

Kennedy Comes To Carolina

The Daily Tar Heel

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'It Was Quite A Day'

(The following is a series of impressions gained by this writer on a trip throughout North Carolina last Saturday in which he saw, heard and followed Democratic Presidential Nominee John F. Kennedy.

(In no way is this article to be construed as editorial comment on the candidate, nor as editorial endorsement. It is merely a collection of impressions of a man, of the political animal, of practical politics, of the American—or at least North Carolina—voter and of campaigning, a new and exciting phenomenon for the writer.)

Following a presidential candidate through a day of heavy campaigning is a little like stalking a lion in the African jungle; never a moment's peace, always on the alert, always on the go. Because of this, and because it was the first time for this writer, it was quite a day.

We arose Saturday morning at the ungodly hour of five-thirty, pulled a sleepy and somewhat unhappy roommate out of bed, and informed him that he was to be the chauffeur to Raleigh-Durham airport. Striking out in blerry-eyed resignation—some of your enthusiasm is bound to be in bonds at pre-sunrise hours—we struggled the Tar Heel truck over to the twin city airfield.

There we found a group of sleepy men, numbering perhaps thirty, two women and a harassed tour director. He was Graham Jones, publicity director for the Democratic Party in North Carolina.

All of these people were reporters and all, like us, were to board the special Piedmont plane which was to pick up the Kennedy caravan in Greenville and follow the rest of his North Carolina barnstorming trip.

The special plane was the idea of state party headquarters, and was a good one. It enabled the North Carolina press to give the trip the same coverage afforded by the national press, members of which were in two immense airships immediately preceding the private Kennedy plane in flying order.

They served what is euphemistically called a "continental" breakfast—presumably because it has been flown over cold from Bulgaria—on the plane and had us in Greenville in less than thirty minutes. The trip was short enough to stall any ill effects of the unAmerican breakfast.

Since we were in Greenville an hour and a half before the candidate was supposed to arrive, the little country airfield became a meeting place for North Carolina reporters and stray dignitaries who began to wander in around eight o'clock.

A primary source of interest was the state gubernatorial campaign; little if any concern was expressed over the "Republican threat" being imposed by candidate Robert Gavin. Terry Sanford arrived, looking as though the mantle of the governorship had already fallen upon his shoulders.

Governor Hodges looked as though he was about ready to quit the State House and move his belongings to Washington. He met this student's inquiries with consummate grace and courtesy, commenting that the University of North Carolina budget requests "must be considered along with every other budget," but adding a little wryly that "the University has lots of friends in the Assembly."

Senators Ervin and Jordan were there, looking benevolent in the way that only Southern Senators can look benevolent.

As the nine o'clock arrival hour drew near, the crowd began to grow and anticipation, as they say, "filled the air." Police stretched so many ropes in front of the crowd that we began to wonder whether this were to be a reception or a lynching.

As the hour passed the crowd grew more restless. The two or three bands gathered at the airport played futile and rather disarming marches—every time the band started playing everyone looked around for Kennedy.

Suddenly the first of the three planes appeared. All eyes strained toward the sky. Another appeared. The first landed, unloading a motley group of corre-

spondents, photographers, and campaign aides. Their primary interest seemed to be in finding bathrooms and asserting a kind of visitor's supremacy. Those of us from the North Carolina press swallowed our pride and met their challenge with equanimity.

The second plane carried more of the same mold.

Then came the third plane. A large white two-engine job, it cruised in effortlessly. The door opened, and at least twenty photographers—this neophyte included—surged toward the plane. Out came Pierre Salinger, James Hagerty in Democratic guise, followed by a few aides of uncertain purpose. Then the door was empty; we all waited.

Finally he appeared. Looking as though he had just returned from a three-week stay in the Bahamas, John Kennedy blinked at the crowd—which was a good deal smaller than he may have expected—managed an uncertain and halfhearted smile, then solemnly came down the ramp.

Someone rushed into his path and, engulfed in the glamour of it all, shoved an immense key to the city of Greenville into the hands of this Yankee from Massachusetts. Again came the grin, but it was getting a little less forced now. The crowd cheered with what might be described as enthusiastic reserve.

Kennedy forged his way through a welter of hands and faces, all of which were heading for him, and somehow made it to the flashy convertible which awaited him. He climbed in, waved to the crowd, and was joined by Sanford, Representative Bonner, and John Clark, Pitt County Democratic Chairman.

We got into a bus, fighting for seats with guys from the New York Times, the Associated Press and every conceivable sort of news media. We, somehow, got a seat, next to a reporter from the Times.

While a friendly reporter from the Greenville paper told everyone in the bus about the peculiar characteristics of the region, the man from the Times quizzed us about North Carolina. He, being from the Times, was very thorough.

We went to a mock tobacco auction at Tripp's Farmers' Warehouse, the largest under one roof in the world. People in Greenville seemed intent on having all reporters repeat that fact, as apparently the 13-acre barn is a great source of local pride.

The whole trip seemed worthwhile if only because of the laughs afforded us in the warehouse. First of all, no one from the city limits of Greenville seemed to understand anything about selling tobacco, and the stupid questions came fast and furiously. While all of us stood around wondering what in the devil was happening a man started talking gibberish to Kennedy, fists started flying in efforts to get near the candidate, and a merry time was had by all.

The upshot of it all, as far as our ears could tell, was that a pound of "Nixon tobacco" sold for five cents and a pound of "Kennedy tobacco" for ninety dollars. The market price Friday was approximately sixty-two cents a pound. The most interesting sight of the day was that of the Governor of North Carolina standing off to one side completely ignored by the crowd. He signed his autograph for a little girl who had not lost her perspective on state affairs in the hustle and bustle of this visit. Kennedy seemed a little impatient to leave.

Back to the bus and over to the stadium of East Carolina College. The rush was so great that a middle-aged man fell and broke his arm, dampening the enthusiasm of at least this reporter for all the excitement that was going on. No one seemed to give him very much attention.

The working press rushed to the tables up front and the working candidate got up to the platform. After a series of rather dull pronouncements of welcome and an invocation by the minister of the Black Jack Free Will Baptist Church—this was a primary source of amusement to the press plane—the candidate got around to speaking.

It was not a good speech. Billed by the Democratic Headquarters as a

"major speech," it was largely a collection of clichés about the need for a strong America, references to Roosevelt and Wilson and Jackson and Jefferson and Truman, and a couple of sly little jokes.

A cheering section shouted "K-E-N-N-E-D-Y" and the man from Back Bay kept right on going. He said that "to be an American citizen in the 1960's will be a difficult and hazardous occupation," and that he thinks that "we can do better." Judging from the applause, everyone seemed to agree.

After the speech the crowd of some 12,000 milled around the field while Kennedy, honored guests and the press made a fast getaway back to the airport. Five minutes later all were in the air heading toward Greensboro.

The ride to Greensboro was not very much fun. The pilot, realizing that we had taken off after the Kennedy plane and that it was necessary for us to be at Greensboro-High Point airfield before the candidate, decided wisely to make up for lost time and to beat him there. In order to do this we flew at about 800 feet, under the clouds and through what seemed like an endless series of air pockets.

Air travel has never bothered us very much, but this was not fun. As we bounced along through the merry air waves the old stomach grew more and more independent of its master, and tension mounted. Somehow, by the grace of God, we made it with only a case of shaky knees, intact otherwise. The pilot was informed by a less fortunate reporter that this was not to happen again. It did not.

We made the 150-mile trip in about thirty minutes, a cause for great admiration for air travel, and beat Kennedy by three or four minutes. The crowd was murmuring excitedly.

It was a good crowd, and a pretty big one. Kennedy drew about eight thousand people all the way out to the airport, a fine showing. And they were enthusiastic people.

A huge roar went up when the candidate arrived. "We want Jack, we want Jack!" they screamed. Teen-aged girls seemed to be chewing at the bit as the tanned Senator headed straight for the ropes to shake a few hands. How many hands have since gone unwashed? . . .

Anything that was wrong in Greenville was rectified in Greensboro. The speech was moving, exciting and well delivered. From the moment Kennedy mounted the platform until the plane was no longer visible in the sky he had the crowd in the palm of his hand. If he wanted them to cheer, they cheered. If he wanted respectful attention, he got it.

Again, the theme was weakened foreign policy and the decline of American prestige abroad. But this time the point was well made and seemed worth considering. The remedies seemed possible. And, somehow, the references to the five great Democratic presidents seemed almost pertinent.

As the Senator finished, the latent desires of the crowd burst into fruition. Police lost control of the crowd as he walked toward the plane after another handshaking tour. Girls, shrieking in a manner reminiscent of an Elvis rally, headed for the political dreamboat. For about a minute it was Newport. Sinatra at the Paramount and Jazz at the Philharmonic all rolled into one fanned political bombshell.

And then the plane took off. As we soared into the hinter and yon we could see grinning policemen banding together to send the screaming crowd home. The visit was a real success. And Kennedy didn't do anything to his knee.

Off to Asheville. The resort town in Western Carolina had been a question mark all day, since the new Asheville-Hendersonville airport was a question mark itself and the weather had been rather uncertain. But off we went to Asheville.

At one-twenty-five the pilot announced that we would circle over the airport until one-forty and then land. We circled for fifteen minutes and then headed for Charlotte.

Apparently a Delta Airlines plane had made three unsuccessful attempts at landing and it had been decided that if he couldn't land then neither could the Senator. The weather was bad also, further inhibiting possibilities.

We made Charlotte a little after two: an hour and a half ahead of schedule. This was another interesting part of the day. We were standing with Roy Parker of the Raleigh News & Observer when Kennedy landed. As soon as the Senator disembarked Parker asked whether it were true that Kennedy forces had contributed to the Sanford campaign. Kennedy replied in the negative and then, as he was swept past us, turned around, grabbed Parker by the arm and said with astounding firmness: "Print it like this—a categorical, flat denial. Right?" We were a little taken aback.

Kennedy went off to make a telephone speech to the gathering in Asheville and the rest of us went to have something to eat on the Democratic National Committee. All's fair in love, war and the political ratrace.

In the airport dining room this reporter had the good fortune to be able to talk with Mrs. Martha MacKay, national committeewoman from North Carolina and a Chapel Hillian, Mrs. Gladys Tillett, a former national committee vice president from Charlotte and Mrs. Margaret Price, present na-

tional vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

We asked Mrs. Price about the influence of the candidates' wives in the campaign, to which she replied that a good many people are interested in the candidates families and that "never before have candidates families made themselves so available for campaigning." She cited the recent Kennedy-Johnson Women invasion of Texas, but added that the Democrats, unlike the Republicans, have given no consideration to a separate campaign for the "office" of First Lady of the nation.

She also said that a trend toward more campus volunteers for political help has been noticed and that a large number of college students are eligible to vote but have not registered. She mentioned the Kennedy appeal to youth, giving some credit for this to the fact that "young people feel in him a vitality. The next ten years will influence their lives. He sees ahead of us the prospect of improving our world position and economic stability at home."

At three-thirty the "Motorcade" formed—where this so-called "word" came from the Good Lord only knows—and turned toward downtown Charlotte. The crowd along the airport road was scattered; more people began to appear on Wilkinson Boulevard and Morehead Street. We wondered what the Senator was thinking as the parade passed through the run-down Negro section of Graham Street. A bus was stopped somewhere along the way, and the entire busload, driver and all were leaning out of the windows grinning at the Senator as he drove by.

They were four deep along Trade Street and the Square at the intersection with Tryon Street was jammed. Independence Boulevard was a little less crowded, but the outside of the Coliseum was a madhouse.

Kennedy's entrance into the Coliseum was one for the books. When he appeared the crowd burst into a frenzy. For ten minutes the people screamed, shouted and cheered for their man. It was a moving spectacle, even though the 10,000 people did not quite fill the huge building.

The invocation was delivered by Dr. Charles Stoffel, minister of Charlotte's First Presbyterian Church.

Kennedy was introduced by Mrs. Tillett, who was as gracious and gentle as a Southern hostess can be. She scored heavily with the crowd by saying of Kennedy: "He is a man who was not denied because of religion the right to fight for his country."

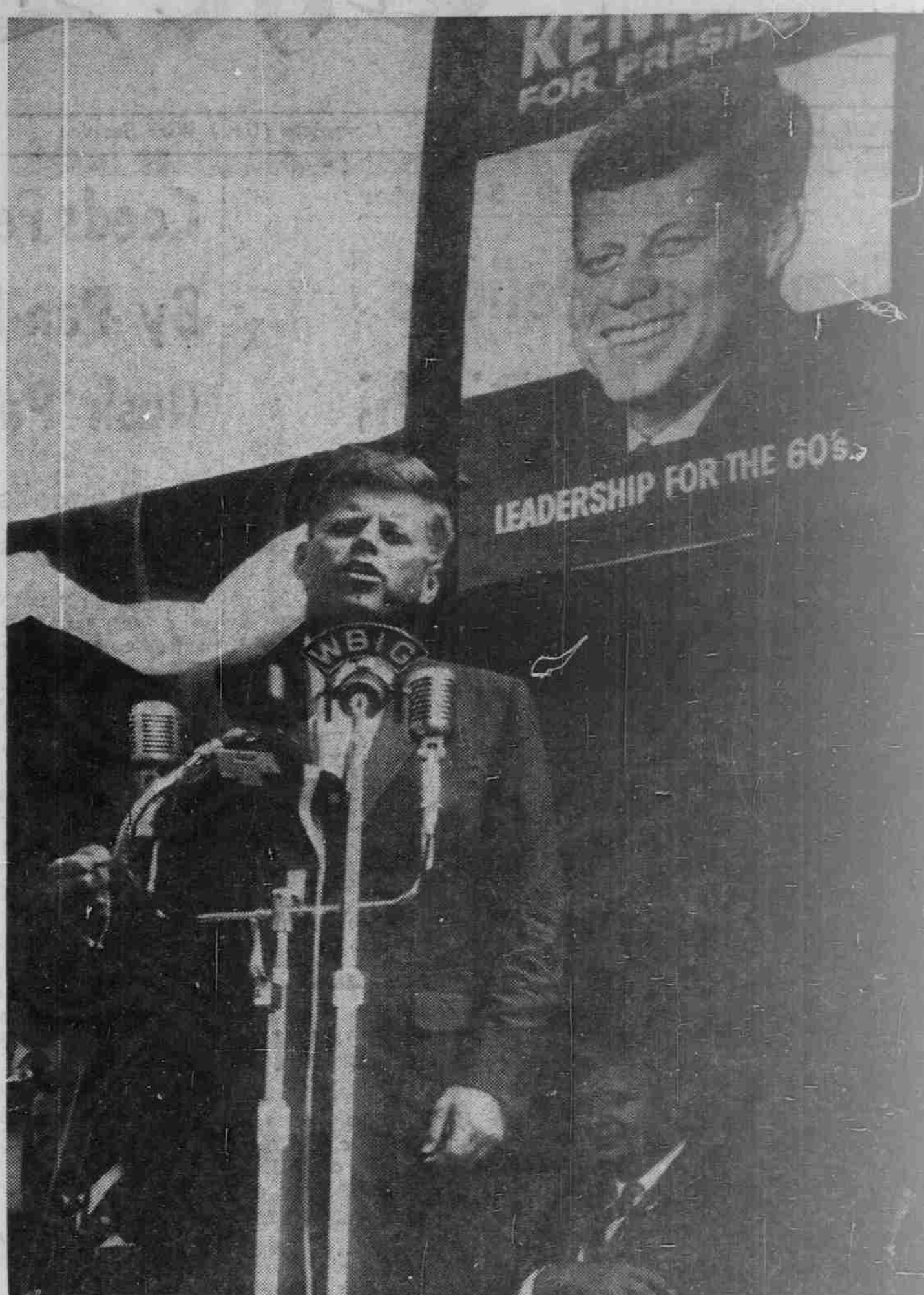
Kennedy's speech was not as good as the Greensboro talk, but it was good. His primary emphasis was upon the nature of the Democratic Party; he emphasized not its appeal to local interest groups but to the nation as a whole. He was not content merely with saying that the party is now a national party; he called for the help of the people of North Carolina in making it a national party.

Kennedy also emphasized the "forward-looking" aspects of the Democratic Party, comparing such campaign slogans as "Keep Cool With Coolidge," "Back To Normalcy," "Had Enough?" and "You Never Had It So Good" with "The New Freedom, The New Deal, The Fair Deal and The New Frontier. It was a point well taken, and duly impressed the audience.

At last the speech was over. The reporters broke for the press buses and Kennedy, guided by a belligerent guard, was hustled into the waiting convertible to "motorcade" back to the airport. The Charlotte show was over. Raleigh lay ahead.

We decided to stay in Charlotte, having finally succumbed to the rigors of campaigning. The day was over for us. For Kennedy, there was more to come; and many more afterwards.

It was quite a day.



When He Spoke, They Listened



'Like Stalking A Lion In Africa'

