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Biographical Note

Belieu, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations and Logistics from 1961 to 1965, describes John F. Kennedy's (JFK) friendly personality, compares the JFK presidency to other presidential administrations, and discusses the Cuban Missile Crisis and Bay of Pigs, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Kenneth E. Belieu

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Kenneth E. Belieu

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1, 15	John F. Kennedy's (JFK) personality and manner
7	Belieu's government jobs
10	JFK's staff
12	Comparing the JFK administration to other presidential administrations
16	Cuban Missile Crisis
19	Bay of Pigs
24	U.S. space program
25	JFK in the Senate
26	JFK's assassination
28	Donating materials to the JFK library

Oral History Interview

with

Kenneth E. Belieu

March 1, 1977
Washington, D.C.

By William J. Hartigan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HARTIGAN: This is Bill Hartigan in Washington, D.C., 1625 K Street, in the office of Ken Belieu, and the purpose of my visit with Mr. Belieu is to interview him on behalf of the oral history department of the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. Ken, if you'll just answer me in any way at all so we can get a voice level, and we'll proceed with the interview.

BELIEU: Fine, fine. You just go right ahead.

HARTIGAN: Ken, I think the appropriate way to open up is to ask you when you met President Kennedy.

[-1-]

BELIEU: You know, I don't know whether I can tell you that or not. You think about a man so much, a man like Jack Kennedy, I think probably I met him two or three years before he ran for president. I'm not sure. I knew Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] before then. I met Bobby during the McCarthy [Joseph R. McCarthy]-Army hearings. I was on the army side and Bobby was minority counsel there,

and I began to learn the family. I remember one time, Jack Kennedy as senator, a young slender senator, came on the floor of the senate. I was working for Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson], who was majority leader at that time, and the Senate was in great confusion. At least I thought so. And Jack came running on. I shouldn't call him Jack, I guess, but that's the way we talked of him then. And he said, "Do you know what's going on here?" and I said, "I'll be damned if I know," and he said, "I don't either." But he was a kind of a man that you liked when you saw him. At least I did. So I suppose, to answer your question more specifically, about two or three years before he ran. I watched his opportunity to become vice-president, if I remember, at the convention years before. We were all rooting for him, but it didn't quite happen. But we knew we had a winner then. Later on, of course, I got to know him much better as president. At least in my opinion, I was always proud of that knowledge so I maybe somewhat answered you, I don't know, Bill.

[-2-]

HARTIGAN: No, that's fine. You, as time progressed, you became involved, though, with his activities. Is that right?

BELIEU: Yes, actually, before the, before he was sworn in as president, but after he was elected, the president-designate, or whatever you want to call it. One of my responsibilities with Lyndon was head of the preparedness investigating committee on all military aspects, also the space committee. And as soon as he was elected, we opened up our files to—I remember going to see Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.], who was administrative assistant at that time, and we opened up our files to the President-elect and got acquainted with him somewhat during that time. Again, I was having more an intimate relationship I guess, if you call it that, with Bobby because Bobby was on the Hill and around at that time more often than the president-elect was who was tied up with his new offices. I didn't really feel that I became personally acquainted with him until I became assistant secretary of the navy when he was president. And I'd have to say, as a matter, when he left government by the unfortunate circumstances that caused that, I felt the lilt went out of government.

It was my opportunity to brief him a few times even as assistant secretary and go over to the White House and meet with him. He was always very gracious. I can give you one specific example

[-3-]

which I'll never forget, and my mother, if she were alive today, wouldn't either. Later on we were standing in the outside edge of the oval room facing the rose garden, my mother and I, who was visiting me from Oregon. My mother was in her late seventies then. And the President was to come out and there was a ceremony. I've forgotten what the ceremony—it must have been a navy ceremony of some nature because I was invited. When the President came out, if he knew you, he'd lilt. His eye would look at you and he'd light up and you can

see it. Now I wouldn't have done that with Ike [Dwight D. Eisenhower], or with Lyndon, or with Richard Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon], but as he walked by I reached out and grabbed him by the arm. He sort of almost said, "Hi, Ken," but he didn't say it. But you could see it in his eye. I reached out and grabbed him by the arm and said, "Mr. President, I'd like to have you meet my mother." He said, "Are you Ilia Belieu, Ken's mother? I want to tell you what a fine young son you've got." Well, she never voted for a Democrat in her life but she went out of that White House about ten feet tall and I bet she voted twice for him every other day from there on out.

One time in the main navy building where the assistant secretary of the navy lived in those days, now it's been torn down, but it was an old office that all the Roosevelts had lived there at one time as assistant secretaries. And I was having a rather hectic meeting coming up. I was trying to prepare for it and I told a marine on

[-4 -]

the switchboard that I didn't want to be bothered with any phone calls. About that time the phone buzzer buzzed imperiously and the marine said—I picked up the phone—"The President wants to talk to you." And I almost said something to him. When I picked up the phone, it was his nibs himself on the phone, you know, the President calling me. And he said, "How many carriers have we got, Ken?" And I fortunately knew the answer, and I told him the number. I said, "Seventeen, including the one coming down the ways." Well, that of course was not accurate since the one coming down the ways was not operational. He said, "Well you've got one that's very expensive in this new budget." I said, "Yes we have. It's very expensive." "Well, what do you think about it?" And I said, "Well, as long as you need air power at sea I guess, Mr. President, and you can run the United States flag up and down anybody's coastline if you want with impunity." And he said, "That's good enough. Well, that personal contact was something that I thought was a trademark of his. The story of my mother and this. He called me about three times, I guess, during the time he was president. I can't, I should remember. The only one I remember with great clarity is that one on the carrier. The fact that the President of the United States would do that to find out what was going on, to call somebody as low-level as I was in government, obviously made me a fan of his for the rest of my life. He had an ability with people, I thought.

I remember

[-5 -]

going into the White House on social occasions sometimes. Now we all have friends in life that we can look at and we see them, having not seen them for a while, will look across the room and you raise the arm or a slight indication that you're there. I felt no compunction to see him across the room, crowded in the White House in the East Room or someplace like that. He'd always kind of raised his hand back, his eyes were sparkling and you knew that you were among friends when you talked to him. I thought he was a great president. It's unfortunate that time did not give him the chance to accomplish the programs he wanted to.

I remember taking over at one time to meet with him. Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] arranged the appointment. He had to sign, by law, certain naval papers. I took them to him and I decided I would take my young naval aide with me, who later became a retired vice admiral, who was then a young captain, never been in the White House before in his life. And I had forgotten protocol. I didn't clear him in, but he came in with me and nobody challenged it. Ken O'Donnell let me take him into the President's room and the President made this young naval captain feel so welcome.

HARTIGAN: Kind of like an Admiral Lynn.

BELIEU: He was almost an Admiral Lynn, that's right. Well I've

[-6 -]

talked an awful lot. You may want to ask me some more questions.

HARTIGAN: Well, Ken, with reference to some of the programs, projects that you will, that you were involved in during his administration. This information will be available to young students coming in doing research and so, in your good judgment, whatever hints that you think would be of value to them doing their research, giving them an honest evaluation of what happened during those years would be helpful.

BELIEU: Well I guess you can't.... History's difficult to track down, get an audit trail on. One of the jobs I had on the Hill was staff director. Very formal title, Senate Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences. Called the Space Committee. This was, you remember came after Sputnik and the country was concerned about going to the moon and getting into space. The technology is now here, and we know about it. Kennedy made that a personal thing when he came in, made it a presidential program. He didn't have to say too much. All he had to do was say a few words about it, and it moved. It moved, we went to the moon. U.S. technology succeeded where others didn't. This was a very positive accomplishment, in my mind, taking President Kennedy. Many of the technology benefits that

[-7 -]

we're using today came from that program. Obviously I saw him mostly through naval eyes at that time. He had a new look at the navy. He'd been in the navy, as everybody knows. He inspected the navy and when he saw things in the navy that were similar to what he had seen in World War II, he wanted to change them and make them more modern.

I had a personal involvement in his equal opportunity program. Coming from Oregon, I didn't have much background in that field but he issued an executive order, if you remember, that the country would move into equal opportunity and suddenly I awoken one fine day to find myself as the equal opportunity officer for the navy, and I didn't even know

how to spell “equal” or “opportunity.” He had a meeting in the White House and explained his program to us and I can say with some pride, the navy program worked extremely well in days when it was difficult. Without fanfare we, I remember, arranged for blacks and Americans of Mexican or Spanish background to become members of twenty-two I think, maybe it was twenty-one, different trade unions in Pascagoula, Mississippi, at that naval, on of the shipyards down there, without any problem with the local people either, done gently and firmly, just giving people an opportunity to apply. I think many people have forgotten Jack Kennedy in that area. He was very forceful, quiet, aggressive in it in my opinion. A student of history would be well advised to read between the lines of what he s done because his impact on

[-8-]

the short period of time he was in office was greater than it might have been had he been there sixteen years, or thereabouts like Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt].

HARTIGAN: In other words it was a short effective....

BELIEU: I thought so. Of course, I’m parochial. The parish is probably getting bigger. I liked the man. When you like somebody you re going to give them every credit you can. But I don’t think that that has to revolve on my say so. I think a student of history can tell that, too.

HARTIGAN: Ken, was that the only position you held under President Kennedy, Under Secretary of the Navy?

BELIEU: Assistant Secretary of the Navy. I was promoted to Under Secretary after he was assassinated.

HARTIGAN: I mean Assistant Secretary, right. That was under Governor Connally [John B. Connally], right?

BELIEU: John Connally was Secretary of the Navy for the first year I was there, and then Fred Korth, from Texas, was Secretary of the Navy. I’m certain it was Fred

[-9-]

Korth was in office when Kennedy was assassinated. I believe that’s correct.

HARTIGAN: Because Connally became, ultimately became governor.

BELIEU: Yes, he was in the navy one year and then became governor of Texas

almost immediately thereafter, well, shortly after the election. I also saw President Kennedy, I think, which may be more revealing through the eyes of Ted and his staff. You can tell what kind of an operation a man runs by the kind of staff he has around him and how they operate. I'm sure that there were probably push, pull, tugs of war, political lines of force within the staff and the White House. I've served in the White House several times since, been close to it, and that's human nature to find that. I remember watching Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], who's a pro in his own right, Ken O'Donnell, who is outstanding. I thought Ted Reardon, no finer man. I could name many more. He had an excellent staff around him, I thought. Presidents make mistakes, they're human like you and I, but I enjoyed working with him. There was a feeling of teamwork in the organization that I felt which was much younger then.

HARTIGAN: We all were.

[-10-]

BELIEU: I guess we all were, right. I remember one time I called Ted Reardon up and said, "I understand Ted Kennedy [Edward Moore Kennedy] is going to run for the Senate." [Interruption] I butted in and I said, "Ted, the President doesn't want to start a dynasty here. Maybe he hadn't oughta run for the Senate. He's already got an attorney general in the family." And Ted Reardon ignored me. He said, "Have you ever met Ted Kennedy?" I said, "No I haven't." He said, "Well, he's great." He ignored me completely. He said, "When he makes senator, I will introduce you." Well he did, and then one day, Ted Kennedy called me up and said, "How about having lunch?" And I said, "Fine, will I come up on the Hill, or will you come down have lunch with me in the navy?" He said, "I'll come on down. I'd like to get off the Hill." Well I'd never met the man really. But my staff was all agog. This young Senator was going to come in. I guess we've all seen the man whose got some kind of a presence when he walks into a room, you can feel him coming.

HARTIGAN: I know it, yeah.

BELIEU: I was in my office but I could hear the typewriters stop at about ten minutes to twelve, and he walked in and all the gals out there and the marine aides were looking at him and you could just feel his presence, and we

[-11-]

became friends from there on out. And that's typical, I thought, of the Kennedy family. It was my experience with him. They were dedicated to government, worked hard, were intense, and had a delightful sense of humor.

HARTIGAN: You were involved for many years in numerous agencies and parts of the government and that somewhat put you in the position of being able to, I suppose, evaluate administrations. How would you really evaluate, compared to other men, his administration? Bearing in mind that he was young, his staff was inexperienced, his staff was new.

BELIEU: I don't know whether one can do a real substantive analysis of an Administration's time like compare quarterbacks on different football teams at different times against different oppositions. Eisenhower never had a Bay of Pigs problem presented to him. He would have had he run again, I guess, and been elected, had the constitution allowed it, had he gotten in office. Kennedy took the responsibility for that, even though it wasn't his fault. But as leader, or as captain of the ship, he took it. He did not shirk from responsibility. I've seen administrations that have. I watched Eisenhower. Of course, I knew Eisenhower in the Army. I thought he was a great general and a very good man as president. I think

[-12-]

you'd have to compare each one of them at the time and the games they had to play at that time. Kennedy's inaugural speech, which we all watched, started the country out on very solid footing, I thought. I can only tell you what I sensed, as a matter, I've talked about teamwork before. It was a pleasure to work in that organization. I've worked in some administrations where it wasn't. I might describe it as a football team where you're arguing about going off-tackle or off-guard in the huddle, maybe, if that happens. We had lots of arguments like that, but once a decision was made, off we went. In some outfits I've observed that you're almost disloyal if you argue before the decision is made, and that's not the proper way in a democracy.

I remember one incident after I got out of government service. I was out in California. Everybody remembers Kennedy, Jack Kennedy, the president, going to Berlin. I was president of an organization in California that had a German working for it who had been a German national, now an American citizen, or trying to be an American citizen, but a German national in Berlin when the President came and talked at the Wall area over there, talked in Berlin. The minute this young man found out that I had worked for Kennedy, he had to look me up and tell me how great Kennedy was and how the people in Europe loved him.

Later on I had an opportunity to speak in France at Belleau Wood on Memorial Day and I had memorized a French speech and I gave it in

[-13-]

French. And people there had found out that I had worked for the Kennedy administration. I found in Paris, when de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle] was there and they would not allow anybody to go through the French Parliament, or Assembly rather. I had a marine aide in

uniform. One of the former ambassadors here found out I had worked for Kennedy and they took us right through. The French officer couldn't have gone in there. Took my marine, with his uniform, in and in what we would call Republican and Democratic cloak rooms of the Senate in Paris and treated us like we were long lost relatives. These little things make you understand a little bit, makes one understand a little bit about what Kennedy was doing internationally, I thought. I'm not sure that weapons systems and diplomatic and protocol do as much as a gleam in the eye and the lilt of a good human being can do in international affairs. I think he was starting out well on that at a very difficult time. But I can not give you a precise comparison.

HARTIGAN: Ken, were you aware of any of the legislative accomplishments of President Kennedy, either when he was in the Congress or during his term as President, that you were familiar with?

BELIEU: No I really can't.... ____ ...

[-14-]

military affairs so much and space affairs, was staff man for the Armed Services Committee and later on staff director. My whole little world was involved in the military appropriations bit at that time, or the space appropriations, although working for the then-majority leader, you got into state justice and judiciary, so I can't, I really can't talk too intelligently on that. In the Pentagon, of course, my world consisted of basically the appropriations for the Navy. I can only say this, that in terms—I've dealt with many appropriations and many legislative matters since then—that in working with the Kennedy administration on the Hill, we always had the full backing of Larry O'Brien and the legislative liaison group, and I cannot remember any problems we had that were not surmountable.

HARTIGAN: Are there any other general observations, understanding that you had a very short period of time working with Senator Kennedy, nobody's fault, of course. Any general observation you'd like to make before we close off?

BELIEU: No, you know, he was a very warm human being and that's what you'd like to have in a president, I think. I think he had a great sense of what as an army officer I would call duty, honor, country. Just no question about that.

[-15-]

It permeated his whole organization. He was commander-in-chief, and he knew it and he was doing it well. It's interesting that for the very short time that I knew him that he would make

such an impression on me. I had worked with Patton [George S. Patton]; I worked with Bradley [Omar N. Bradley]; I worked with many who were great in this country. It's been my privilege to do that, and he stacks up with his trump card along that route.

HARTIGAN: Just from a category point of view and being closely allied with the military, were you involved in any of the Cuban Missile Crisis....

BELIEU: Only indirectly. My job in the Navy was supply officer for the Navy and I was not involved in the tactical plans or strategic plans of that nature. I do remember I was inspecting a naval ordnance plant out in California about the day or so before the Bay of Pigs thing occurred and I remembered the senior civilian there saying, coming as I left the plant, the top man from the civilian side saying, "Tell the President, whatever he does, we're all for him." Later on, coming back, when the navy was utilized in the blockade, so-called, of Cuba.... Of course, as a senior naval official—I was a civilian naval official—I was well cognizant of what was happening. And I thought at that instance, he was a young

[-16-]

President, Jack Kennedy, Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev] had challenged him, as we know, had tried to test him. He found out that this young man might not be so well-versed in the international things, in terms of Khrushchev's longevity. But once he understood what was happening, he stood pat. And as we know, the Russians pulled back. I think Kennedy had the courage and the stubbornness that he could apply when he needed to. And I think he did that at that time. Historians will always argue about something of that nature, but as president, the decision had no place else to go, and he made it.

HARTIGAN: You were Assistant Secretary at that time...

BELIEU: Yes.

HARTIGAN: ...of the Navy. At that time were you sure or unsure of whether they were going to turn back? I know I watched that on TV like the others, but you were closer to it. And I think people always wonder what was in the minds of the officials that were actually....

BELIEU: Well, I don't think any of us, at least I didn't know exactly what the Russians might do. You never know that. I fought the war in Europe in the infantry

[-17-]

division and I never knew from one day to the next what the Germans might do except shoot

at us at times. But I knew that we had strength, and if we wouldn't be frightened about it we could handle it. I think Kennedy did, too. I think that's what he did. I think, no I don't think I had any doubts at all except that you've got to realize that I was militarily trained and wouldn't have had any doubts anyway.

HARTIGAN: We were as close as we ever want to be to having a war at that point. Is this true, or did the newspapers pumped that up?

BELIEU: I don't know that I had that much knowledge of the thing. We'd have to know what the Russians were thinking to.... I think that everybody realized that there was a possibility. We've all heard the descriptions of the eyeball through the keyhole in the door and he blinked, and so forth. A lot of that may just be political cosmetics, I don't know, or editorial cosmetics perhaps, but the point, to me, in any so-called confrontation is the ability of the man with courage to stand pat. Had we blinked there'd be Russian missiles there today. There's no question about it. Kennedy didn't let us blink.

[-18-]

HARTIGAN: Would we have actually fired on those ships if they didn't turn back?

BELIEU: My opinion is we probably would have.

HARTIGAN: Would have had to, I think. There'd be no....

BELIEU: When you get into that kind of a confrontation, but that's a hypothetical, and nobody'd be able to settle that.

HARTIGAN: What about your observations with reference to the Bay of Pigs from a naval point of view. You were Assistant Secretary of the Navy at that time, too, weren't you?

BELIEU: I haven't any personal knowledge about the plans that were made for the Bay of Pigs. Based on what I've been able to glean subsequent to the action was that the plan was made outside the military. I talked to a member of the Joint Chiefs later on and he said during Eisenhower's end of his tenure they were asked their comment and they said the plan that was presented to them had maybe a fifty-fifty chance of being successful, and they never saw the plan again. Now whether this gentleman was actually right or not, that's what he told me.

[-19-]

I do not know what was presented to President Kennedy at the time, so I can't go much

further than that from personal knowledge.

HARTIGAN: But the plan that was put into effect and ultimately was one that was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Is that right?

BELIEU: No. On the contrary, the plan that.... Members of the Joint Chiefs have told me this so they, the Joint Chiefs, saw a plan, were presented with a plan sometime prior to the end of the Eisenhower administration. How soon in the late fall I don't know. Now at that time, they said that that plan which was not prepared by the Joint Chiefs had a 50-50 chance, maybe a 50-50 chance of success. The plan was taken back, not implemented, and they never saw the plan again. That's what I was told. But Joint Chiefs records would show that. I don't know if this is completely accurate or not.

HARTIGAN: Let me just turn this tape over. I think we can be finishing up in a minute.

[Tape one, side two]

[-20-]

...we do have to change the tapes over. But we were talking about the Bay of Pigs and your observations of it from the assistant secretary of the navy's point of view. And I think we ended up with the plans that were presented in the latter part of the Eisenhower administration you say had a 50-50 chance of being....

BELIEU: This is what I'm told the Joint Chiefs said. It might have a 50-50 chance. But they were not the ones who made the plan. I don't know who made it. Obviously, a plan done properly by a nation of this size could have been successful had it been done properly.

HARTIGAN: The plan, however, that ultimately went into effect was, I'm assuming, approved by the Joint Chiefs of staff at that time, the new plan.

BELIEU: No, I don't think, I don't know. The information I have was that they didn't see it again, but it would be hard for me to imagine that a man of President Kennedy's caliber would not have shown somebody, you see.

HARTIGAN: That's the point I'm making. I'm assuming that he would certainly have, have hoped to have some

[-21-]

support for this plan.

BELIEU: Or somebody could have told him that this thing had been approved.

HARTIGAN: Of course, my recollection of it at the time was that they were in and out of that White House prior and through that so....

BELIEU: Well, I would think, all I can record is what somebody told me, and that doesn't mean that it's history at all. History really comes down to the combination of what everybody tells everybody, and then somebody makes a guess on that basis, I guess.

HARTIGAN: I understand that. I don't know if you're aware that he, after the Bay of Pigs, visited with President Eisenhower. Are you aware of that?

BELIEU: I had forgotten that until this minute, but I think you're right. My memory says that he did talk with Ike about it. But there again, I would not have known this personally.

[-22-]

HARTIGAN: Are there any other observations you'd like to make with reference to....

BELIEU: Oh, I'm certain I could think of many more if we had more time. I remember, I wasn't present, but he inspected the Navy and it was well written up at the time. And it was down in Norfolk, if I remember, and the ships went by in line of review. It must have been a glorious sight from Marshall's [George C. Marshall] standpoint. I think they had some target practice with drones and guided missiles, and I'm told that all the missiles missed the drones, and the President was extremely unhappy about that and told people, in no uncertain terms, that they better straighten up and fly right and get those things fixed because that reverberated through my office a little bit. That's typical sometimes. You try to set something up for the top guy and show it to him....

HARTIGAN: You felt you had to hit something, huh? [Laughter]

BELIEU: Now he can ask probably a reasonably good expectancy. You ought to have expected them to hit something. I guess in retrospect, you have to say that many of those missiles were in the early stage of development when they should have shot, should have fired.

[-23-]

HARTIGAN: Were there any difficulties associated with the space program, to your recollection? You were on the Hill at that time, weren't you?

BELIEU: When I left the Hill, we hadn't put an astronaut in orbit, gotten him out in space at all yet. John Glenn went out and one of the interesting stories about John Glenn, you reminded me of now, when he came back to earth and was being interviewed by the President, an audience with the President in the White House, that the President made some, with his acute sense of politics, said that, "That character takes a good picture from any angle, he ought to go in politics." I always thought later on that's why John Glenn went into politics. He slipped in the bathtub for a while and didn't make it for a while. Now he's a senator.

HARTIGAN: A sense of political analysis, huh?

BELIEU: Yeah. Understanding the cosmetics of politics, a man has to make a good showing on the tube today.

HARTIGAN: Were you active during the 1960 campaign, Ken?

BELIEU: No, not really. I was a professional staff member on

[-24-]

the hill and was precluded from political.... I participated in many a gathering where candidates were present and so forth. The fact is I was not even allowed to go at the convention as a professional staff member. I wanted to go because I had never been to one. Senator Stennis [John C. Stennis] was a member of the committee that I was working for, of which I was staff director. He called me out there on the last day of the convention to go on a military inspection trip with him so I was able to participate, or sat there as a member of the audience, while President Kennedy made his acceptance speech and laid his hand on Lyndon Johnson, his vice-president. Watched that with a great deal of interest because I'd never seen one before and it was very interesting to me.

HARTIGAN: Were you active on the hill while President Kennedy was a member of the Senate or the Congress?

BELIEU: Yes, I went on the hill in—I left the Army in 1955. Picked up a wooden leg in Korea [Korean War], and I stayed in the army for about five years and then went on the hill as a professional staff member of the armed services committee with Senator Russell [Richard B. Russell, Jr.]. And then became staff director of the space committee when the space age started. And while I knew President Kennedy and met him some

[-25-]

time during that period, I new Ted Reardon well, and we used to have lunch together occasionally, and I'd see the President-to-be as a senator in his office, and we'd say hello and talk about things sometimes. I didn't really know him that well.

HARTIGAN: You weren't familiar with any of his activities as a senator?

BELIEU: No, he was not on the armed services committee, and my time was 90 percent, 101 percent taken up with all the matters of the committee.

HARTIGAN: Ken, have we left anything that we could touch on?

BELIEU: Oh, I'm certain we'll think of something.

HARTIGAN: At the moment, I'm talking about.

BELIEU: I'd say not.

HARTIGAN: Ken then, one final question I personally like to ask everybody. Where were you at the time of the assassination?

[-26-]

BELIEU: I was in main Navy building and had lunch with, a standard meeting I had with several admirals, and they had left. They had a private dining room in that building, and I was sitting there drinking coffee and talking to some of my military assistants, or naval assistants, and my marine aide came running in and said there had been some shooting down in Dallas, and it looks like the President's been hurt. We didn't have much information. We listened to the radio a bit. I called up Ted Reardon in the White House, as I indicated before we were close friends, and I said, "Ted"—Ted was about the only senior staff man in the White House, everybody else had gone to Texas with the President—I said, "Ted, it must be a bad thing happening over there, why don't you come over and spend some time with me this afternoon." He said, "I think I will." A lot of people said you couldn't call the White House that day. I didn't have any trouble. I made several phone calls that day.

HARTIGAN: I didn't either. I talked to Jim Raleigh. I was in the Post Office at the time I talked to Jim Raleigh.

BELIEU: Well, Ted didn't show up, and pretty soon I called him back, and he said, "Would you come over?" He said, "I've got grown men in my office crying and I need some help. Would you come on over?" And so I walked on over and

[-27-]

spent the afternoon in Ted's office. Oddly enough, it was the office.... Later on, when I went in the White House, it was the office I inherited there, so it had a lot of nostalgic memories, not too pleasant. I watched the ____ come back from Texas. I watched the chaos, if you call it chaos, the confusion in the White House at that time. I remember seeing Bob McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] sitting at Ken O'Donnell's desk using the telephone. Many senators and many old friends of the President were up in Ted's office, sat there and sort of held hands during that afternoon. I think one of the saddest things I watched was the taking of the rocking chair out of the Oval Office and moving it across to the executive office building with some personal mementos that Kennedy had to make ready for the new President which had to happen, of course, in our system of government. But we all thought we had lost a very dear and close friend. As I said earlier, the lilt sort of went out of government for a while when Kennedy died.

HARTIGAN: Ken, on behalf of the Kennedy Library I want to thank you for the time you've given us today. I know it was a very busy schedule and very difficult for you to cut the time out of your schedule to do it and possibly, if rummaging through your papers you find any memorabilia or papers that would be of interest to a young student researching through the Kennedy

[-28-]

Library, if you would see fit to let us know about it.

BELIEU: I'd be happy to do that. I have never taken papers from the office much, but I have a couple of foot lockers at home that have papers in them and when I can get at them, if they're valuable, I'll be glad to give them to you.

HARTIGAN: I'll tell you what we can do. The archives division has been very cooperative and they have gone out in such cases and evaluated what people have in their garages and in their attics and their basements and cellars and whatnot, and have found that a lot of it was valuable for library purposes and some of it wasn't, and I know personally they did it to mine, so it was a great thing because my wife just keeps saying, "When are you going to get rid of those boxes?" If we could have somebody call you and let them look it over and then you decide whether or not you feel it in your good sense to donate it to the library, and whatever restrictions you feel....

BELIEU: I'd be happy to, Bill. Let me take a look. I don't think there's much there, probably maybe two or three feet of manila folders that would be basically carbon

[-29-]

copies of letters I wrote, or.... Official Navy files stayed in the Navy, and all the jobs I had in government, I've never taken.... When I left the White House not too long back, I took about oh, I suppose, half a dozen papers with me that were non-classified and were actually no value to me either. I thought they might be when I got home, but in the end it was sort of a nostalgic thing.

HARTIGAN: When you look back on it, though, I was very pleased after Dan Fenn [Dan H. Fenn, Jr.] talked me into it, I was very pleased to know that these were going to be put some place because they really, you took them from a nostalgic point of view and now they re going to be used.

BELIEU: I have one picture at home made of Senator Kennedy when he came back from Europe on a transatlantic crossing on a liner that was taken by the daughter, if I remember correctly, of a naval officer that was on board. I think there are only about two or three copies in existence of that picture, and it's a colored photograph. There's a silhouette and the light's shining just around it like you see the light around the sun and a picture through a telescope in an observatory. A copy of that picture—I wouldn't give it up....

[-30-]

HARTIGAN: We could make a copy of it.

BELIEU: ...a copy of that picture would be of some value, I think because....

HARTIGAN: Maybe we could make a copy of it, Ken.

BELIEU: ...it's a very poignant picture.

HARTIGAN: Well, possibly you can let your girl know, and she can call us up in the Kennedy Library up in Boston. It is easily attainable through the directory, and either myself or somebody of expertise in the archives division will come down and.... As I said, I was quite happy when I made the decision to do it with mine, because I know somebody's going to enjoy them. At best, only I could enjoy them...

BELIEU: Right, right.

HARTIGAN: ...and in a carton down in the garage someplace.

BELIEU: They'd be better off in the library than they would be in a footlocker at home someplace.

[-31-]

HARTIGAN: Ken, thank you very, very much for your time and hope to see you again. And I hope to hear from you with reference to your papers and we'll send this transcript to you so you can review it and make whatever decision on deletions, additions that you'd like to make.

BELIEU: When you type the transcript, don't pick up the hoarseness in my voice.

HARTIGAN: Thank you very much Ken.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-32-]

Kenneth E. Belieu Oral History Transcript
Name List

B

Bradley, Omar N., 16

C

Connally, John B., 9, 10

D

de Gaulle, Charles A., 14

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 4, 12, 19, 20, 21, 22

F

Fenn, Dan H., Jr., 30

G

Glenn, John, 24

J

Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 2, 3, 4, 25, 28

K

Kennedy, Edward Moore, 11

Kennedy, John F., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12,
13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27,
30

Kennedy, Robert F., 2, 3

Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyevich, 17

Korth, Fred, 9, 10

L

Lynn, Admiral, 6

M

Marshall, George C., 23

McCarthy, Joseph R., 2

McNamara, Robert S., 28

N

Nixon, Richard Milhous, 4

O

O'Brien, Lawrence F., 10, 15

O'Donnell, Kenneth P., 6, 10, 28

P

Patton, George S., 16

R

Raleigh, Jim, 27

Reardon, Timothy J., Jr., 3, 10, 11, 26, 27, 28, 28

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 9

Russell, Richard B., Jr., 25

S

Stennis, John C., 25