

Oral History Interview

with

ADMIRAL GEORGE G. BURKLEY

October 17, 1967  
Washington, D.C.

By William McHugh

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MCHUGH: Dr. Burkley when did you first meet John F. Kennedy?

BURKLEY: I had the opportunity of meeting John F. Kennedy, President of the United States, approximately two months after he had appointed me as physician at the White House. Assistant physician to the President, as a matter of fact, was more near the designation. During the first two months I was not given the opportunity to meet him. However, one day as the President was leaving the elevator, I was at the office which was then occupied by Dr. [Janet] Travell and I suggested that maybe I should meet the President. She stopped him in the corridor and I was introduced. That was my first official meeting with the President. [phone call]

MCHUGH: Dr. Burkley, how were you appointed to the White House?

BURKLEY: Well, this is rather a long story. I had been asked by the Surgeon General of the Navy to be present at Camp David on each occasion that President Eisenhower went to Camp David. This period

covered from 1956 until the time of President Kennedy's inauguration. As a result of this I was known by the people who were connected with President Eisenhower, and as a matter of fact, at the time of the eleven country trip Dr. [Walter] Tkach, who was associated with General [Howard McC.] Snyder in care of President Eisenhower, was unable to go and I accompanied them on this trip.

McHUGH: Was it unusual for President Eisenhower being an Army man to have an Navy doctor particularly?

BURKLEY: It was not a question of caring for President Eisenhower exactly. Camp David being a Navy installation, it was felt advisable to have a Navy physician available should it be indicated at any time while he was on this installation. This continued, and at the time of President Kennedy's inauguration, I felt that my association, in any way, with the White House--and I might mention that I actually was not in direct care of President Eisenhower at any time. I was sort of a relief man, or an emergency type man in that capacity.

When President Kennedy came to office, one of his first official actions was to receive the two airmen who had been held prisoner by the Russians for a period of six months. He met these men at Andrews Air Force Base and it was felt that they would like to have me accompany him as physician at that time. When I was called by the Navy Aide [Captain Tazewell Shepard] and the former Navy Aide Captain [E. Peter] Aurand, who is now Admiral Aurand, and asked to come over. I willingly complied, knowing that I had the clearance, and that made it much easier. When I arrived at the White House and had completed this duty I was asked by the Naval Aide to accept a position at the White House as physician. I said that that was very flattering, and that I would be glad to do it, however, I felt it was much easier to know a person before he was appointed, rather than have someone appointed and then have to feel that maybe he would rather have someone else. So I deferred accepting this invitation.

McHUGH: Did you know at the time who recommended you for this position?

BURKLEY: I think I was recommended, there was no specific mention. I think I was most likely recommended by the then Captain Aurand, because he was one of the ones who knew me best. And I said that I would come over daily from my duty as the Commanding Officer at the Navy Dispensary, and carry on until some decision was made. Each day for the next three days that I came over the same question was asked and finally Mr. [P. Kenneth] O'Donnell stated that they would like to have it settled, and that they wanted me to come to the White House, which I then did. The Navy, as far as I know, had no knowledge of my appointment. I was appointed by President Kennedy as physician to him.

McHUGH: Did you have the opportunity to discuss the previous White House doctors' operating problems that you might have in the job?

BURKLEY: I had plenty of opportunity to do this, but I had the opportunity without direct contact due to my travels to Camp David, and it was not necessary. Both Gen. Snyder of the Army, and Col. Tkach of the Air Force, were very cooperative and helpful, anytime that it was indicated.

McHUGH: Were you available to all personnel attached to the White House?

BURKLEY: The duty at the White House is actually restricted in one way, that your only real duty is the care of the President and his family. Many people who are at the White House avail themselves of our presence and we are delighted to help in any way. However, we do not take definitive care of any other member at the White House, other than the President and the first family.

McHUGH: And that includes both the personal physician and the assistant physician to the President,

000908

or the assistant physician at the White House?

BURKLEY: Well, it includes both physicians, because the one is to supplement the other at any time.

McHUGH: Were there ever any unusual occasions when the President offered your services to anyone else?

BURKLEY: Yes. The President has--President Kennedy on a number of occasions would ask me to see someone. As a matter of fact he authorized and had me go to Brazil, with the senior ambassador who had had a cerebral vascular accident and was being returned home in the President's plane. And I've seen a number of other people including Cabinet members and various members of the President's staff who would ask for some specific check or care for these people.

McHUGH: Do you recall the ambassador's name, at that time?

BURKLEY: No, I don't.

McHUGH: Did you find it necessary to make any changes in the dispensary when you came to the White House?

BURKLEY: The area, so-called dispensary, was well operated. The physical plant was not too satisfactory. We did secure some additional space, which we used primarily for physio-therapy and that type of treatment or therapy.

McHUGH: That was for the President.

BURKLEY: It was not necessarily, well, for the President. It was available to the President . . . .

McHUGH: That was set up on whose initiative, Doctor?

BURKLEY: That was set up on my initiative.

000909

McHUGH: I see. —

BURKLEY: It was in the West basement, at that time. We subsequently, in redoing the swimming pool area, and the small area next to the swimming pool, which had some gymnasium equipment, we established an area there where President Kennedy on a daily basis was very religious in his physical program.

McHUGH: I see. What variety of problems would you handle in a normal day's work?

BURKLEY: Normally, you might say there were no problems. Occasionally, there might be a slight cold, or something of that sort. Are you referring to the care of the President or to general care?

McHUGH: Well, both but primarily to the President and his family.

BURKLEY: Well, general care would be anyone who happened to be coming by our office would drop in. Many of them came in as much to say "Hello", as they did to secure an aspirin or something of that sort.

McHUGH: And as for the President?

BURKLEY: The President, if anything were indicated, I usually saw him either up in his second floor suite, or in the little office behind his office. On occasion, he did come to the office in the West basement, but this was rather rare.

McHUGH: Altogether, on how many occasions would you say you saw him at his, his room upstairs?

BURKLEY: Well, there was . . .

McHUGH: That's rather difficult. I would ask were there a number of illnesses? . . .

000910

BURKLEY: Oh, the President was rarely ill, and the necessity to see him routinely was not a problem. All his medical records are in the possession of the family, which would have the complete detail of any medical coverage.

McHUGH: I see.

BURKLEY: I have no personal records covering any time during my care for the President. My personal opinion is that this, those records are private and anyone other than members of the family using them would be invading the privacy of the individual.

McHUGH: At one time, there had been an attempt during the campaign to steal the medical records of the President. Did that present any problem for you as far as security or risk?

BURKLEY: It presented no problem to me, because our records were kept in a secure place and were always within the White House area, where such an invasion would be practically impossible. I am familiar with the problem which existed prior to the election, and that perhaps made us a little more careful with the records. We also secured the records that were in outlying areas which antedated his presidency, and included those with his past medical records.

McHUGH: Did you go on all the President's trips, Doctor?

BURKLEY: I accompanied President Kennedy on every trip that he took during his time as President. I was at the White House every morning at 8:00 or before and remained at the White House every evening, including parties, which might be quite late, until the President was known to be in his own quarters.

McHUGH: That's very interesting. Did you go on his European trip also.

BURKLEY: I went on all trips.

McHUGH: I see. Were there particular problems associated with these trips? What precautions would you have to take?

BURKLEY: Well, we had a regular setup, which is customary in travelling with the President, which I do not care to discuss, but all the possible angles were covered by cooperation with the Secret Service, in that we knew the areas of most likely danger. We knew where additional medical aid would be available, and things of that nature.

McHUGH: I see. When you say the personal, the part of the subject you didn't wish to discuss, you mean it's something personal that you . . .

BURKLEY: I feel that is more or less necessary to not discuss openly what we carry, or what we don't carry, because then that becomes a matter of press knowledge and they would call up and say, "Do you have your extra scissors with you," and that sort of thing.

McHUGH: I see. On the trip to Canada he injured his back. Was that a ruptured disc?

BURKLEY: It was not a ruptured disc. It was a--I was on that trip with him and on returning from the trip he had slight, some increase in back distress and having noted the manner in which he handled the shovel I mentioned that I thought that that was probably the source of his increased or his back pain. It was not a disc. The President had, as the records clearly show, he'd had surgery on his back, and although his back was not a continuing problem, and was not a constant problem, it was always a potential problem and therefore, it was tried to save him as much as possible. And an unguarded action, such as the one mentioned above at Ottawa, could easily precipitate some distress.

McHUGH: Was that--At that time, was that primarily a muscular problem?

BURKLEY: It was a muscular problem primarily.

MCHUGH: Did he have acute pain at that time?

BURKLEY: He had a muscle spasm and pain in the area, yes which was responsible for the distress he had.

MCHUGH: To what extent did that affect his normal routine?

BURKLEY: It affected his normal conduction of the office of President in no way. He tended his office and went back and forth occasionally he--at one point he was on crutches, but that did not deter him from his full duty as President.

MCHUGH: I see. How long did he have to continue to use the crutches?

BURKLEY: Oh, it was a question of several weeks. At that time, I had attempted to secure the aid of a physical medicine specialist, Doctor Hans Kraus of New York, and had requested contact with him from Dr. Travell. She had resisted doing this, and I, I said if she did not call him personally, I would call him. And at that point he was called, and from then on the management of the President's exercise and program was entirely under Dr. Kraus and Dr. Travell was instructed not to have any, to attempt to interfere in any way.

MCHUGH: Were there problems generally of press relations on the President's illnesses?

BURKLEY: Of what?

MCHUGH: Of press relations, when he was ill?

BURKLEY: There were no particular problems other than the press always attempts to interpret everything in regards to medical health, medical status, and about four to five months after I came to the White House the President specifically stated in the presence of another individual that I was his physician and that I alone was to take responsibility for anything that



was indicated.

McHUGH: Surely. Who did you work with on . . . . Now in this statement you just made, you referring to treatment of the President not to, or are you referring to the relations with the press?

BURKLEY: I'm not referring to relations with the press. I had never had any direct relations with the press, because I felt that any information that was of significance would be given to the press through the channels of the press secretary, and many times they attempted to contact me directly. I enjoy the press and have a great respect for them, however, I felt that it was only just that any report on the condition of the President should be given through a definite channel, and not from hearsay from here to there and asking various questions.

McHUGH: And who were you usually working with on that? Did you work with Pierre Salinger?

BURKLEY: I worked with the existing press secretary, but, however, all reports were always made known to the President before any expression was given.

McHUGH: Surely.

BURKLEY: And the President, I may mention, had no objection to anything that was pertinent being given to the press. There's one other thing I might mention, that on many occasions when the press made notation that President Kennedy seemed tired and his back must be bothering him, the actual fact was that the press was tired from trying to keep up with him. This was particularly of note on one occasion when we were on an airplane carrier off the West Coast, and the President walked up to the level on the tower on the airplane carrier, I think, at least five times, when the elevator was right next to the area of the steps and had no difficulty. However, the press reported he was having trouble with his back. The actual case was that they were getting tired

000914

and tried to interpret the entire, their feelings in regard to the President. They felt he should be tired.

McHUGH: The President was a firm believer in the patient choosing his own doctor. Did he consult with you in having other doctors treat him?

BURKLEY: The President never had any doctor treat him, except with my cognizance and I . . . He never requested that I have anyone see him. And additional physicians who saw him were at my instigation.

McHUGH: I see. Under what circumstances would other doctors be called in?

BURKLEY: Well, if there were any indication that he had a respiratory infection, for instance, I would ask a nose and throat man to see him. In this instance it happened to Dr. G. W. Taylor, Captain, United States Navy, and he would see him whenever he had anything of this nature.

McHUGH: Did Dr. Paul F. de Gara see him at all?

BURKLEY: Dr. de Gara--At one point there was a question of some allergy to dust. Some of the nose and throat problems he had, we felt were on an allergic basis. As you know, President and Mrs. Kennedy were very fond of dogs and horses, and we felt that there was a possibility of there being an allergy. Dr. de Gara is one of the foremost allergists and was known to some of the members of the group. And I contacted him and asked him to come down. He made various tests, and those reports are also in the complete medical record. We collected all the dust from the second floor, and he had it analyzed and things of that nature.

McHUGH: Were you able to, subsequently--were you able to control that allergy pretty well?

000915

BURKLEY: Yes, the President was able to control both by avoiding, and by giving antihistamines, the problem very satisfactorily.

McHUGH: I see. How frequently did he use antihistamines generally?

BURKLEY: Oh, now that's the sort of thing--See, you're getting into the medical record. And I feel that all the records of his medical care will be made available at such time as it is indicated. And I feel that his use of antihistamines would be perhaps--since it was mentioned, once in two or three months for perhaps not more than a day.

McHUGH: I see. Was there a clear understanding of the relationship between your responsibility and other doctors who treated President Kennedy?  
I think that really . . .

BURKLEY: At the time of President Kennedy's statement that I was his physician and I alone was to prescribe for him, from that time on there was little interference from anyone. However, on one or two occasions Dr. Travell attempted to enter into the picture, and I informed her that she was not to attempt to give any injections or anything of that nature as it had been clearly stated that this would be under my jurisdiction and I would if indicated have Dr. Kraus make any recommendations.

McHUGH: Surely. Did you ever have any reservation about other treatments that the President received?

BURKLEY: The President received no other treatments that were not authorized or indicated by me or by someone that I had asked to see him.

McHUGH: Were you involved in the fifty mile hike, Doctor?

BURKLEY: I was involved in that I was in Palm Beach at the time, and I set up a medical coverage and

had one of my helpers, Chief [Thomas F.] Mills, accompany in the station wagon, with the group who were going. I had no medical care of the group who were there.

Would you turn that off for a second while . . . .  
[recorder off, resumed]

MCHUGH: When you became the President's personal physician and reviewed his medical history do you remember what your first impressions were?

BURKLEY: There again it was approximately three or four months before I had complete access to his medical history. However, I had the help of a physician who had taken care of him for a number of years and knew his medical record and found no great discrepancies in the things that we wanted to cover.

MCHUGH: Was that Dr. [Sara] Jordan?

BURKLEY: No. Dr. Jordan was not in direct care of him. I have spoken to Dr. Jordan on several occasions, but at the time that I knew him, she was not in the active picture, although we spoke to her in her office. And one of the men who had been trained by her, from Boston, we contacted on various occasions.

MCHUGH: Can you mention his name?

BURKLEY: Dr. Russell Boles, from Boston who had been trained under Dr. Jordan and had previously treated President Kennedy. [The next three questions and responses were accidentally erased and were immediately reconstructed by the interviewer].

MCHUGH: How often did he treat him as President?

BURKLEY: Four or five times over a three year period.

MCHUGH: Did he ever treat him for ulcers?

BURKLEY: At no time did he treat him for ulcers? He treated him for a mild gastric upset that was

000917

caused by some foods that he was eating.

McHUGH: Would that have been related at all to medication that he was taking?

BURKLEY: No. It was not related to any medication.

McHUGH: Ted Sorensen in his book on the President mentions that he wore a brace.

BURKLEY: You would hardly call it a brace. It was a canvas lower abdominal belt, of very light material and had no actual stays. It had a thickening in various portions where there were double or triple the number. They were not metal stays, or bone stays or anything of that sort. It was . . . You could hardly call it a brace. It was just a small support rather than any actual brace.

McHUGH: Yes. After his trip to Canada the President, as you mentioned, began working with Dr. Kraus. What did his therapy consist of? Was that mainly exercises that he was taking?

BURKLEY: Therapy was practically a hundred per cent exercise. It was a progressive buildup of exercises. They were minimal of any medication given. I would say that in the period after Dr. Kraus entered the picture that the use of the so-called procaine injections was limited to approximately three times and only to one injection at that time. It was definitely felt that they were not helpful and were actually harmful or actually not beneficial in that after an injection the exercise should be curtailed and gradually built up again, and this would really set him back, rather than increase the . . . . If he had a definite so-called muscle spasm, it was treated by massage and other means, and on one or two occasions a procaine injection was given, but only under the direction of Dr. Kraus. One finding that the Warren Commission made . . . [phone ring] . . . there again the question of adrenal insufficiency, it was never a problem with the President.

McHUGH: You mean after he became President.

BURKLEY: When under my care and that's one reason I was given complete charge of his medical supervision. And as far as the President was concerned he had no problem in concern to this. Now that is a touchy problem . . . [Recorder off-resumes] . . . to me that the press and various other people tried to interpret every action of the President in light of his medical condition. I may state here that President Kennedy was a essentially normal, healthy male, who had all the vigor and vitality, and much more so than the average male. None of his activities were curtailed, in any way, by his physical well-being, and he at no time during the time that I had supervision of his medical life, had to curtail any activity because of medical problems . . . .

McHUGH: Yes.

BURKLEY: . . . And I considered the President essentially a healthy adult.

McHUGH: I see. What sports did he partake in with . . .

BURKLEY: Well, his sports were somewhat limited in that it was diverted into actual exercise programs. At times, he loved to sail, which he did extensively, when he was in Hyannis, and on the trip up to Maine. He enjoyed golf. He did not participate in it to a great extent because of his other activities and also that in the swinging of a golf club you cannot completely control your motions and the danger of some adverse turn might precipitate something that we didn't want to have precipitated.

McHUGH: I see. There was a story that the President was an insomniac. What kind of a sleeper was he in your opinion.

BURKLEY: The President slept well. I don't know where a story of that nature would arise.

McHUGH: Doctor, were the events surrounding the assassination in Dallas as they were narrated in

the [William] Manchester book [Death of a President] accurate in your estimation?

BURKLEY: I have never read the Manchester book. I have been interviewed by Manchester, and I have been told that I am quoted in the book. However, I have never read any section of the book. I do not possess one.

MCHUGH: I see, so whatever knowledge you may have of anything that's in the book . . .

BURKLEY: It's secondary.

MCHUGH: . . . you don't have any disagreement.

BURKLEY: I have no agreement or disagreement, because I don't know what he said.

MCHUGH: I see. Did you view the X-rays that were made of the President or autopsy photos?

BURKLEY: We might mention something about the assassination here which will clear the record I think, to a great degree. When we were in Fort Worth, Mrs. Lincoln and I were in the second car in the motorcade. When we arrived in Dallas the President got off one end of the plane. Mrs. Lincoln and I got off the other end of the plane, and when we got to the bottom of the stairs, the motorcade was already in motion and I complained to the Secret Service that I should be either in the followup car or the lead car.

MCHUGH: Who did you speak to at that time?

BURKLEY: Members of the Secret Service. And they said it couldn't be arranged, that the politicians had gotten in that group of cars, that everyone wanted to be in those cars, and also the motorcade was in action. We, therefore, were put in a so-called VIP vehicle. When the assassination occurred, I got to the scene by securing a car through one of the Secret Service.

000920

Andy Berger, and an escort of a policeman. I was there probably within three to five minutes of the time the President arrived. I went immediately in to see the President, and went to the table on which he was being treated, and immediately saw for all intents and purposes life did not exist, or could not be sustained. I talked to the doctors who were busily engaged in doing what was indicated and would have been indicated had there been any hope of salvation of the President. I gave them some hydrocortisone, to put in the intravenous which was being given, and also told them his blood type. There was no need for anything in my estimation, but they were correct in doing all possible procedures. I then contacted Mrs. Kennedy, who was sitting outside, and that is of record, and from then on it was my interest.

Where were we? [tape off, resumed]

When the President was on the Air Force One returning to Washington, Mrs. Kennedy, as has been noted, sat in the rear of the plane, next to the coffin bearing the President's remains. During the flight I contacted her, and stated that an autopsy would be necessary, and that I was perfectly willing to arrange to have it done at any place that she felt it should be done. She said, "Well, it doesn't have to be done." I said, "Yes, it is mandatory that we have an autopsy. I can do it at the Army hospital at Walter Reed, or at the Navy hospital at Bethesda, or any civilian hospital that you would designate." However, I felt that it should be a military hospital, in that he had been President of the United States and was, therefore, the Commander in Chief of the Military. After some consideration she stated that she would like to have the President taken to Bethesda. This was arranged by telephone from the plane, and it was accomplished. I accompanied the President in the ambulance going to Bethesda, and also accompanied him to the area where the autopsy was performed. And during the course of the autopsy I supervised everything that was done and . . . [phone call]

MCHUGH: You mentioned that you supervised the autopsy.

BURKLEY: I supervised the autopsy and kept in constant contact with Mrs. Kennedy and the members of

000921



her party who were on the seventeenth floor in the suite at that level. I made trips back and forth. I delivered to her personally the ring from the President's finger, and talked to her on a number of occasions. I also directed that the X-rays be taken for future reference, and had complete knowledge of every thing that was done. The records are also in possession of members of the family.

McHUGH: I see. There were photographs taken also at that time. Were there not?

BURKLEY: There were photographs taken at various stages, and they are also in the possession of the family. And the only regret I have that I did not ask to have a photograph taken when he had been restored to his near normal appearance. And I may mention here that he was very lifelike in his appearance and there would have been no question of his having been viewed.

McHUGH: I see. Manchester's book mentioned that you were concerned, that there was concern that the embalming was taking so long. Were there particular problems?

BURKLEY: By virtue of the completeness of the examination the postmortem took considerable time, because there was a desire not to miss anything for future reference . . .

McHUGH: How long did it take?

BURKLEY: That part would have to be a record from elsewhere, because I was involved in so many things. It took practically the entire night, and the embalming was done very carefully, and the reconstruction of the area which had been involved in the gunshot wound in the head had to be cared for in a very professional manner.

[END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE]

000922

I can't give exact timing on that, but it was--considering the job that was being done--it was not excessive.

MCHUGH: I see. Do your conclusions differ at all with the Warren report of the circumstances or cause of death?

BURKLEY: My conclusion in regard to the cause of death was the bullet wound which involved the skull. The discussion as to whether a previous bullet also enters into it, but as far as the cause of death the immediate cause was unquestionably the bullet which shattered the brain and the calvarium.

MCHUGH: I see. The brain and the what?

BURKLEY: And the skull, calvarium.

MCHUGH: I see. Do you agree with the Warren Report on the number of bullets that entered the President's body?

BURKLEY: I would not care to be quoted on that.

MCHUGH: I see. Under the best circumstances would it have been possible to save the life of the President if all indicated medical procedures had been carried out successfully?

BURKLEY: It is unquestionably in my opinion that the President could not have survived, under any circumstances, nor regardless of who, or how many procedures were available, or what equipment was available. When I examined him, as I stated earlier, he was essentially no longer living. There may have been some cardiac action, but that was it . . . [phone call] The physicians at the hospital in Dallas were completely justified, and were performing as any group of competent physicians should do, in that, until it is unquestionable that life does not exist, all efforts should be made to sustain

000923

life or to improve the condition.

MCHUGH: I see. So in your opinion, the speed or availability of medical help was not a significant factor in the President's death.

BURKLEY: In this instance it was not. However, I feel very keenly that the physician should have complete access and availability to the President at all times.

MCHUGH: Has there been any change in the setup whereby it would now happen that the President, excuse me, the personal physician of the President would always be available up front?

BURKLEY: The personal physician to the President is now always, either in the followup car with the Secret Service, or in the car immediately following this vehicle. So that at no time has he been further back than that.

MCHUGH: So it would not now be possible for that situation to occur again. Is that your understanding?

BURKLEY: It would not possible, as far as I'm concerned. I simply would not ride anywhere else. [interrupted by visitor at door]

MCHUGH: Were you able to convey strongly to the Secret Service, at the time, that you felt that they were making a mistake when you were assigned to another vehicle?

BURKLEY: As probably Mrs. Lincoln has mentioned in her recording, this was brought to their attention very strongly at the foot of the stairway from the airplane. However, I do not feel that, although at that time, with the existing regulation, that it could have been different, as far as they were concerned because the people who wanted to get in those cars were such that they overruled other people, and they simply crawled into them. I

000924

don't feel that they could have just said, "Well, this is the doctor's car." But it had not been established to that extent, at that time. Mrs. Lincoln and I discussed on numerous occasions that there should be a car--and the reason I mention Mrs. Lincoln, because she, from the stenographic and from secretarial standpoint, was many times needed and we attempted to ride in the car immediately behind the Secret Service. This would not occur again, I'm sure, because I would simply crawl into the car behind it, if it was the King of Siam. I wouldn't ride anywhere else.

MCHUGH: Doctor, were the doctors in Dallas familiar with the illnesses that the President had?

BURKLEY: The doctors in Dallas would have no reason to have any knowledge of that, and they had no need to have any knowledge of that, because the question was one of assassination by gunshot and his previous history, other than the fact, that I gave them the neo-cortef to put in the solution, which also would be used in anyone, possibly, who had such a wound, to give them additional support. But as far as any knowledge, their need to have any previous knowledge, it was not indicated and therefore, in addition to that the inquiries concerning the medical background of the President by people who were dealing with the Warren Commission and the assassination are absolutely unfounded, because they have nothing to do with the assassination.

MCHUGH: I see. They did make an attempt to find out though, did they not?

BURKLEY: They had no time to find out. I told them, they didn't--I went in and told them that this I wanted to put in the intravenous that was being given . . .

MCHUGH: Surely.

BURKLEY: And they made no questions at all. There's a statement in one of them, that one of them ought

000925

to do this, but that is not true, because I was the one who came in and gave it to them, and the doctors in Dallas never even mentioned that I was present. As far as I'm concerned it doesn't matter to me, because there was no reason to interject myself in a procedure which at that time was hopeless. In addition, I was not part of their team, and it would have interfered.

McHUGH: Did they, at that time, attempt to do a postmortem on the President, to learn about these things?

BURKLEY: They hadn't, not to learn about these things.

McHUGH: No, excuse me. Once it became apparent that the President was no longer, was beyond hope as far as . . .

BURKLEY: At no time--when the President was--there again I stood with Mrs. Kennedy, and one of the doctors came and said that they felt that the President was dead. I went over and checked him myself, and I pronounced him dead.

McHUGH: Surely.

BURKLEY: There again it is not entered by any of the Dallas people, and I came back to Mrs. Kennedy and said, "The President is dead." And we went over to the President and we said the prayers for the dead and various other things which have been recorded elsewhere, I believe.

McHUGH: Did the doctors there at that time then attempt to perform a postmortem?

BURKLEY: The coroner attempted to have the body retained there for a postmortem and investigation of the assassination. That was perfectly understandable, in that this condition existed. However, the people involved were not just anyone. It was the President of the

000926

United States. Mrs. Kennedy was going to stay just where she was and travel with the President at any time. It was felt advisable to return the President to the Washington area as soon as possible because of the uncertainty as to what else was happening in Dallas.

MCHUGH: Did any of the doctors there attempt to begin postmortem procedures?

BURKLEY: Of course not. First place, postmortem would have to be either authorized by a member of the family or ordered by the court.

MCHUGH: This was not normally a procedure that they would automatically perform?

BURKLEY: In no way.

MCHUGH: I see. Do you have any other remarks you wish to make about events in Dallas, or the return trip, or the funeral? . . .

BURKLEY: No, I'm sure that this is all made note of by other sources. So it's very . . . [Recorder off]

It's needless to say that all the members of President Kennedy's so-called official family were emotionally involved and practically devastated by the assassination. The same was true in my case. And I have nothing further to . . . [phone call]

The Warren report definitely stated that one thing that should be seen to, and that was that the doctor was in a position in the motorcade and available to the President at all times. Had this been stated prior to the assassination, I think the problem would not have existed, as far as our position in the motorcade. However, this was never clear and it was always an argument as to where we would get in the motorcade. Most of the time, however, I was within one or two cars of the President. This was one of the few times that this did not occur. The only other time that it did not occur, to my direct recollection, is when we were in Rome, and we were in the VIP bus. And actually, at that time, the VIP bus practically got lost, and we

000927

never get to the Quirinale Castle. We went direct to our hotel. However, now this will not exist, and I hope in the future that any subsequent physicians to Presidents will have no such problems.

McHUGH: Was it the Secret Service who were primarily responsible for assigning you your seat in the motorcade on any given occasion?

BURKLEY: I would not state that they were responsible. The assignment of cars usually came from one of the . . .

McHUGH: Would that have been Kenneth O'Donnell, ordinarily?

BURKLEY: Not necessarily. It would have been the local political representative who was arranging this particular trip.

McHUGH: Oh, I see.

BURKLEY: But had it been established that our position was to be in that area, it would have then been directly the responsibility of the Secret Service. And it is now such.

McHUGH: I see. Well, thank you very much, Doctor.  
Did I ask you what your relationship to Dr. Travell was?

BURKLEY: I'm not sure. I was asked to come to the White House by Ken O'Donnell to be part of the White House medical setup. I was not to be Dr. Travell's assistant. However, our arrangements were very amicable, and we had at no time any actual disagreement, other than it was felt that my management of the President's health was more general and not as limited to the use of the procaine injections which Dr. Travell advocated at all times. And President Kennedy, as stated previously, specifically said that I was his physician. This was approximately in October or September of 1941.

McHUGH: 1961.

BURKLEY: '61. And no other notification was given until a year or so later it appeared in the Congressional Record, although I had been functioning as the physician to the President for many months prior to that.

McHUGH: For some peculiar reason I don't think the New York Times announced your appointment as personal physician until, I think it was, in June of '63 actually.

BURKLEY: Well, all this announcement was made after they noted in the Congressional Record that I, my name appeared in that position. I had made no statement or made no attempt to have anything changed.

McHUGH: Well, thank you very much, Doctor.

[END OF TAPE ONE]