

The
PRESIDENTIAL
RECORDINGS

JOHN F. KENNEDY

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

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 21, 1962

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2,500 troops, I don't know. We agreed to help them get the thing out.⁷⁵ But I don't know what they're going to do with 2,500 soldiers to get it out, so . . .

Vance: The letter I have from McDermott says, "While we have no way to judge the appropriate figure, the state director of civil defense of Mississippi has informed the Public Health Service officials that 2,500 troops would be needed."

O'Donnell is saying something to the President in the background.

President Kennedy: [to O'Donnell] Did they?

O'Donnell: He hasn't [unclear] number of troops.

President Kennedy: I see. All right, well, I see. Well, then, I would think we ought to say that at the request of the civil defense director—

Vance: State director of civil defense of Mississippi.

President Kennedy: —that yes, the President has approved the . . .

Vance: Yeah. Fine.

President Kennedy: And so we don't get Barnett into it . . .

Vance: Right.

President Kennedy: Right. OK. Fine.

Vance: Yes, indeed, sir.

President Kennedy: Thank you, bye.

After hanging up the telephone, the President switches off both tape machines.

President Kennedy's next appointment was with Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois. The Douglas meeting and one later with Allan E. Lightner, Jr., the senior U.S. diplomatic representative in Berlin, went untaped. Kennedy left the office for the pool at 8:00 P.M.

Wednesday, October 3, 1962

The Kennedy administration continued making gains in Congress. The Senate sent the White House a tax revision bill containing the Kennedy business investment deduction. The price for this was the defeat of a measure to recoup some of the lost revenue through a withholding tax

75. Possibly another reference to the chlorine.

on dividends and interest. Compromises also surrounded Senate passage of the Foreign Aid Bill. The administration did not get as large an appropriation as hoped; but the Senate was far more generous than the House, which had cut the tab from \$4.8 billion to \$3.6 billion. The Senate authorized \$4.4 billion.

What little President Kennedy taped this day dealt with influencing the Senate-House conference on foreign aid to discourage the House from incorporating its cuts in the final bill. Kennedy also added to his record of taped civil-rights calls to the secretary of the Army, Cyrus Vance.

9:20 A.M.

We would like to come over if we can . . . General Wheeler and I, to discuss [a] withdrawal plan with you, sir.

Conversation with Cyrus Vance¹

On October 3, 9,827 Army troops remained in Oxford. Small numbers of forces began to depart from Oxford by truck and helicopter for either Memphis or Columbus Air Force Base. Nevertheless, the total number of regular troops in Oxford continued to increase slightly over the next several days, reaching 10,113 by the morning of October 8.²

President Kennedy: Cy?

Cyrus Vance: Yes, Mr. President.

President Kennedy: Morning.

1. Dictabelt 4J2, Cassette B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

2. On October 8, the Army removed the remaining check points from the Ole Miss campus, allowing cars to enter without being searched. Despite this, troops still patrolled the grounds, the town of Oxford, and the surrounding countryside. More than 5,400 troops that had been standing by at installations in Memphis and Columbus, Mississippi, were ordered to return to their bases. According to the *New York Times*, on 8 October, 3,000 National Guard troops, 14,000 regular troops, and 1,500 military police remained on duty. Of the regular troops on duty, half were at bases in Memphis and Columbus, 90 miles away.

On 10 October, the Army completed a significant withdrawal of troops from the Oxford area, reducing the number of men from 10,000 to 5,200. The remaining troops were divided nearly equally between regular Army and federalized Mississippi National Guard members. At peak strength, there had been some 23,600 men in Oxford and the surrounding area.

Vance: Morning, sir. We would like to come over if we can, about twelve, General [Earle G.] Wheeler and I, to discuss [a] withdrawal plan with you, sir.

President Kennedy: Good. Fine. OK, I'll be right here.

Vance: Fine, sir.

President Kennedy: Good. OK.

Vance: See you then.

Robert Kennedy recalled that as a result of the logistical foul-up on the night of September 30, the President was "as mad at Cy Vance and the information that Cy Vance was giving him as I've seen him during the course of the administration. He asked for an investigation to be conducted."³ Vance and Lieutenant General Earl G. Wheeler, the new chief of staff of the U.S. Army, were due to come to the White House later that morning to discuss the withdrawal plan for Oxford and, perhaps, to discuss the conduct of the presidential investigation.

Before the arrival of Vance and Wheeler, the President made telephone calls to the Speaker of the House and to Lawrence F. O'Brien, a special assistant to the President, who handled congressional affairs, to discuss the forthcoming conference on the foreign aid bill.

10:05 A.M.

I don't know what my psychology would be these days on Otto.

Conversation with John McCormack⁴

The President wanted to discuss with the Speaker of the House possible strategies for getting an increased authorization for foreign aid out of the upcoming conference on the Foreign Aid Bill committee meeting. Otto Passman, Democratic representative from Louisiana and chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations

3. Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, eds., *Robert Kennedy in His Own Words: The Unpublished Recollections of the Kennedy Years* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 168.

4. Dictabelt 4K.3, Cassette B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

Committee, an inveterate foe of foreign aid, would have to be induced to accept, in conference, the addition of \$300 to \$400 million to the \$3.6 billion in foreign aid in the House version of the bill. Apparently before starting to record, the President had told McCormack that Larry O'Brien, his special assistant for congressional relations, would be coming up to the Hill to see him and Passman.

President Kennedy: . . . foreign aid conference. I didn't know whether it would be possible for him to come up and speak to you about our thoughts. Then perhaps you and I could talk on the phone again and you could give me your judgment about what we ought to try to work out with Otto.

John McCormack: Sure. A . . . absolutely. And . . . we meet at eleven today, and Larry can come up anytime. . . . Oh, I'll come off the rostrum once we get going. We're going into the . . . I'll get into the third supplemental, so will it be convenient for him about half past eleven or so?

President Kennedy: Good. Fine. I'll have him up there.

McCormack: I think . . . You see, Otto agreed; when I said my understanding . . . I'll put it that way . . . that he'd go at least 300 in this title one, and probably a little more.

President Kennedy: Right. Right.

McCormack: Is that right?

President Kennedy: Right. That's right. He . . . you remember, we were talking about 350 and then he said, "Well, we will go over 300 and see what more we can do." Now, in view of the fact that we did well in the Senate, actually an even split would take us to 400 million over the House figure. So I thought that if he went up there with . . . Larry would have two sets of figures, and then we could just see what we could do with him.

McCormack: And I was thinking that a . . . My thought would be that . . . that you and I and Passman and whoever you wanted in from the department would sit . . . get together down at the White House. Naturally it would be at the White House.

President Kennedy: Right. Right.

McCormack: I think your . . . the psychological effect, don't you see?

President Kennedy: Right. I don't know what my psychology would be these days on Otto. [*Laughter.*] I'll tell you—

McCormack: Well, I know, Mr. President, it's a pretty tough . . . It . . . it may not get all we seek, but it will get a hell of a lot more than he would give to someone else.

President Kennedy: OK. Good. Well, I'll have Larry up there and then I'll be glad to meet whenever . . . you think would be best today.

McCormack: Today?

President Kennedy: Well, I think if they are going into conference tomorrow, either today, or whatever time you thought. Today or tomorrow would be fine with me.

McCormack: Better today. In other words, he'd . . . he would allocate it, as I understood it, anyway you wanted.

President Kennedy: Right. What we got to try to do is get him up to as near 400 as we can.

McCormack: I know. I agree with you.

President Kennedy: I'll have Larry up there, though, at 11:30.

McCormack: All right.

President Kennedy: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

McCormack: Right. Right.

The President then called Lawrence F. O'Brien to inform him of his discussion with the Speaker.

Sometime That Morning

[O]nce you get him briefed on the 400 . . . we can arrange to see Otto.

Conversation with Lawrence F. O'Brien⁵

President Kennedy spoke to Special Assistant Larry O'Brien to follow up on his discussion with the Speaker of the House John McCormack. The President anticipated having a personal lobbying session with Congressman Passman at the White House, but wanted O'Brien first to talk over the foreign aid numbers with the Speaker. Kennedy would also raise an unidentified matter with O'Brien. That portion of the conversation was either not recorded or erased.

Unidentified: Hello.

Evelyn Lincoln: The President asked for Mr. O'Brien. He's on.

5. Dictabelt 4K.6, Cassette B, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

Unidentified: OK.

President Kennedy: Larry?

Larry O'Brien: Yes, sir, Mr. President.

President Kennedy: Tell him to call . . . The Speaker said that he'd call you at 11:30 and then, perhaps, he will want to arrange—once you get him briefed on the 400—⁶

O'Brien: All right.

President Kennedy:—we can arrange to see Otto, if necessary, down here.⁷

O'Brien: Right.

President Kennedy: Now, the second thing is that I talked to Charlie . . .⁸

O'Brien: Yeah.

Secretary Vance and General Wheeler entered the White House at 12:14 P.M. Kennedy did not tape this meeting. After these military advisers left, the President had lunch with J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The President then went to the Executive Mansion for the rest of the day. He did not swim today and may have been feeling the initial effects of the illness that would keep him in bed all of October 4.

During the afternoon, the President presumably received reports on the progress of Walter Schirra's nine-hour space mission. In early September, Schirra's mission had influenced the scheduling of the final phase of the DOMINIC nuclear test series because of concerns over the radiation effects of high-altitude testing.⁹ At 6:17 P.M., the President spoke with Schirra, who had returned safely and was onboard the aircraft carrier *USS Kearsage*. At 6:30, the President held an unrecorded meeting in the Oval Room of the White House with his Soviet specialists. It is not known when that meeting ended.

6. The Speaker of the House, from 1962 to 1971, was John W. McCormack, Democratic congressman from Massachusetts, 1928 to 1971.

7. Otto Passman was a Democratic U.S. House member from Louisiana, 1947 to 1977, and chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. The most powerful and outspoken opponent of foreign aid in Congress, Passman continually clashed with the Kennedy administration over its foreign aid requests.

8. Unidentified.

9. See "Meeting on the DOMINIC Nuclear Test Series," 5 September 1962.