidentified:** Yeah, it was a [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** No, it's not great writing, but I mean—

**President Kennedy:** It's not even good. . . . The only character that came out at all was the general. The president was awfully vague. But I thought the general was a pretty good character. [*Extended pause.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . well, then General Walker starts bringing those fellows, you know . . .

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** If General Walker starts bringing in fellows from [*unclear*] and that—

**Marshall:** There are rumors all over the place.

**President Kennedy:** He's bringing in what?

**Robert Kennedy:** He's getting them all stirred up. If he has them march down there with guns, we could have a hell of a battle.

**Unidentified:** Thugs.

**Sorensen:** Did the FBI say Walker's there [*unclear*]?

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42. Popular novel of 1962, written by Fletcher Knebel, about a military plot to overthrow the U.S. government.

**Robert Kennedy:** No. No. Walker's baiting them.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] John?<sup>43</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** They need to keep an eye on him.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Is that football coach doing any good?

**Lincoln:** Tom Watkins is calling you.

**Robert Kennedy:** Why don't you get it?

*Two simultaneous phone conversations proceed.*

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Oh, just a minute, I'm going to go and talk to this fellow, Watkins.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Oh yeah. How's it going?

**Marshall:** [*on a different phone*] Hello? Yes? [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** . . . which isn't based on just anything. We certainly do want it to go as far as ever. We'll just about [*unclear*] work hard [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Well, I get the picture. What about getting the . . . Is Nick there? Would you ask him what the story is with the gas?<sup>44</sup>

**Unidentified:** [*possibly on the phone*] What route is it going to be?

**Sorensen:** We talk about [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] You just, yeah . . .

**Sorensen:** [*Unclear*] be a shame to [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [*in the background*] John, do you want some milk?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah, well, I think they got a report from them five minutes ago. [*Unclear.*] John said he's stirring people up. It's a long way from Wisconsin. Yeah, I know.

Oh, Nick? Oh, what's the story? Well, I think I'm . . . Won't you be able to get it? How far away is it? Can these students see that? Is it covered all right? How much more . . . You'd guess about *how* much longer? Yeah. OK.

[*to Marshall*] How was Watkins?

**Marshall:** He says [*unclear*] can't send anything, can't do anything.

**President Kennedy:** What are they saying? He's there now?

**Robert Kennedy:** They're saying . . .

**President Kennedy:** Where are they? Up around the third floor? Where are they? Are they in the administration building with Meredith?

**Robert Kennedy:** No. Meredith is in another building.<sup>45</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Nobody knows where he is?

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43. Probably John Doar, on the staff of the Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice.

44. The car bringing tear gas from the airport got lost on its way from the airport.

45. Meredith was in a dorm room in Baxter Hall. Evidently the President was unfamiliar with the geography of the campus or the plan to protect Meredith.

**Sorensen:** How many are guarding the administration building?

**Robert Kennedy:** He's got forty or fifty marshals. The gas is a quarter of a mile.

**President Kennedy:** But they can't get it through the . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Well they just . . . Yeah. You know.

**Marshall:** They're not guarding anything there.

**Sorensen:** Then why don't . . .

**Marshall:** . . . the students.

**Sorensen:** . . . why don't they just let . . . The marshals just left?

**Marshall:** What do you mean?

**Sorensen:** [ *Unclear* ] spend the night . . .

**Unidentified:** Where are the marshals?

**President Kennedy:** Why don't they go inside the building? I think they would. I haven't had such an interesting time since the Bay of Pigs. [ *Chuckling.* ]

**Unidentified:** Cuba [ *unclear* ]?

**Robert Kennedy:** Since the day what?

**President Kennedy:** Bay of Pigs.

**Unidentified:** Does Tom Watkins sound like he's—

**Robert Kennedy:** The Attorney General announced today, he's joining Allen Dulles at Princeton University.<sup>46</sup> [ *Laughter.* ]

**Marshall:** He sounds . . .

**Unidentified:** You might take up this [ *unclear* ].

**Marshall:** So he is. He's a very reliable fellow.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Marshall:** He's been a very reliable fellow. But he sounds—every time . . . every time there's a suggestion that that conversation would get out, he sounds concerned.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Hello? No, I'm just wondering if you heard. No.

**Unidentified:** Do you want to hold that?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] When they say he's sending more gas, we'll know we're in.

**Marshall:** Sending what?

**Robert Kennedy:** More gas.

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Oh, I'm just holding it. Who?

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46. Dulles was the retired director of Central Intelligence.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ] is loose as a goose. [ *Laughter.* ]

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] That's all right. This is Burke Marshall. A what? A priest. Oh.

**O'Brien:** That's the best shot they could take. That'll [ *unclear* ] in Mississippi.

**Unidentified:** Tell him to get that collar on quick.

**Marshall:** [ *on the phone* ] Do you know if the football coach has talked to the students?

**O'Brien:** More appropriately [ *unclear* ] if his sweatshirt's on.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. [ *Unclear* ] He may be down there [ *unclear* ].

**Unidentified:** He's coming.

**Unidentified:** Well the football coach would make a, get him, pretty good [ *unclear* ]. [ *Laughter.* ]

**Unidentified:** Is that it?

**Unidentified:** It's got to be better [ *unclear* ].

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**Unidentified:** Training.

**Marshall:** Where was that company?<sup>47</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** Right there. It's just forming up.

**Marshall:** Oh, it's just forming?

**Robert Kennedy:** The only question is, you want them there now? That's up to Nick.

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** All you're going to have up to assist is 150–200 fellows.

**Marshall:** Yes, it's all there.<sup>48</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** I think it's all there. It's within the hour, and that was fifty minutes ago. I am [ *unclear* ].

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, I think we ought to, I wouldn't hesitate to put them there. I don't think that's where we're going to have the difficulty. Not way beyond it. The problem is looking as if we're not doing enough rather than too much right now.

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** Good.

**O'Brien:** Oh, I agree.

**President Kennedy:** Better get them over there.

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47. This is apparently a reference to a local unit of the federalized Mississippi National Guard.

48. This advance contingent was still three hours away from Oxford.

**Marshall:** I wonder if we shouldn't just put them over there?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, but if it's forming up and we can't put—

**Marshall:** Because it might discourage some of these people from . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Throwing?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** That's why, he's in a . . . They're just guessing.

[*Pause.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** If they get the gas, it's not really a—

**President Kennedy:** Problem?

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . problem because they're going to get the . . .

**Marshall:** Unless the Bureau . . . See the Bureau says that their people are moving in.

**Unidentified:** From outside?

**Marshall:** Yeah. And they might be armed.

**President Kennedy:** You see, once some one fellow starts firing, everybody starts firing. That's what concerns me.<sup>49</sup>

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** If one person fires . . .

**O'Brien:** How are they getting in?

**Marshall:** What?

**O'Brien:** How are these people coming into the campus?

**Marshall:** How?

**O'Brien:** Yeah. Why don't they have the, I thought . . .

**Marshall:** Well, you see . . .

**O'Brien:** . . . they had the entrances wired off.

**Marshall:** . . . that would be state police.

**O'Brien:** The state police which means that the city's gone back.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Yeah? Well, that's good. All right. Well, that's good.<sup>50</sup>

**President Kennedy:** What's that?

**Marshall:** [*to the President*] They got the gas. They just got a gas truck.

**Lincoln:** Geoghegan for you.<sup>51</sup>

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Hello? [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** They got a gas truck.

49. Robert Kennedy seems to be supporting his team's view that once the tear gas arrives, the marshals under Katzenbach's command can stabilize the situation.

50. At 11:44 P.M. this news was reported to Ramsey Clark, assistant attorney general, Lands Division, who was overseeing the war room at the Justice Department during this crisis.

51. William Geoghegan, assistant deputy attorney general, legislative program, Department of Justice. He was manning the command center at the Justice Department with Ramsey Clark.

**Marshall:** Yeah. Well, just hang on; I've got to go to another phone for a minute.

**Unidentified:** I'll hold this one.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] All right, can we get the answer to that?

**Unidentified:** Which?

**Marshall:** [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** Or I can . . .

**Evelyn Lincoln:** [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** Do you have a switchboard? How do you handle that?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. I'm going to get direct lines in . . .

**President Kennedy:** From that building?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, not this. We just kept an open line. But our various installations around there, we have direct line that we put in last week.<sup>52</sup>

[*on the phone*] Hello. Is Nick there? Let me speak to him, please.

[*on the phone with Katzenbach*] Yeah. Oh, you're all set? Do you? I think we should move that army up anyway, don't you?<sup>53</sup> Well, yeah. Up to you? Yeah. I don't want to make it appear that we didn't do enough. Let me ask Ed what he thinks, being there and talking. All right.

[*to the people in the room*] But he doesn't think but, of course, the problem is that they can't . . . If we can get that Walker.

**Marshall:** That state trooper was seriously hurt.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] The kid's arm?

**President Kennedy:** That's too bad. What happened? Did one of those pellets hit him?

**Marshall:** Yeah. But we're flying him to Memphis to the hospital.

**President Kennedy:** Did he break his back? Did it break his back?

**Marshall:** I don't know. But they're putting him on a border patrol plane and flying him up to the hospital in Memphis.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Ed, did the coach come?<sup>54</sup>

[*to the people in the room*] Well, he said, this is completely under control.

---

52. This is presumably the direct line between Louis Oberdorfer at the Justice command center in the Oxford Post Office and Ramsey Clark at the Justice Department.

53. Robert Kennedy, who has accepted the President's suggestion, may still be operating under the assumption that the advance contingent from Memphis had already reached the armory in Oxford, a short distance from the campus. In fact, this group was still in Tennessee.

54. Apparently Guthman spoke to John Vaught, the Ole Miss coach, who assured him that there was only a small group of troublemakers.

**President Kennedy:** What does he say about the students, what they want?

**Robert Kennedy:** Ed just said that, they say that because it's a relatively—compared to what a big campus it is, and there are so many students—it's a relatively . . .

**President Kennedy:** Small group?

**Robert Kennedy:** . . . small number. Because, you know . . .

**President Kennedy:** Too bad that fellow getting hurt.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ] pitchfork.

**Unidentified:** Just . . .

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ].

**President Kennedy:** Mrs. Lincoln?

**Lincoln:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** Do you want us to put on the TV? Listen [ *unclear* ]. Ask him to send it over some [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Oh, yeah.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Well, do you think that they're going to move in there with some guns, though, from out of town?

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ].

**Unidentified:** Uh-huh.

**Unidentified:** Now here's how you get errors [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] How do the marshals feel? Is that where the . . . OK? Did they do anything about that?

**Unidentified:** It's still [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] So that's all right?

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ] soldiers.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] I mean if anything . . . Is there anything you can do to send, you can't send anybody in and arrest that Walker, can we?<sup>55</sup>

**Sorensen:** She started a [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Suicide.

**Sorensen:** I wouldn't hesitate to [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Are these kids breaking up at all?

**Sorensen:** [ *Unclear* ] haven't used the [ *unclear* ] since I was a kid.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Can't arrest any of them? Well, I don't know whether it would break it up or what.

---

55. About a half hour earlier (11:32 P.M.), Clark at Justice had instructed the FBI to arrest General Walker, if possible.

**Marshall:** My guess is it won't matter.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Would not. But you think the situation's under control? How long will this ammunition last? Yeah, about that. But better plan for two hours. All right. Well, Nick, I think we just . . . we should . . . it's got to be up to you, being on the scene, as to whether you need these fellows, but I think it's gone beyond the stage that . . . What's Millington?<sup>56</sup> Well, they're going to form in the armory there. Isn't that pretty close? Well, why don't they go over to the armory? Are you in touch with them, Nick?<sup>57</sup> Well, I can't send them right away. Well, did he get it up there? [*Pause.*] Well, they can't hurt you, though, can they?

**Marshall:** Did the guard unit seal off the campus?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah, but they keep telling me that you're in touch with the military, and that this . . . So are you in touch with them? Well, I mean, have they told you how many they're coming and . . . Well, can you ask them what the hell they're doing?<sup>58</sup> And will you let me know? Right. [*Pause.*] Hello?

[*to the people in the room*] Oh, I'm just trying to get the operator.

[*on the phone*] Oh, would you hold? [*He puts the phone down.*]

**Marshall:** Wouldn't that be just the thing for the guard to do?

**Robert Kennedy:** What?

**Marshall:** Seal off the campus.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Marshall:** And they'll fight it?

**President Kennedy:** What's the problem now?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, it's not a problem. It's the same problem . . . of getting the people in there. They think that they have it under control.

**President Kennedy:** Are you questioning whether to bring the guard in?

**Robert Kennedy:** No, I'm just questioning . . . I'm just trying to figure the fact that they don't know when they are going to get there, and all the rest of it. That is what I've been thinking about. And when you're dealing with, sort of, unknowns . . .

[*on the phone*] Hello?

**Marshall:** He can't communicate with the guard?

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56. Millington, Tennessee, site of the Memphis Naval Air Station.

57. The Attorney General wants to know whether Katzenbach had spoken with Lieutenant Colonel John Flanagan, the chief of Task Force Alpha.

58. Ramsey Clark has apparently told the Attorney General that Katzenbach is fully informed about the movements of the Memphis force.



**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, he can through my office.<sup>59</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Who is Vance in touch with? Memphis?

**Robert Kennedy:** That's where the General is.<sup>60</sup> And he's going to get on this plane and come down?

**Marshall:** Who's the general? Is it General Abrams?

**Robert Kennedy:** Billingslea.

**Marshall:** Billingslea.

**Robert Kennedy:** Have you seen him?

**Sorensen:** Is he a National Guard general? Or . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** I think regular.

**Sorensen:** Huh?

**Marshall:** [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** Regular.

**Sorensen:** Brought down in the National Guard under his [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, he's the theater commander. [*Pause.*]

**President Kennedy:** This is what they must do every night in Teheran and these places.

**Unidentified:** That's a hell of a job, don't you think?

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** Taking care of mobs and so forth. [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*] beginnings.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, because we say you don't have to use too much force.

**President Kennedy:** The margin of force is . . .

**Lincoln:** [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Hello?

**Lincoln:** Ramsey Clark calling in.<sup>61</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Who?

**Robert Kennedy:** Ramsey Clark.

**President Kennedy:** Where is Nick? And where's his command center? Is it right in the administration building?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** He can see all that's going on?

---

59. Only Robert Kennedy's aide at Justice, Ramsey Clark, is able to communicate with the U.S. Army or the National Guard. Katzenbach or Oberdorfer can only reach them through Washington.

60. Referring to General Billingslea.

61. Clark was overseeing the war room at the Justice Department during this crisis.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. And then, Jim McShane's head of the marshals. And, Joe Dolan . . .<sup>62</sup>

**President Kennedy:** What's Joe doing there?

**Marshall:** He's sort of . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Lou Oberdorfer.<sup>63</sup>

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**President Kennedy:** McShane enjoy this?

**Robert Kennedy:** No, but I think they all like him.

**President Kennedy:** He's pretty tough.

**Robert Kennedy:** He knows what he's doing. I don't think anybody's going to push him around much. Let's see, we've got some other good ones that they have. And then we've got three . . . We've got also about 150—

**Marshall:** Bob, are you sure Nick's in touch with the guard? He just told Ramsey that he wasn't and that he'd like to know when they're on their way.<sup>64</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, well, that's what I gave . . . He said the only way through is through the office. Of course, Cy keeps saying that they're talking to one another. Let's get Cy. You want to get Cy Vance for me?

**Marshall:** [*in the background, on the phone*] Hello, Ramsey? [*Unclear.*] You're not in touch with . . .

**Unidentified:** Sure is a great day.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Unidentified:** It's been a great day.

**O'Brien:** Well, in substance, they're defending this administration building and keeping students out of that one building where these students—

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah; then they have a student that's—

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** —named Meredith in another building.

**O'Brien:** Yeah. They don't know where [*unclear*], do they?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, I suppose they do. I don't know if they know.

**Marshall:** Right.

**Robert Kennedy:** And they've got 35, 40 marshals there. Actually,

62. Joseph P. Dolan was assistant deputy attorney general in the Justice Department.

63. Louis F. Oberdorfer was assistant attorney general in the Tax Division of the Justice Department. He is running the command center in the Oxford Post Office.

64. Nick Katzenbach told Ramsey Clark at 12:05 A.M. (10:05 P.M. Mississippi time) that the situation had reached a point where he needed reinforcements. He wondered when the local National Guard unit would arrive.

out of the 500 that we have, about 330 or so are border patrolmen—the Immigration and Naturalization Service and about 150 marshals.

**O'Brien:** They're a little tougher, aren't they?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. The border patrol . . . But they haven't been through this, when we sent our marshals through a long special training. They haven't been through that, but they're very well disciplined. They were the best [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Were they?

**Marshall:** That's an impossible situation. No one's in touch with the guard unit, as far as I can see.

**President Kennedy:** Is it from Cy?

**Lincoln:** Secretary Vance.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. [*Pause.*]

**O'Brien:** Maybe it's by design. The guard unit is in touch with no one.

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear*] to call the Attorney General's office to call them back to Memphis.

**Marshall:** Well, they have to call the Attorney General's office to get the Attorney General's office to call the Secretary of the Army. The Secretary of the Army to call to Memphis, and then back to the Secretary of the Army to . . .

**O'Donnell:** They're not really in Memphis but they're supposedly there on the road now. Aren't they?

**Marshall:** They're forming at the armory.

**O'Donnell:** They formed this afternoon. I saw them form on television.<sup>65</sup>

**Marshall:** But they're forming . . .

**Sorensen:** Again.

**Marshall:** —again at the armory in Oxford. You see, it's a local unit.

**O'Brien:** Well, where were they forming when you saw them?

**Sorensen:** That's what I'm talking about, that's . . .

**Marshall:** But that's that company.<sup>66</sup>

**Sorensen:** That's just the Oxford units, you mean?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** Well, who are the [*unclear*]?

65. There is confusion in the room between Task Force Alpha and the local Mississippi National Guard's units shown getting prepared on television that afternoon.

66. Again, as stated in note 65, there appears to be some confusion among the men as to whether they are discussing the movements of Task Force Alpha from Memphis or another local Mississippi National Guard unit in the Oxford area.

**Sorensen:** Well, we [*unclear*] students. Huh?

**Unidentified:** Who were the [*unclear*]?

**O'Donnell:** You ought to include the student members.

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**O'Donnell:** Well, how about the ones that formed in Jackson this afternoon?

**Unidentified:** Oh, but they . . .

**Marshall:** See, Jackson is 180 miles away.

**O'Donnell:** But aren't they supposed to be on their way now?

**Marshall:** Yes. Uh. huh. Four hours away means about three.

**O'Donnell:** Then there's a couple of thousand on their way, aren't they?

**Sorensen:** [*Unclear.*]

**Marshall:** Fifteen hundred. Twenty-five.

**O'Donnell:** The question is who's in touch with their commander [*unclear*] will carry out.

**Marshall:** Well, the one they would want to get in touch with right now are the ones that . . . There's a company in Oxford.

**Sorensen:** That are right there in the armory.

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Sorensen:** The ones that are right there.

**Marshall:** Well, a company could do a lot of good.

**Sorensen:** Maybe there's a phone in the armory.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Hello? If they what? [*Laughter in background.*]

**Sorensen:** [*Unclear.*]

**Lincoln:** Ramsey [*unclear*].

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Marshall:** Well, after dark. [*Unclear.*]

**Unidentified:** The hours are [*unclear*]. They'll probably charge the telephone. [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** I just put that together. I thought it was valid.

**Sorensen:** It isn't quite clear yet what our [*unclear*] administration building is.

**Unidentified:** You know, I can't think what [*unclear*].

**O'Brien:** [*Unclear*] I assume the students think he is there or why would they keep [*unclear*]?

**Marshall:** Well, the marshal stood there.

**Unidentified:** Let's say the marshal [*unclear*].

**O'Brien:** [*Unclear*] near a pay phone.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*] the phones in there. [ *Laughter*.]

**Unidentified:** Phones.

**Unidentified:** I think maybe you're right. That's what it is.

**Marshall:** [ *Unclear*.]

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*] tough when you're fighting the bastards.

**Unidentified:** Is there any fight with [ *unclear*]?

**O'Brien:** They got a very good [ *unclear*].

**O'Donnell:** Yeah. Well, if the [ *unclear*] injured, they . . . Then you could get their [ *unclear*] to [ *unclear*] the students.

**Unidentified:** I can't help, my impression was that the National Guard unit was on its way to Oxford from their outlying [ *unclear*].

**Sorensen:** Well some are, apparently, four hours away, but the one at Oxford is being called to the armory in Oxford.<sup>67</sup>

**O'Brien:** By whom?

**Unidentified:** Cy. [ *Laughter*.]

**Unidentified:** What's the problem?

**Unidentified:** Well, it's a rather vague one, I think. I don't think I could normally get in touch with them, the National Guard.

**Sorensen:** A bicycle could go to the armory faster.

**Unidentified:** Somebody ought to go down there.

**Unidentified:** Well, the general will be [ *unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*.]

**Unidentified:** Yeah, [ *unclear*] starting to fire . . .

**President Kennedy:** Want to call the Governor on that?

**Sorensen:** Unless they get rid of the . . .

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear*] fire marshals.

**President Kennedy:** [ *Unclear*] marshals.

**President Kennedy:** Did you talk to Barnett?

**Marshall:** [ *Unclear*.]

**Unidentified:** Students riot?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I don't [ *unclear*] Walker's crowd.

**Sorensen:** He's arrived on campus? [ *Unclear*] changes from outsiders.

**Robert Kennedy:** What?

**Sorensen:** I think there's really a good justification for [ *unclear*] students.

**President Kennedy:** Well, [ *unclear*] I would not . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Not now.

---

67. Evidently, because of the delay in getting Task Force Alpha down, the Secretary of the Army has located some National Guard reinforcements closer to the campus.

**President Kennedy:** The only way that [unclear].

**Marshall:** [on the phone] Hello? Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** They can keep their options open because [unclear] the MPs have left yet.

**Marshall:** [on the phone] They need the Guard [unclear].

**O'Brien:** [Unclear.] Walker's intent.

**Unidentified:** Huh?

**O'Brien:** General Walker's plan.

**Unidentified:** [Unclear] Walker's military career?

**Sorensen:** I hear it was pretty good.

**Unidentified:** It used to be in somebody . . .

**Sorensen:** [Unclear] beachhead.

**Unidentified:** We should . . .

**O'Donnell:** Better get Cy Vance. The General [unclear] he used to shove messages over to the Germans [about] what area they were going into. He would himself lead a company of guys no matter, and slit the throats coming back on the way out. I tried to [unclear] they always had a message that they were coming.

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.]

**Unidentified:** I asked Lemnitzer, one day, I said, gee, I just couldn't believe that any guy . . . That I saw him on television, I couldn't believe that such a stupid . . . could become a general because [unclear].<sup>68</sup>

**O'Brien:** [Unclear.]

**Unidentified:** You have exams or anything like that?

**Unidentified:** [Unclear] demonstrate conduct so . . .

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Sorensen:** According to [unclear]. In [unclear] and approach you on question [unclear].

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** I saw them.

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.] The President could take [unclear].

**Unidentified:** [Unclear.] We'll do it in the House.

**Unidentified:** Why, I hear those guys won't mind their trucks. They're watching too much television. He saw the [unclear].

**Unidentified:** He thought they needed mobilizing. See all of them, they all had to go down and organize that, plus TV. They watch themselves on TV.

---

68. General Lyman Lemnitzer was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**Unidentified:** Would they like to be sworn in the federal service?  
[ *Laughter.* ]

**Unidentified:** No.

**Sorensen:** I guess that's the most we get now.

**President Kennedy:** [ *Unclear* ] to Cy Vance right here. [ *Unclear.* ]

**Unidentified:** Where is he?

**Unidentified:** Vance is [ *unclear* ].

**Unidentified:** Say listen, we're contributing a lot to this.

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Makes it kind of fascinating. It's getting like an election night or something. That door opens, I went for the next bulletin.

**Unidentified:** Bob asked me to stay and sleep good and then watch the . . .

**President Kennedy:** Now look, you ought to do [ *unclear* ], as soon as Vance calls us back.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Hello? Hello?

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**Unidentified:** He's been shot.<sup>69</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Oh, can you get them back?

**Unidentified:** Walker isn't . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Oh, hello. Is Nick there?

**Marshall:** [ *Whispers.* ] [ *Unclear.* ]

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *to someone in the room* ] [ *Unclear.* ] The thing is [ *unclear* ] about the military . . . He can't tell me, can't tell you anything.

**Unidentified:** Is there any word from Cy or [ *unclear* ]?

**President Kennedy:** I suppose he could get in the [ *unclear* ]. The problem really is from there to here, not from . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Oh, Ed? Yeah, what's bad again? [ *Pause.* ] What can you do, though, you see those guards can't get in there for awhile.

[ *to the people in the room* ] An AP man got shot.<sup>70</sup>

[ *on the phone* ] Well, I can't find out from the military. [ *Pause.* ] He says what? Where does he get that word from? How does Ramsey Clark know in 15 minutes, do you know?

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69. Marshal Graham E. Same of Indianapolis was shot in the neck and in critical condition. "How a Secret Deal Prevented a Massacre at Ole Miss," *Look*, 31 December 1962.

70. William Crider of the Associated Press.

**Marshall:** What's that [*unclear*]?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Well, how long can you hold there?  
[*Sound of door opening.*]

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**Lincoln:** Ramsey Clark.

**Marshall:** [*on the phone in the distant background*] Hello? Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah.

[*putting down the phone and speaking to the people in the room*] They're storming where Meredith is.<sup>71</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Oh. The students are or the . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*] They're storming where Meredith is.

**Marshall:** [*in the background*] They're outside. [*Unclear.*] Yes. Yes.

**President Kennedy:** Well, are the other marshals going?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hey, Nick?

**President Kennedy:** [*Unclear*] necessary . . . You better try to stick them, all the marshals in. . . . I suppose get in the cars. . . . I don't see how they can . . . They may not be able to move him out, I suppose.

**Unidentified:** Because they're in . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Well, you better move them all out and see if we can't get them. You go ahead and do it. All right. [*Puts the receiver down.*]

**Marshall:** Bob, do we have any word on the MPs?<sup>72</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, they're on their way. You want to get Nick?

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** You want to get Nick?

**President Kennedy:** All right.

*Telephone rings.*

**Lincoln:** Hello?

**Unidentified:** Hello, [*unclear*].

**O'Donnell:** You don't want to have a lynching.

**O'Brien:** Yeah. [*Long pause.*] Good. [*Long pause.*]

**O'Donnell:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Oh, you want Bob? Yeah. Who is this? Ken O'Donnell. Yes. Yeah.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

---

71. Fortunately, this was only a false rumor. Throughout the riot the lightly guarded Baxter Hall escaped any serious harassment. There were only 24 marshals guarding Meredith in his dormitory.

72. Task Force Alpha. It is still in Memphis.



**O'Donnell:** [*on the phone*] Were they after him, or what? Are they after him now? [*Pause.*] Yeah. OK. [*Replaces the receiver.*]

[*to Robert Kennedy*] Bobby, it was the [*unclear*] that [*unclear*] firing. Sounds of people coming into the room. An indistinct conversation is overheard where someone says "side arms."

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Hello? Well, I think they have to protect Meredith now. Well, that's what I mean. They better fire, I suppose. They got to protect Meredith. What? [*Pause.*] [*Unclear*] can't do anything. Is Meredith all right?

**Unidentified:** Well, I don't know. If they can.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] They better protect Meredith now. Well, can you make sure that he's protected, Dean? [*Pause.*]

While Robert Kennedy hastened to react to the possibility that Baxter Hall might be stormed, the President was in the Oval Office trying to pressure Governor Ross Barnett to help restore order to the campus. Kennedy was especially concerned that the injured man receive medical attention. This conversation was taped.

12:14 A.M.

---

*We couldn't consider moving Meredith if we haven't been able to restore order outside. That's the problem, Governor.*

---

### Conversation with Ross Barnett<sup>73</sup>

**Ross Barnett:** . . . the Commissioner of the highway patrol to order every man he's got.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. Well, now, how long's that going to take? We don't want somebody . . .

**Barnett:** Well, I haven't been able to locate him.

**President Kennedy:** You can't locate . . .

**Barnett:** He went to the . . . Here's what happened. He went to the doctor's office with this man that was hurt.

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73. Dictabelts 4E and 4F, Cassette A, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** And I finally located him there after you'd told me to get, have him to get more people, don't you see, if . . .

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** You needed 'em.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** And he thought then that fifty he had would be sufficient.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** But I told him by all means to order out every one he had if he needed it.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** And I'm certainly trying in every way . . .

**President Kennedy:** Well, we can't consider moving Meredith as long as, you know, there's a riot outside because he wouldn't be safe.

**Barnett:** Sir?

**President Kennedy:** We couldn't consider moving Meredith if we haven't been able to restore order outside. That's the problem, Governor.

**Barnett:** Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. President.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** I'll go up there myself . . .

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, how long will it take you to get there?

**Barnett:** . . . and I'll get a microphone and tell them that you have agreed to re—, to, for 'em to be removed . . .

**President Kennedy:** No. No. Now, wait a minute. How long . . .

**Barnett:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**President Kennedy:** Wait a minute, Governor.

**Barnett:** Yes?

**President Kennedy:** Now, how long is it going to take you to get up there?

**Barnett:** About an hour.

**President Kennedy:** Now, I'll tell you what, if you want to go up there and then you call me from up there. Then we'll decide what we're going to do before you make any speeches about it.

**Barnett:** Well, all right. Well . . .

**President Kennedy:** No sense in . . .

**Barnett:** . . . I mean, whatever you, if you'd authorize . . .

**President Kennedy:** You see, if we don't, we got an hour to go, and we may not have an hour.

**Barnett:** This, this man . . .

**President Kennedy:** It won't take you an hour to get up there.

**Barnett:** . . . this man has just died.

**President Kennedy:** Did he die?

**Barnett:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** Which one? State police?

**Barnett:** A state policeman.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, well, you see, we got to get order up there, and that's what we thought we're going to have.

**Barnett:** Mr. President, please. Why don't you, can't you give an order up there to remove Meredith?

**President Kennedy:** How can I remove him, Governor, when there's a riot in the street, and he may step out of that building and something happen to him? I can't remove him under those conditions. You . . .

**Barnett:** Uh, but, but . . .

**President Kennedy:** Let's get order up there; then we can do something about Meredith.

**Barnett:** . . . we can surround him with plenty of officials.

**President Kennedy:** Well, we've got to get somebody up there now to get order and stop the firing and the shooting. Then when you and I will talk on the phone about Meredith . . .

**Barnett:** All right.

**President Kennedy:** . . . but first we got to get order.

**Barnett:** I'll, I'll call and tell them to get every official they can.

**President Kennedy:** That's right and then you and I will talk when they get order there, then you and I will talk about what's the best thing to do with Meredith.

**Barnett:** All right then.

**President Kennedy:** Well thank you.

**Barnett:** All right.

*President Kennedy hangs up.*

### Meeting on Civil Rights, Continued

*President Kennedy returns to the Cabinet Room to report on his conversation with the Mississippi Governor.*

**President Kennedy:** He wants us to move him again. And I say, "Well, we can't move him if the situation's like this." And he says, "Well, we'll take care of the situation if you move him."

**Robert Kennedy:** I can't get him out. How am I going to get him out?

**President Kennedy:** That's what I said to him. Now, the problem is, if he can get law and order restored, . . . OK, we'll move him out of there if he can get order restored.

**Unidentified:** I don't see how we can . . .

*Long pause. Sounds of doors opening and closing. Evelyn Lincoln can be indistinctly heard talking in the background.*

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Now we'd better get this . . . Now, they might not recognize the kids today. Get him . . . get him up there and get him out or something. I don't know what the exit is. Yeah, yeah, they're shooting at other . . .

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*] He said [*unclear*] to you immediately.

**Robert Kennedy:** I'm glad to see that . . . They always make sure of everything, even if they don't know what time it is.

[*on the phone*] Can we be all right? Will they be all right? Have they gotten into the room? I think we just have to protect him no matter what it is.

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] All right. Would you get that, Ed? See if we can get Barnett to get [the] highway patrol to bring doctors in. [*Door opens.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Nick? I'll hold.

**O'Brien:** Doctor.

**Sorensen:** From the inside of the arm[ory] or wherever [*unclear*].

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello.

**President Kennedy:** What about removing him if Barnett says that he can restore law and order?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, that's not what they, they're firing at the marshals.

**Unidentified:** I'd sure as hell put all those bastards in the can.

**Unidentified:** Yeah. That's for sure.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello. What's it look like?

**O'Donnell:** [Edwin] Guthman's so scared he can't talk. Helpless feelings on the other end of that phone. You have to [*unclear*].

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] This is Larry O'Brien. [*Pause.*]

**O'Donnell:** [*in the background*] I hate to say it, but I [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** Well, we ought to do that [*unclear*] to Barnett. [*Indistinct exchange.*]

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Yes. Yes. Hello? Yes. Hello?

[*to the people in the room*] Two marshals have been shot.

[*on the phone*] Yes, we're on this line down there. We're on this line. Well, we're talking down there. This is Larry O'Brien in the Cabinet Room. Hello? Yeah. So I understand. Yeah. Yeah. Are you able to move them out of the administration building to where the boy is?

**Marshall:** Have they got authority to return, Bobby?

**O'Brien:** They know it.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** First. I thought they said [they] haven't eaten since this morning. [*Unclear.*] [*Unclear*] in the field, probably didn't spend a lot of time on the campus.

**Evelyn Lincoln:** [*Heard faintly in the background.*]

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] people [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear*] one reason was that the people [*unclear*].

**O'Brien:** They say they can't determine just what his next move is. Let's see what's going to happen. He says these students are getting ready with a flying wedge to hit the dormitory and [face] these guys. He says, "No, they just have to face us, and somebody's going to get it."

**Unidentified:** Have they not shot back yet? The marshals?

**O'Brien:** Apparently not. Said some of them were hit with buckshot. But there are two of them seriously hurt. They really don't know how badly yet. The problem . . . One's bleeding in the throat. [*Possible door sound.*]

**President Kennedy:** Well, can I talk to them directly and on . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Do you want to get Nick for me?

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Is Nick there? All right.

**Robert Kennedy:** The problem is, if we move him, they're liable to [*unclear*].

**Sorensen:** About two hours.

**President Kennedy:** What about the Guard?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, can't the 82nd [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** How long before they get any more guards?

**Robert Kennedy:** He told me he'd have several bunches in an hour.

**President Kennedy:** An hour from now?

**Robert Kennedy:** And in a pinch they'd have about [*unclear interjection*]. They took two hours.

**Marshall:** And they [*unclear*]. [*Continues speaking faintly in the background.*]

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Yeah? Nick? Hold on, here's Bobby.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hey, Nick? Oh, I just got, Ramsey just asked me for . . . if they had permission to fire back. Do you have to do that? Well, can't they just retreat into that building? [*Pause.*] Is he safe over the other place? Oh, I think that they can fire to save *him*. But now, can you hold out for an hour there? [*Pause.*] Can you hold out if you have gas? Is there much firing? Is there any way you could figure a way to scare them off? [*Pause.*] I'm sorry for that. I think that if we start a

battle with . . . Up in the air? Except then it might really start them. . . . Once *you* start firing, they can forget this . . . Will that help? OK. OK.  
[*Puts down the receiver.*]

**President Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Will you hold?

[*to the people in the room*] Do you think they can hold for an hour?

**Robert Kennedy:** If they have gas.

**President Kennedy:** And do they?<sup>74</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** I think it really depends on how much firing.

[*Phone rings in the background.*]

**Unidentified:** Pardon.

**Lincoln:** [*answering phone*] Hello? Hello?

**Unidentified:** How much firing?

**Robert Kennedy:** The guards have arrived since you . . .

**Lincoln:** [*on the phone*] This is Evelyn Lincoln. [*calls out*] Cy—

**Robert Kennedy:** Cy Vance. . . . The President can take it.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello. [*Long pause.*] Hello.

[*to the people in the room*] Pretty damn hard once firing takes place, to shut it off.

**Unidentified:** Yeah, I know.

**Operator:** Hello?

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello.

**Operator:** Yes, do you want a line?

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Just leave it open. Hello. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, we'll leave this line open. All right. Right. [*Puts the receiver down.*]

[*to the people in the room*] Well, they can't even get the injured guy to the college dispensary. They're trying to get a wedge to get him through.

**O'Donnell:** Trying to get him through the crowd? [*Long pause.*]

*Sounds of a door opening and closing can be heard as Robert Kennedy returns to the room, probably after a conversation with Cyrus Vance, the secretary of the Army.*

**Robert Kennedy:** Damn Army! They can't even tell if [*unclear*] the MPs have left [yet].<sup>75</sup>

*The Attorney General now realizes that he hasn't any federal reinforcements in town. And Vance at the Pentagon cannot even tell him when the advance contingent of Task Force Alpha will arrive at the Oxford armory.*

74. No. The embattled federal forces at the Lyceum are still without tear gas.

75. It is about 12:17 A.M., over ninety minutes since the Attorney General ordered the movement of the troops from Memphis.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello?

**O'Donnell:** Whether they've left yet?

**Robert Kennedy:** Won't even attempt to tell us.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Yeah. All right.

**Sorensen:** You mean they're not in contact with anyone . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, who knows what the reason is? Cy Vance doesn't know yet. [*Pause.*]

[*Robert Kennedy leaves the room again.*]

**Lincoln:** [*Unclear.*]

*Pause. Sound of door opening. It appears that a midnight snack is being served.*

**Unidentified:** Cheese on this?

**Unidentified:** Yes.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello?

**Unidentified:** [*referring to the snack*] And a roll.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Nothing, huh? Right.

*Unclear voice in the background.*

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Huh? Yes.

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** Well, where were they?

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear.*] Out of the way. [*Unclear.*] I'll be a son of a bitch if the President of the United States calls up and says, "Get your ass down there." Yeah, I would think they'd be on that fucking plane in about five minutes.

**Unidentified:** They sort of roped them in.

**O'Brien:** So, where they are afraid the problem is the . . . now this flying wedge of students that's going to tackle the dormitory.<sup>76</sup> Half these guys, you know, they've about had it.

**O'Donnell:** But what's the point of it . . . these guys . . . burning and looting. I suppose they are going to kill us when they get here.

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**O'Donnell:** You start firing at a bunch of students?

**O'Brien:** They're afraid it's going to happen.

**O'Donnell:** Uh?

**O'Brien:** That's what they're afraid is going to happen.<sup>77</sup> . . . marshal

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76. Baxter Hall, where Meredith is located.

77. Tape 26 ends. There appears to have been some conversation lost before the Secret Service replaced the tape reel. Tape 26A begins, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

seriously hurt; the others, some others got buckshot. Well, this must have been done under the premise that something's going to happen [*unclear*].

[*on the phone*] Hello?

*Pause. An indistinct conversation can be heard in the background.*

**O'Brien:** [*puts down the receiver*] If necessary, is there any way that we could get an ambulance?

**Sorensen:** The police ought to be able to get an ambulance to the [*unclear*].

**Unidentified:** The Governor said, "Make sure and take that boy out of there, and everything will be all right."

**O'Brien:** That's the main thing.

**Unidentified:** I'd take him out. By tomorrow, with those 5,000 bayonets.

**Unidentified:** Certain that there be no repercussions whether you choose to bring troops in or not.

**Unidentified:** No. No. I agree.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** . . . write this thing off now. Obviously, the townies [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** They had in mind. [*Doors open.*]

**Sorensen:** One that was hit by the gas?

**Unidentified:** Yeah. [*Unclear.*] [*Unclear exchange.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, we can't last that long. [*Doors close.*]

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone*] Hello. Yeah. Hmm. Don't worry. Oh yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** The son of a bitch. He knows [*unclear*]. [*Door opens and closes.*]

**President Kennedy:** What? Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*] It's not about the policemen. It's about other people being shot. If you get Barnett to get Meredith off the campus . . .

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** Just to get Meredith off the campus. That's what he wants.

**Unidentified:** Well he can [*unclear*]. [*Sound of water being poured.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** That's what he said.

**President Kennedy:** Well, he wants to be able to say that he asked me to get him off. And that I refused.

**Robert Kennedy:** Now, he's too . . .

**President Kennedy:** You've got to get law and order and then you can discuss what to do about Meredith. But he can't do anything. He doesn't even get ahold of the head of the state police.



**Robert Kennedy:** What do they say?

**O'Brien:** They don't know. Nothing at the moment.

**Robert Kennedy:** We'll have to stick it to that Walker.<sup>78</sup> [*Door opens and closes.*]

**Sorensen:** Can't you get him arrested?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I can't do it now.

**Sorensen:** Why not?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, he's out there in the field.

**Unidentified:** You mean there's nobody that can go out and arrest him?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone*] Hello?

**Robert Kennedy:** Is he still being shot at, Larry?

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone*] No. Any shooting? Things quiet now? Quiet. Yeah. Yeah.

[*talking to people in the room*] Everything's quiet around there, but he doesn't know . . . they're trying to check the dormitory.

**Robert Kennedy:** The what?

**O'Brien:** Trying to check around as to what's going on in the dormitories. He says it's quiet around the area. One fellow's seriously hurt and they're trying to get an ambulance.

**Marshall:** There's supposed to be an ambulance going in, too. [*Door sounds.*]

**Unidentified:** Jesus!

**Sorensen:** Sad day in our country.

*No conversation as they wait for information to come in. Doors open and close.*

**Sorensen:** Any word yet on the military?

**Marshall:** Well, they're just leaving Memphis.<sup>79</sup>

**Sorensen:** Can they handle that [*unclear*]? [*Unclear exchange.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** Hey, Burke?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** Want to talk to Watkins?<sup>80</sup> You put the call in?

**Marshall:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** Watkins.

**Marshall:** Should we call him?

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78. Major General Edwin A. Walker, retired.

79. At 12:26 P.M., the departure of Task Force Alpha was still about ninety minutes away.

80. Thomas A. Watkins.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yes.

*Doors open and close followed by silence. Then again there are sounds of doors opening and closing, with Evelyn Lincoln's voice in the background and an unclear exchange in the foreground ending with "Jesus Christ."*

*The President enters the room.*

**President Kennedy:** [ *Unclear* ] casualties [ *unclear* ] unless we're lucky.

**O'Brien:** The state policeman died. It's too bad.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ].

**O'Brien:** [ *talking on the phone* ] Hello? Yeah. Yeah. All right.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear* ].

**President Kennedy:** Shotgun wound in his back.

**O'Brien:** [ *talking on the phone* ] Hello? [ *Pause* .] Right. No. All right.

[ *talking to people in the room* ] He told me they ought to get [ *unclear* ] the fighting was [ *unclear* ] the campus [ *unclear* ] the assistant dean [ *unclear* ].

**Unidentified:** I understand it was [ *unclear* ]. [ *Voices can be heard murmuring in the background.* ]

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

*The Attorney General enters the room.*

**Robert Kennedy:** What's he say, Larry?

**O'Brien:** Nothing at the moment. He just said that we've got a stretcher.

[ *on the phone* ] Hello? Maybe he . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Hello? Well, how does it look now?

**O'Brien:** So they sent 18 men out to the dormitory.<sup>81</sup> They weren't sure if they were receiving fire or not.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] And what about there, they firing at all now? [ *Pause* .] Is Nick there? [ *Pause* .] Well, I'd like to talk to him to see what the . . . Oh, they're there? Yeah. Who's this?

**Marshall:** Let the people pick [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *in an aside* ] Now, they told them they had to land. [ *Unclear exchange.* ]

**Robert Kennedy:** They think we shouldn't do that.

**Unidentified:** Not today.

**Robert Kennedy:** You shouldn't just, you shouldn't say things.

**Unidentified:** Why don't you pick up the phone? That will get them flying.

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81. Originally Katzenbach posted 6 men to guard Meredith; as the situation deteriorated on campus, 18 additional men were dispatched from the Lyceum front to reinforce Baxter Hall.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *Unclear* ] probably shouldn't say anything [ *unclear* ]. These guys have capable fellows there.

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** The National Guard. They can [ *unclear* ].

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *talking on the phone* ] Yeah. Oh Nick? How's it look? The fellow from the London paper was there, was he?<sup>82</sup> London paper. [ *talking to the people in the room* ] He says the fellow from the London paper died. . . . Yeah.

**President Kennedy:** We ought to get some more troops. I wonder if it takes this long to get people ready around here.

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Have the troops, have the National Guard showed up? Did they fire? Are they firing at all down there?

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Is it quieter?

**Marshall:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**Robert Kennedy:** [ *on the phone* ] Who've you got up there at the other place? Yeah, but I mean I think you want to get somebody that's up there that knows how important it is to keep Meredith alive. Yeah, but I mean it should be somebody that you know. And that should stay right by Meredith and shoot anybody that puts a hand on him. And it has got to be the absolute . . . OK? [ *The telephone rings in the background.* ]

[ *speaking to the people in the room* ] It's a little quieter. [ *Unclear.* ]

The Attorney General steps out to call secretary of the Army Cyrus Vance to inquire about the status of the long anticipated Task Force Alpha. Hoping to reduce any further delays, the Attorney General wants to know whether the advance contingent can be flown directly to the campus. Robert Kennedy used his brother's telephone and the call was taped.

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82. At approximately 12:30 A.M., Jack Rosenthal of the Justice Department called the White House to report that a reporter for the *London Daily Sketch*, Paul Guihard, had been killed in the riot. His body was found next to a women's dormitory on campus. See Dictabelt 4F2, Cassette A, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

*Approximately 12:40 A.M.*

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*[H]ow long before they'll be there?*

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**Conversation from the Oval Office between  
Robert Kennedy and Cyrus Vance<sup>83</sup>**

**Cyrus Vance:** Yeah, see the problem is one of light getting in there, and they're just going to get in wherever they can on the campus.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, and then they're, we could use at least a couple hundred right there.

**Vance:** Yeah, well . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** I don't know how. They don't have transportation in from the airport.

**Vance:** No. They will land on the campus. These are their instructions. Wherever they can get in, Bob.

**Robert Kennedy:** OK.

**Vance:** Right.

**Robert Kennedy:** But when, how long before they'll be there?

**Vance:** Uh, well, they left—take a look at my watch—must be about, I would guess 10 or 15 minutes ago. And it was supposed to take about an hour. Bob, I don't want to guess . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** No.

**Vance:** . . . at the thing because I don't know precisely.

**Robert Kennedy:** OK. All right.

**Vance:** Right.

**Robert Kennedy:** Thanks.

*Robert Kennedy hangs up.*

**Meeting on Civil Rights, Continued**

*At approximately the same time that Vance is confirming to Robert Kennedy that the helicopters have taken off, General Charles Billingslea calls the Justice Department (12:42 A.M.) with similar information. The first helicopters actually took off at 2:08 A.M. (12:08 A.M. Mississippi time).*

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear.*] Somebody shot [*unclear*] the London paper [*unclear*].

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83. Dictabelt 4F3, Cassette A, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

**Unidentified:** Right.

**Unidentified:** It's going to be a big story over in Europe, don't you think?

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**O'Donnell:** I have a hunch that Khrushchev would get those troops in faster. That's what worries *me* about this whole thing.

**Unidentified:** Why?

**O'Donnell:** I think that . . .

**O'Brien:** You know, but most of them [*unclear*] you get them there first [*unclear*].

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Donnell:** I just don't quite understand it. I mean, why would [*unclear*].

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Hello? Anything doing?

**Marshall:** Larry, is there any sign of the Guard?

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Find any Guard there at all? Any arrivals? Any word?

**Unidentified:** I wish those marshals would arrive. No state police guarding them [*unclear*] troops [*unclear*]. The state police they can't find [*unclear*].

**Marshall:** That's what the Governor said. We didn't find the state police.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Yeah, I know. National Guard.

**O'Donnell:** The MPs are airborne? At least?

**Marshall:** What?

**O'Donnell:** Are they airborne?

**Marshall:** Yeah. They're airborne. No, they are. They are *in fact* airborne.

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Marshall:** I mean, unless they're lying to us.

**Sorensen:** Well, they were not exactly accurate when they told us that they were.

**Marshall:** They were two hours off to begin with.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Not at the airport?

**Marshall:** [*Unclear*] off something like that.

**Sorensen:** It wasn't two hours? [*Unclear*] regular Army?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Yeah.

**Marshall:** Or at least one of them.

**O'Brien:** [*on the phone*] Yeah. Fine. Right.

[ *talking to people in the room* ] The current problem is how to get the trucks off the campus back to the airport to bring the troops in.

**Marshall:** Are the troops . . .

**O'Brien:** The MPs.

**Marshall:** They're going to land on the campus.

**O'Brien:** Well, he said that there's a question whether they can or not.

**Marshall:** Why?

**O'Brien:** Well, I don't know. Lights or what have you.

**O'Donnell:** They have a helicopter?

**Marshall:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** So that's what they're checking out now. They were going to have them land in the airport and bring them in by truck, but now . . . ?

**Marshall:** They can't get the trucks off the campus?

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

*Door opens. The President and the Attorney General enter.*

**Sorensen:** A few hundred students and rednecks have really got the entire U.S. Army [ *unclear* ].

*Unclear chatter; someone jokes, "Take a cab from the airport."*

**Unidentified:** Think some of the townspeople would drive them in?

**Marshall:** [ *Unclear.* ]

**President Kennedy:** What about a baseball field with night lights or anything like that?

**O'Brien:** [ *talking on the phone* ] Hello?

**Robert Kennedy:** Burke, should we [ *unclear* ] them?

**Marshall:** We cannot [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** [ *talking on the phone* ] Well, they won't be able to land.

**Unidentified:** Unless they can open it. [ *Unclear* ] can get it open.

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** But can Ramsey look at the map and see whether, where else there is?<sup>84</sup>

**Marshall:** Well, there is a practice field right next to the large [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, why don't they [ *unclear* ].

**Marshall:** That's where they [ *unclear* ].

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I don't know whether they can find it, though. [ *Unclear.* ]

**Marshall:** If there's no lighting. That's a problem.

---

84. Ramsey Clark was assistant attorney general in the Lands Division of the Department of Justice.

**O'Donnell:** [ *Unclear*] the weather's all right, we can [ *unclear*].

**Unidentified:** In the dark?

**O'Brien:** [ *talking on the phone*] Yeah. [ *Unclear exchange.*] [ *talking on the phone*] Yeah.

**Unidentified:** Helicopters.

**O'Brien:** [ *talking on the phone*] Yeah.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** Second time in.

**O'Brien:** [ *to the people in the room*] Maybe they have sixty guardsmen there now. One of them was just wounded, so they know they're there.<sup>85</sup>

**President Kennedy:** One of the guards was wounded?

**O'Brien:** They said they just brought him in. So he says they estimate they've [ *unclear*]. He arrived in a group of sixty.

**Unidentified:** You were right about it anyway.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**Unidentified:** That's good anyway.

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** Sixty men . . . sixty men under the command of a Captain Falkner, is the name.<sup>86</sup>

**O'Donnell:** That's Faulkner's son.<sup>87</sup>

**O'Brien:** Yeah.

**O'Donnell:** [ *Unclear.*]

**Marshall:** [ *talking on the phone*] All right. Where did they land?

**O'Brien:** One of the Oxford group, then?

**O'Donnell:** Yeah. Must be.

**O'Brien:** That's what they have, sixty.

**Marshall:** [ *Talking on the phone unintelligibly in the background. Unclear exchanges.*]

**O'Brien:** [ *on the phone*] Yeah. Yeah. Oh. Yeah.

[ *to the people in the room*] Taking care of those sixty guardsmen pretty quick. One of them got hit in the arm with a brick. He's down. And the other one got a cut across [ *unclear*].

**Unidentified:** [ *Unclear.*]

**O'Donnell:** He won't like it.

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85. The first confirmation for the White House that some National Guard reinforcements, a contingent of some 55, had reached the campus. Ramsey Clark at Justice learned this at 12:48 A.M.

86. Captain Murry Falkner, cousin of William Faulkner.

87. William Faulkner, author.

**Unidentified:** The corpsman.

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone*] Well, as long as they're [*unclear*] backs to the bricks and rocks, that's a hope. Yeah. Yeah. [*Unclear exchange in the background.*]

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone*] Is that right? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. OK. Right.

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear*] the marshal who fired that gas gun . . .

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone while Marshall is whispering in the background*] No shooting, now though, huh? Yeah. Anything going? Yeah. Good. OK. He's in the next room. I'll keep this line open. OK. All right. [*Meanwhile, an indistinct conversation is going on in the background.*] OK, Dean, I'll tell him.<sup>88</sup> He's in the next room [*unclear*]. OK.

**O'Donnell:** [*Unclear.*] [*telling a story*] He said, "All right." He said, "Who?" He said, "Governor, this is the *Boston Post*." "Who the hell else would it be this time of the night?" "Governor, your daughter's car has been found cracked up down on the Cape. Do you have any statement?" "Certainly, the thief must be apprehended." [*Laughter.*]

*Sounds of the door opening and closing followed by a pause.*

**O'Brien:** You say you're unsure about that car that's been showered and hit with bricks.

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone*] Hello? Hi Joe. [*Pause.*] Yeah. [*Pause.*] Larry O'Brien. Yeah. [*Pause.*] Yeah. Well, I'll get on it . . . yeah. OK. [*Pause.*]

**Sorensen:** They say if you ever made a chronological listing of the reports we've gotten over that phone in the last three hours, it wouldn't make any sense at all.

**O'Brien:** [*talking on the phone*] Hello. [*Pause.*] Yeah. You want Bobby? Who's this? Yeah, hold on a minute. [*Puts down receiver.*]

He wants Bobby. [*Sounds of door opening and closing.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*talking on the phone*] Hello? Yeah.

**O'Brien:** [*Unclear.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*talking on the phone*] They tell me the fellow from the London paper was killed. . . . Well, they found him back of some dormitories. Yeah. Yeah, that's true. What are we going to say about all this, Ed?<sup>89</sup> You know, we're going to have a hell of a problem about why

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88. Dean P. Markham.

89. Probably Edwin Guthman, director of public information at the Department of Justice.



we didn't handle the situation better. Yeah, yeah. [*Pause.*] OK. Well, I think we are going to have to figure out what we are going to say. [*Pause.*] Do you want to? Oh yeah, well you did terrific. I think it's just a question of the fact that I made the decision to send [*pause*]. OK. You want to hold on?

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Hello? This is Burke. Yeah. Yeah.

**Lincoln:** Bill Geoghegan calling you.<sup>90</sup> Want to take it?

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Yeah. Oh, Mrs. Lincoln? Oh, Ed? Listen, can you hold on just a minute while I take a call from Bill? Hello? Just hold on.

*Phone rings. Then there are sounds of a door opening and closing.*

**Operator:** What number?

**Lincoln:** One line. [*Door opens and closes.*]

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Ed? They can't get the trucks out to them. We're going to try to land some on the campus. [*Pause.*] We're not. [*Pause.*] Yeah, we ought to do that. It's really a [*pause*]. Yeah. Let him know if they've gone. . . . Oh, he was there, all right. What he was doing I don't know. I don't know, Ed.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*Unclear.*]

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Yeah. Yeah, they did . . . Yeah. OK. They've all been evacuated, I understand—[*pause*]. Yeah. Real war. No. God, that's dumb. That's uh, that Army, you know, they're just late. Well, they're in the air.<sup>91</sup> Yeah. I don't think they do. They've got pistols. Well, they're . . . Yes, they do. I mean, they'll all be there by the morning, Ed. Yeah, I know. Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** Is Ed there?

**Marshall:** What?

**Robert Kennedy:** Ed?

**Marshall:** He just said, "Hold on," and . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** I'd like to speak to him, then.

**Marshall:** Fine. [*on the phone*] Hello? Who's this? Oh Dean? Is Ed around? Could—well, when he comes back, Bob wanted to talk to him. [*Pause.*]

[*to people in the room*] Do they know what they're going to do with the MPs?

**Unidentified:** Not exactly.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I think they [*unclear*] and maintain law and order, and then they can figure it out.

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90. William A. Geoghegan was assistant deputy attorney general in the Department of Justice. He was the number two at the crisis center in the Justice Department.

91. It was about 12:55 A.M. and the helicopters are about to take off.

**Marshall:** Well, I mean, do they know where they're going to land them?

**Robert Kennedy:** Oh, in another 15 or 20 minutes, I think. They have it pretty much under control, though, in effect. [*Unclear.*]<sup>92</sup>

**Marshall:** Oh, here's Ed. [*on the phone*] Just a minute, Ed.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Hey, Ed? I think that probably you should get that crowd together and brief them on all that, when it quiets down and all. [*Door opens.*]

**Lincoln:** Bill Geoghegan's calling you.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah, but you see, we're going to be blamed for not doing enough. And I think that you trace it. First, that we had the agreement with the Governor. Uh—Do you . . . Do you want to hold on? [*He puts the receiver down.*]

**Marshall:** [*on the phone*] Hello, Ramsey?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*seems to walk to other side of the room*] Well, he's besieged, of course, from behind. . . . But he's under siege.

**President Kennedy:** So has he agreed with us?

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah, of course, he just figured that he . . . but I mean uh—

[*on the phone*] Hello.

**Unidentified:** What about?

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] What about the reporters there? Do they see the picture? [*Unidentified background conversation.*]

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah, I just think that, but the point that we want to get over you know is that the Governor said . . . made this arrangement. We didn't sneak him in. I think that's going to be the cry, that we snuck him in unprepared.

Well, can I tell you what the . . . Of course, the point is, at first, he said, he came in in [a] helicopter, and of course they know he didn't, and then the gate was opened to everybody to come through . . . and the state police guided him in. Yeah. Well, I just think that we are going to take a lot of knocks because of people getting killed, the fact that I didn't get the people up there in time.

**President Kennedy:** [*on another phone*] Well, now, did Bob Watkins [*unclear*].<sup>93</sup>

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92. The advance contingent of Task Force Alpha landed at 1:50 A.M. Not only were they about 45 minutes later than the Attorney General had assumed, but these troops had to land at Oxford airport due to the cloud of tear gas that obscured any possible landing areas in or near the campus. The situation on the campus was still far from being under control.

93. Tom Watkins, Governor Barnett's intermediary.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] I think the fact, then, they promised the state police would stay and then the state police left. And he took responsibility . . .

**President Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] All right.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] . . . under this arrangement for maintenance of law and order.

**President Kennedy:** [*on another phone*] Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] I'll do that, but I just thought you'd cover the points, and OK . . .

**President Kennedy:** [*on another phone*] All right. Just call me now that it's going to be important [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Yeah, but I mean, just so you know the facts and so that that we can . . . Yeah. OK.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] Now, how is it down there now?

**Marshall:** OK. I'll call you [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] OK.

**Unidentified:** Yeah.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*on the phone*] OK. Would you hold?

**Marshall:** Well, we ought to get . . . Oh, have we called up other Guard units?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, they were sending them all, I guess.

**Marshall:** They are?

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, I'm not sure. [*Unclear.*]

*Doors close and the machine is left running. It is about 1:00 A.M. and the Cabinet Room is empty. Someone enters the room again and turns the machine off.*

1:45 A.M.

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*[W]e've got to get this situation under control.*

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### Conversation with Ross Barnett<sup>94</sup>

President Kennedy is losing his patience both with the U.S. Army, which has yet to arrive on the scene in Oxford, and with the Mississippi Governor, who has not contributed anything to restoring order at Ole

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94. Dictabelt 4F4, Cassette A, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

Miss since the unfortunate decision to remove the state troopers over four hours earlier. The President does not know that Governor Ross Barnett is indeed preparing to speak to the people of Mississippi about the crisis in Oxford. All that is known in Washington is that the FBI in Oxford has just detected a group of 150 state troopers sitting in their cars doing nothing but watching the unfolding tragedy.

*The conversation begins with unrelated fragments of phone conversation, perhaps on another line; then the recording of the main conversation begins.*

**Unidentified:** He treated a number of other people. I asked him how many doctors he had, and how many . . .

*Recording switches to following conversation.*

**Ross Barnett:** [Unclear—]

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** —and I, he said that what we were talking about we wouldn't have any trouble. Do it tonight, you know.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah. Well, our people say that it's still a very strange situation. They wouldn't feel that they could take a chance on taking him outside that building. Now if we, can we get these fellows? I hear they got some high-powered rifles up there that have been shooting sporadically. Can we get that stopped? How many people have you got there? We hear you only got 50.

**Barnett:** Well, I have approximately 200 there now, Mr. President. That's not that . . .

**President Kennedy:** You got 200?

**Barnett:** Sir, about 200.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now let me get in touch with my people.

**Barnett:** . . . and we don't have but 210 or [2] 12, patrolmen, you see.

**President Kennedy:** I see. Well, now, let me get my people back again.

**Barnett:** I'm doing everything in the world I can.

**President Kennedy:** That's right. Well, we've got to get this situation under control. That's much more important than anything else.

**Barnett:** Yes. Well, that's right.

**President Kennedy:** Now, let me talk to my people, and let me find out what the situation is there.

**Barnett:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** They called me a few minutes ago and said they had some high-powered rifles there. So we don't want to start moving . . .

**Barnett:** Mr. President . . .

**President Kennedy:** . . . anybody around.

**Barnett:** . . . people are wiring me and calling me saying, "Well,

you've given up." I said, I had to say, "No, I'm not giving up, not giving up any fight."<sup>95</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Yeah, but we don't want to . . .

**Barnett:** "I never give up. I, I have courage and faith, and, we'll win this fight." You understand. That's just to Mississippi people.

**President Kennedy:** I understand. But I don't think anybody, either in Mississippi or anyplace else, wants a lot of people killed.

**Barnett:** Oh, no. No. I . . .

**President Kennedy:** And that's what, Governor, that's the most important thing. We want . . .

**Barnett:** . . . I'll issue any statement, any time about peace and violence.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now here's what we could do. Let's get the maximum number of your state police to get that situation so we don't have sporadic firing. I will then be in touch with my people and then you and I'll be talking again in a few minutes; see what we got there then.

**Barnett:** All right.

**President Kennedy:** Thank you, Governor.

**Barnett:** All right now.

**President Kennedy:** I'll be back.

*President Kennedy hangs up.*

1:50 A.M.

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*[C]an you get them so that we stop this rifle shooting?*

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### Continuation of Conversation with Ross Barnett<sup>96</sup>

Kennedy again emphasizes to Barnett the importance of restoring order, while Barnett assures the President that he is doing everything possible to gain control of the situation.

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95. Throughout the evening, the Governor was deluged with calls and telegrams urging him not to "sell out" to the Kennedys. In response to such talk, Barnett went on the air shortly before midnight (local time), and declared, "I call on Mississippians to keep the faith and courage. We will never surrender."

96. Dictabelt 4F5, Cassette A, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

**President Kennedy:** Hello.

**Unidentified:** Just one moment, sir.

**Unidentified:** There you are, sir. There's the President.

**President Kennedy:** Hello. Hello.

**Ross Barnett:** Mr. President?

**President Kennedy:** Yes, Governor.

**Barnett:** I just talked with Colonel Birdsong . . . <sup>97</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Right.

**Barnett:** . . . who is our director of the highway patrol . . .

**President Kennedy:** That's right.

**Barnett:** . . . and he assures *me* that he has *approximately* 150 men there now.<sup>98</sup>

**President Kennedy:** Now, we got a report that they're all in their cars two or three blocks away.

**Barnett:** I told 'em, just like you asked me, to get *moving*.

**President Kennedy:** I see. Now, can you get them so that we stop this rifle shooting? That's what we got to stop.

**Barnett:** Well, he says he's doing all that he can. He says they're strangers in there.

**President Kennedy:** I know it, well that's what we hear.

**Barnett:** And he's calling for 50 more, and that'll put it up around 200.

**President Kennedy:** Can they get those students to go to bed?

**Barnett:** Well, he says he's trying to, and I don't think it'll be long before he can get them all to bed.

**President Kennedy:** OK. Will you stay at . . .

**Barnett:** Maybe not, I can't tell.

**President Kennedy:** Well, let's stay right at it. We ought to be, that's what we got to do before we can do anything.

**Barnett:** . . . he's reporting constantly to a gentleman who has control of the activities of the troops there.

**President Kennedy:** Yeah.

**Barnett:** And he understands that he's doing all he can.

**President Kennedy:** Well, I think that it's very important, Governor, aside from this issue; we don't want a lot of people killed just because they, particularly, evidently two or three guardsmen have been shot. And, of course, our marshals and then that state trooper, so we don't want . . .

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97. T. B. Birdsong was head of the Mississippi Highway Patrol.

98. This is presumably the 150 men seen sitting in their cars near campus.

2:00 A.M.

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*When will they be there?*

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**Conversation between Robert Kennedy and Creighton Abrams<sup>99</sup>**

Task Force Alpha finally arrived at the Oxford Airport at 1:50 A.M., after the cloud of tear gas over Ole Miss had prevented a daring landing at the campus. The President and his brother feared new delays. It had taken Captain Murry Falkner's National Guard Unit well over an hour to move the few miles from downtown Oxford to the Lyceum. With the airport even farther away from the campus, the White House wondered how the U.S. Army could accelerate the deployment of its 200-man advance contingent.

The tape begins with General Creighton Abrams's trying to explain the Army's plan to move the men. Abrams is monitoring the situation from the Millington Naval Air Station, outside Memphis, Tennessee.

**Creighton Abrams:** Mr. Geoghegan reports to me that there are more than enough trucks at the strip, with 180 men in the helicopters.<sup>100</sup>

**Robert Kennedy:** You got 180 men? Where are the rest of them?

**Abrams:** Moving on the road.

**Robert Kennedy:** When will they be there?

**Abrams:** Uh, about two hours and three-quarters. That would be quarter of three in the morning our time.

**Robert Kennedy:** Quarter of five our time? How many of them are there?

**Unidentified:** [*off the phone in the room*] Quarter of five.

**Robert Kennedy:** How many of them are there?

**Abrams:** The 500.

**Robert Kennedy:** And when do the rest of . . .

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99. Dictabelts 4F7 and 4G1, Cassettes A and B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

100. Geoghegan and Ramsey Clark at the Justice Department War Room have maintained the only continuous contact to the U.S. Army during this crisis. The U.S. Army evidently relies on the Justice Department War Room for information about the battle conditions in Oxford. After this crisis, the Army would be criticized for not having done any preliminary reconnaissance in Oxford.

**Abrams:** Behind that's another battalion, marching right behind them, of 680.

**Robert Kennedy:** They're MPs?

**Abrams:** MPs.

**Robert Kennedy:** What was the delay in getting them out of Memphis?

**Abrams:** They . . . I don't know the details of it, Mr. Kennedy. They . . . this is the best response they could make, apparently, under the circumstances.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, who's in charge of that?

**Abrams:** Each of those battalions has a battalion commander, and both battalions are under the command of General [Charles] Billingslea. They had a meeting over here this afternoon, which I did not attend. But they had a meeting in which they discussed all these plans.

**Robert Kennedy:** Well, didn't they say they could get off and down there within an hour?

**Abrams:** Yes, they expected a much more rapid response than has occurred. I know General Billingslea did.

**Robert Kennedy:** What happened then?

**Abrams:** I don't know.

**Robert Kennedy:** Is somebody going to find out?

**Abrams:** Yes, sir.

**Robert Kennedy:** [*Sighs.*] What about the battle group?

**Abrams:** We have gotten ahold of the battle group and have diverted them. We got ahold of them at [*unclear*].

**Robert Kennedy:** When will they be down there?

**Abrams:** . . . Tennessee. I don't have a new estimate on that, sir. We've, it's only been within the last 15 or 20 minutes that we got ahold of them, and it hasn't been recast. But I can get it very shortly.

**Robert Kennedy:** Yeah. Will you call me back at the White House?

**Unidentified:** [*Unclear.*]<sup>101</sup>

**Abrams:** I will.

**Robert Kennedy:** OK. Thank you.

**Abrams:** Yes, sir.

*Robert Kennedy hangs up.*

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101. This conversation continues on Dictabelt 4G.



4:20 A.M.

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*General, you ought to consider what kind of communication you're going to set up at that airport because you're going to have people flying in there.*

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### Conversation with Creighton Abrams<sup>102</sup>

Five and one half hours after President Kennedy ordered U.S. troops to the campus at the University of Mississippi, Task Force Alpha reached the riot zone. President Kennedy is frustrated by the delays and misinformation swirling about this entire operation. Once he knows that the troops have arrived, he decides to make a point of stressing the need for better coordination and implementation once daylight returns to Oxford.

**Evelyn Lincoln:** Hello.

**Unidentified:** General Abrams calling the President from Millington, Tennessee.<sup>103</sup>

**Lincoln:** [*off the phone to President Kennedy*] General Abrams is on the line at the other end.

**President Kennedy:** Hello. Hello?

**Unidentified:** Here you are, sir?

**Creighton Abrams:** General Abrams.

**President Kennedy:** Yes, General.

**Abrams:** I have a report from General [Charles] Billingslea.

**President Kennedy:** That's right. Now, the Attorney General has him on the other phone.

[*off the phone to Robert Kennedy*] Is that General Billingslea you got?

[*back to Abrams*] We got him on the other phone. So we'll be talk . . .

**Abrams:** The MP company arrived on the campus at 2:15 local time.

**President Kennedy:** Right. OK, now, General, what about the rest of . . . When are these other MPs going to get there? Do you know?

**Abrams:** The 503rd MPs should arrive at approximately zero four-thirty.

**President Kennedy:** That's local time there?

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102. Dictabelt 4G2, Cassette B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

103. Location of Memphis Naval Air Station.

**Abrams:** Local time.

**President Kennedy:** That's, in other words, that's two hours?

**Abrams:** Local time here.

**President Kennedy:** That's the group that set out by truck, is it?

**Abrams:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** So, your addition—

**Abrams:** They're followed by another MP battalion that should arrive at five. There, there's just the length of the battalion between them.

**President Kennedy:** In other words, but the next MP group to arrive won't be for two hours. Is that correct?

**Abrams:** That's correct, sir.

**President Kennedy:** Then after that there'll be some more in a half hour. Then what about that battle group?

**Abrams:** They, they . . . Just a moment, sir.

[*off the phone to someone in the room*] The battle group is [*unclear*].

[*back to President Kennedy*] Six o'clock, sir.

**President Kennedy:** What? Six o'clock.

**Abrams:** Six o'clock.

**President Kennedy:** Well, now, General, you ought to consider what kind of communication you're going to set up at that airport because you're going to have people flying in there. Seems to me you ought to have very good communications with that airport as well as the campus.

**Abrams:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** With General . . . In other words, General Billingslea ought to have a communication with the airport. You ought to have a communication with the airport and Billingslea because we're going to have people flying in there all day tomorrow.

**Abrams:** Yes.

**President Kennedy:** And then, of course, we got the problem of transportation and all the rest. So these are all matters that you'll be dealing with. But I think communication is very important.

**Abrams:** Yes, sir.

**President Kennedy:** OK. Fine, General. Thank you.

*President Kennedy hangs up.*

The arrival of U.S. troops calmed the situation immediately on campus. The student mob dispersed and an uneasy peace took hold. The change in the situation in Oxford gave the President an opportunity to get some sleep. The Attorney General and Burke Marshall went to the Justice Department, and Kennedy retired to the Mansion for a nap.