

INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JACK ALBRIGHT

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Cosmos Club, Washington, D. C.

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G: Let's start with the circumstances of your being hired to begin with, General Albright.

A: Right. On the twenty-fifth day of April [1965] the President removed the previous commander, Colonel [George J.] McNally, who had been in the White House since World War II. McNally was a former member of the Secret Service and had been transferred into this duty in telecommunications after World War II, about 1947. He had served previous time in this while still a member of the Secret Service, but the President removed him for various reasons. The principal one was nonaccessibility, nonavailability when the President wanted him.

So then I was at a meeting in Paris and [was] called back from Paris and was interviewed on the twenty-sixth and seventh of April, first by [Joseph] Califano, who was then assistant to the secretary of defense and the deputy secretary of defense, and then by Mr. [Marvin] Watson, and then by General [Chester V.] Clifton, who was a military aide to the President at that time. At the last then I was taken in, introduced to the President. The President asked me where I was from. I told him I was from Mississippi. He said, "Well, that's a part of Texas, isn't it?" in a joking matter, and I said, "No, sir, it's not." He said, "Well, you sound like a Texan," and I said, "That's a Mississippi accent."

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So he said then the main thing that he demanded of me was that I be available when he wanted [me] to, and when he said he wanted something, not to quibble with him and act like he didn't know what he was asking for, but to get on with it. If I came to a point where it couldn't be done for some reason, come back and talk to him. He warned me, "Don't talk to those staff. They try to filter through two or three staff members what I want, and you'll never get it right. So if you've got a question, come to me."

So our relationship was established that first day, where he said what he wanted me to do. I actually reported in on the thirtieth day of April, 1965. My immediate boss was to be Bill Moyers, who was then in the staff as a principal staff [member], not as the appointment secretary. Marvin Watson was that position. But he had not yet moved over to be press secretary, I don't believe, at that time. George Reedy was still there. Shortly after Bill Moyers moved to press secretary, George Reedy left and Marvin Watson then became my boss. This was the summer of 1965.

G: You mentioned before we turned on the tape in that initial meeting with the President that he emphasized accessibility and said that he wanted you to be available to him when he needed you. Can you recall his words on that?

A: Well, it's almost like I stated. He said, "That previous fellow was never available when I wanted him. There's one thing you've got to understand, you're working for me. When I want you, I don't want some underling, I want you. When I tell you what to do, I don't want you to argue with me and say, 'Mr. President, you can't do it that way.' If you go out and find you can't do it, then you come back to me and explain why you can't. I'm a reasonable man, we'll talk it over and we'll work out a way to do it. I've got many years

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of experience in communications." He visualized himself as a great knowledge and great background at this. He said, "Therefore, when I tell you these things, I'm not doing it just because I don't understand what I'm asking. But talk it over with me if there's a question."

G: Was he speaking in terms of his radio station, do you think?

A: That, and his telephone service, the two together, not his speech environment. He said, "I know nothing about those teleprompters. That's your problem. You've got to do those." But it was primarily the radio in the Texas area.

We had a very difficult job the next two years to build a system that suited him in that area. And then the telephone system. The telephone system, occasionally you'll hear noises on the line, a click or a change in volume level or something. It irritated him very much when he'd hear one. He said, "That's not supposed to be." Well, even in the finest system today there's an occasional click on the line. I tried to explain this to him. It didn't ever really make him happy. He did get to the point where he would not work me over every time he had a noise on the line, but it never made him happy if he had a noise. But this is a fact of commercial telephone systems here and all over the world. They occasionally are noisy. He felt that the system was breaking in or somebody was tapping the line, and I kept assuring him, "Mr. President, this cannot be anybody tapping your lines." "How do you know who's on the other end?" Well, he had me, I really didn't. But I knew locally there wasn't anybody because it was in my hands and I knew what I had.

G: Is there any system that would prevent somebody from tapping the line?

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A: No. Not really. You go through too many junctions, too many switches, too many possibilities of people to cut in. The odds are badly against it, though. The best place to tap a phone is at its source. Certainly not a hundred miles away or five hundred because it becomes a random choice and the telephone exchange is your best protection, because it seeks through a series of lines and picks out another line to connect this one to from your phone. And so your best source--if it gets past your own exchange, the odds get bad that somebody can tap it. It's really very difficult. Now on the opposite end, if they know just who you're calling, certainly they could. But he called so many and so often that it was very ineffective.

G: You'd have to tap every phone in Washington.

A: Couldn't do it. It would be really impractical.

G: Well, outline the functions of WHCA [White House Communications Agency] when you took over.

A: There's quite a difference between the functions we had when I took it over and the functions we had by the time he left office. Now first of all, when I arrived there our functions were primarily to provide his telephone system for him, his message-handling capability, any secure voice systems that he had, minor speech environment for him, meaning the podium, the microphone, public address system, connection to the press and so on. This was generally the function. We reproduced tapes and placed them in the archives and so on.

As time went on, though, he wanted more things. He wanted to be able to read his speech while looking at the audience, and so we turned to the philosophy of the

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teleprompter. We went to contract with a New York company, and they provided us with a great number of teleprompters. Now, these were heavy, very heavy things to haul around. There are generally three things that looked like podiums that sat out in front of him and through a piece of glass it reflected the speech which was passing on a tape or in fact a teletype paper below that. So he read this as though he was reading it as a speech from a paper. Now this was all controlled, speed-wise and everything else, by a man sitting back behind the curtain judging the President's rate of speech, and always keeping where the President could see a couple of lines, three lines at the most. And his speech flowed through there. The print was about an inch high, very large print.

G: Big yellow background?

A: Yes, on a yellow paper. And so he had little trouble reading it. He could read it either directly ahead of him or to either side of something like a forty-five degree angle from that. That's the first innovation we put in.

Then he wanted lights, very cumbersome lights on him so he would look good with the television and the photography and so on. Now it was not too difficult to do if you have time and if it's in a stable environment such as the White House. The problem came, though, as he wanted to travel with this, and so he had to go to a different set, different kinds of poles to hold up the lights, different kinds of lights. He wanted a soft light to make him look good, a soft light form for photography, not a harsh form. But it became a very [cumbersome] thing. This piece of equipment in the White House weighed about eight hundred pounds and so it was very difficult.

Then he wanted a curtain, a backdrop, a blue velveteen type of material which

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gave him a nice image to be projected against for television and pictures. Well, that must have weighed about two hundred pounds, all the scaffolding that went with it and all of the curtain hangers and everything weighed about another couple of hundred pounds. It was a big thing. It was around, oh, twenty-five feet wide and about certainly twelve or fourteen feet high, very difficult to manage.

So we finally, after some two or three months of struggling with this, convinced him to use it only in the local Washington area where we've got time to do these things and could do it correctly, and to not carry this stuff on the road. Well, this gradually faded out and we didn't carry the backdrop. We carried lights for some years.

G: Did you carry the backdrop for a while?

A: Yes, we did. This was several months.

G: Where did he get the idea of using the teleprompter? Were other politicians using it?

A: No. I think Bob Fleming may have led him into this. Bob Fleming had seen this being used in the television environment, which was very common in that environment. The actors stand there and read their lines, it's right underneath the camera itself, and you're looking at what you're reading and they don't have to change their eye contact with the public. And so as a result I think Bob might have gotten him into it.

We called in a company from New York which was providing it called QTV. They were providing this for a number of studios and a number of people who were preparing films on the West Coast. And we showed one to him as an example. Well, he liked it. He said, "I think I like that." Well, it was heavy, four hundred and fifty to five hundred pounds per installation and in addition to this that podium we had weighed about

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over a hundred. Later in the time we wanted certain protective measures in the podium, bullet-proof arrangements and so on, and that rascal became even heavier. You could take the pieces of bullet-proofing out and slide them into another box and haul them separately, but that total package was about four hundred and fifty pounds exclusive of the teleprompter.

So you see we became a logistic problem after a while. This stuff became so heavy I was getting a third of the weight in the forward end of a Jetstar, as an example, about all the weight they could carry. Then some of the pieces I carried, like this lighting system, I couldn't get it in anything less than a 707. So I was getting into a real logistic problem. I can't catch a commercial plane and ship it out to West Virginia somewhere, because no commercial plane would take that. Some of the pieces were oh, twelve, fifteen feet long, some of the poles that held this thing up. Now, Secret Service had inspected and insisted it be very stable, very secure, so it didn't fall on him, and it's a good point. It's a very valid point. So they had to be very sturdy.

An interesting point in this regard. After he made his Asian trip in March 1967, I believe it was; anyway, when he went around the Philippines and had the all Asian trip out there, he came back, and as we were leaving Alaska he called me on the intercom and told me he wanted to make a speech at Dulles when we arrived. Now we're then about five, six hours out between Alaska and Washington. So I called and my man on the ground said, "Well, there's a storm going on here. I don't know how long it's going to go on, but it's a windstorm, high winds. You want to put it at Dulles?" We said, "Yes, take it out there." So he hauled it all out there--we had duty officers always on duty to do

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this--and he put it up and the Secret Service said, "Nope, you can't leave that up there."

The wind was blowing it like this, even though they had it wired, held in place by people.

The Secret Service said, "No, that's going to fall on the President. Take it down."

So I went back to the President somewhere about midpoint, had to wake him up to talk to him, and told him, "The Secret Service says I can't put it up, sir. They've got to take it down." He said, "You don't mean to tell me you're going to let a little old thing like the Secret Service tell you how to do your job? I said, "No, sir, they're not. But they're worried about your safety." He said, "You go tell them not to worry about my safety. If the damn thing falls on me I'll give you hell later, but I told you to put it up." I went back to my man and I said, "Okay, put it up." He said, "Wait a minute, I'll let you talk to a Secret Service man." So I did. I told him, and he was a friend of mine, but a businessman and doing his job. He said, "No, Jack, I'm afraid it's going to fall. I just can't do it." I said, "Look, if I put extra wires, extra cables, tie it down in the back with sandbags, extra people holding to it where it won't fall forward. If it falls, it's got to fall backward." He finally agreed to it.

Well, the upshot of it all was as we got nearer, within an hour, it was pouring cats and dogs and the President said to Jim Cross, the pilot, "What's the weather like?" Jim said, "It's raining like hell." He said, "Take it down. Get it inside." So we had to tear all that stuff down and move it inside of Dulles Airport.

Well, we circled the field and it cleared up, it quit raining, and so he calls me again on the intercom and said, "I understand it's quit raining." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, put it back up." I said, "Mr. President, it takes thirty, forty minutes." He

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said, "Don't tell me your problems. Just get it up." So Jim Cross had to circle the field a couple of times until I told them to get it back out there. And they put it up and we got it back up and tied it down again. The Secret Service was fretting, very unhappy. Just as he stepped off the plane, as he started down the top, it dropped loose again and it just rained all over us. They got an umbrella over him but everything else is soaking wet, the crowd is wet. They're there. He looks around at me and he said, "Why didn't you leave this inside?" And I said, "You said put it outside, Mr. President." He said, "Yes, I guess I did. I ought to get my ass wet."

G: So did he speak outside?

A: He did talk, yes, he did. He talked out there in the rain. Because he said, "We've changed it twice, we're not going to change it again."

G: That's a good story. How did the teleprompter work out for him?

A: Extremely well. Your biggest problems came on days when we were doing something as the State of the Union, as an example. When we did the State of the Union address in 1968 we actually rehearsed it thirteen times. He went through it and he'd tear it up and he'd add to it and the staff writers were there. As we were rehearsing again--it's now about eight-fifteen at night--and we're sitting in the theater and we're rehearsing, he finally turns to me and he said, "Have you got any suggestions for this thing?" I said, "No, Mr. President, I've heard them all day long." He said, "Well, are you going to have time to make corrections and get it on there?" I said, "Yes, if you quit about twenty minutes to nine I'll make it." Because we had to go back and type the corrections in, paste them in, cut them in place, on not three rolls but four rolls of paper.

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G: Why four?

A: Because there's one on each side. Each one of these is a roll of paper, a huge roll of yellow paper, and each one goes in the teleprompter. They are remotely controlled by somebody back in the back but he's got to look at it, too. And they all synchronize, they're all following the same sequence and so on.

On that occasion I made it, I had the police escort me, and I got in there and got it into the things at one minute to nine. He came in at nine, I'm one minute ahead of him.

Now the only time we had a complete failure was in San Antonio, Texas. I was in the hospital. I had a viral infection of some sort, close to pneumonia, but I was in the hospital. So they called for the teleprompters to be brought from the Ranch. Now what he didn't know then and he found out later, those teleprompters had never been used. Our method, we'd already put them up, we'd tested them day by day to make sure they worked. But what nobody ever noticed or ever caught in all of this is that the wires were reversed and when we were running the main one forward, they were going to run in reverse. So we got it up to a speech at the American Legion in San Antonio, and he got up to speak, and as he opened his mouth all three of them ran off the tape backwards. But my main one was still going forward. He looked at one and he looked at another. Now I'm lying in bed in the hospital. This is not helping my health at all. I had watched him so many times, I said, "My God, something's wrong with the teleprompter!" and I grabbed the phone and I called the Ranch and asked them what was wrong. The guy sitting in the back of there said, "Nothing's wrong! I'm looking at the tape!" I said, "No, you're not! You're looking at your tape! His is not running! Neither of the three." Well,

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this guy snuck around on his knees and got up there and looked and sure as hell, he's back reading from the book. That's how I could tell, when he starts turning pages, he always had a text in front of him to fall back on, and that's what he did. He read that.

G: But did he turn the pages when he had the teleprompter working?

A: No, no, no. He would get five, six, seven pages behind. Sometimes he'd look down and see he's on page--we had the pages marked at the bottom of the page on the teleprompter, page thirteen, and he could turn to thirteen if he wanted to catch up. Frequently he never looked at the text, didn't fool with it at all, and he made no effort to keep up. Because if it was working well he didn't need it. But on this occasion he had to read it from the text and I watched him read it all the way through. He doesn't read well with good eye contact. Having to look at the script that way and then look up, he lost contact quite a bit. And I knew something was wrong.

Well, after it was over Marvin Watson said, "You've heard of what a buffer is?" I said, "A buffer? Yes, I know what it is." He said, "Well, I want you to know I'm a buffer tonight. The President wanted to chomp off your derriere. All I can say is, 'Sir, he's in the hospital up in Washington, D.C. You can't blame him for this. You can blame his other people and so on. You can't jump on him.'" And he said, "I took the beating." He said, "I blame you, Marvin, for not checking them." Well, they'd been in there and looked, fellow ran the machine, and it ran forward, ran the machine and it ran backwards. But nobody had ever checked to see they were not synchronized exactly the same direction. They were in opposite directions.

G: How long after you came on did he adopt the teleprompters?

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A: Oh, let me see now. I hired a man to do this for me, a fellow named Adams, Jim Adams, to head the audio-visual and teleprompter, It would be in the summer of 1965, I would venture to say in the order of June, July, 1965.

G: Did you notice any departure in his speaking style as a result of the teleprompter, other than I assume he would have more eye contact with the audience?

A: Well, that was the principal difference. I think he did develop a sense of--he spoke with more confidence I guess is a better word because he didn't have to try to do the second function of fumbling with what page he's on or following it there. And even though we printed it in the book, you never had print that large. The type of print for a speech is not that big. The speech for the typewriter for that teleprompter was huge print, and it came through as a real big print about so big. That was magnified, too.

G: We have one of those on exhibit at the Library.

A: Yes, that's the first one that I bought, and I had sent down there, right. You also have one of his podiums down there.

G: Was there more than one podium?

A: Oh, good God!

G: The big heavy one?

A: I had twenty of them.

G: You're kidding?

A: You ever try to cover him when he's making six or eight, seven stops a day, and six or seven or eight the next day in a campaign-type thing? No way with two; we had to have twenty. And with the teleprompters I didn't have quite that many, I think I had ten, ten

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sets.

The next administration would not use either the podium--that size, they wanted something different in size--or the teleprompter. They wouldn't use either one. And so they went back to mothball. I don't think there are any of them; I think they've disposed of all of them in the White House now.

G: I saw one the other night at the Sheraton Park that looked identical to the one that President Johnson used to use.

A: Oh, yes, this is a common one that a lot of people are using with the three. And some of them won't have a cover in front of them, all you see is the glass sitting out there. But his did, he often had something up there where you really couldn't see the glass, it was hidden by something of equivalent height and all you saw was just a piece of stuff. Now that was always below him enough that it didn't cut him off along about here. But he stood behind that podium with about that much sticking up behind the podium, because he's a tall man. But he didn't want to be standing and looking over the thing at the crowd, as he said. We designed that podium around his height, him standing behind it, saying no. We'd keep sticking things under there until we got the height he wanted.

We had the same problem with microphones. First of all, he didn't want any microphones out, he didn't want to see a microphone. So I tried putting the microphones inside the podium. Well, your loss was so great, there were so many vp's, voice power and projecting power when you do that, and your microphones just pick up all the noises if you bump that podium and other [noises], it wasn't satisfactory. So I convinced him after maybe a couple of times trying it that it wasn't good. So he'd let me go back then to

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the two microphones outside.

Then we got into a squabble, as some of the papers said, with the unions, the broadcasters' unions, and they felt that they didn't want to take a feed from our people in the White House. So as a result we went to four microphones on most occasions where two of these would be given as a feed to the broadcasters and we would take a feed from them, and the two for the public address system were always separate. One on each side was for PA and one on each side was for the connections to the press and radio. They took their tapes from that.

We've had some interesting failures over the years. I had some real traumatic times in providing this. He made a speech in Vietnam--

G: This is at Cam Ranh Bay?

A: Cam Ranh Bay, first time he went through there in 1967. We'd been to Manila. He wouldn't let us take anybody with me. I was allowed to take on that occasion one man with me. That was the around-the-world trip, no, the second time I guess it failed on me.

G: This was the Harold Holt funeral, is that right?

A: That's right. That was on the two days before Christmas, 1967. We went to Thailand, and while in Thailand he made an early morning speech, but he wouldn't let me take but one recording man with me. We took the recording man and we didn't take the podium, tie put the cords up and microphones and so on. Well, he did visit the troops in the hospital over in Cam Ranh Bay first and then came back and I had things set up and he made his speech.

Then we got ready to get on the airplane and this young kid I had there--I left him

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there for others to come and pick him up, he wasn't going on the rest of the way around the world with us--admitted very tearfully to me that the recorder had failed. He didn't have a copy of the speech. So I had to borrow a tape from the press plane from one of the test men that they had recorded on an identical type recorder. I borrowed the tape from one of these people. I don't now recall who it was. And the President the minute we got in the air wanted to hear it, how it sounded, how he had come across, and so fortunately I had one. Normally I would have had one of my own. My man would have recorded two tapes, he had two tape recorders--but they both failed. I couldn't do a thing about it. Somehow or other in the feed from the jack, from the multiple, they had failed. So I borrowed this one and played it for the President, you know. Then after it was over with he said, "Yes, very good, very good. Your boy will take the tape on back and let's get copies in the archives." I said, "Mr. President, I've got to tell you. I don't want you to get too mad at me, but we didn't get a copy of it. This is the copy we borrowed from the press." And he just died laughing. He said, "Well, at least you showed common sense enough to borrow one. If you'd gotten on here without one, I'd have been unhappy." (Laughter) So anyway, we got one for him to hear.

G: While we're on the subject of his speeches, many things have been written about how he failed to come across over television and how he was so effective in small groups and one on one, and for some reason he couldn't relate over television.

A: That's true. I think he was at his best where he was speaking to ten to fifty people in a room three times this size, but intimate, and he's got something to tell them, something he wants to talk about, I think he was at his best, most persuasive at that point. And he came

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across because he usually didn't have a script. He usually took it right out of his heart, his soul, and that's where it came the best.

The next best would be where he's speaking to a live crowd, a crowd sitting in front of him, oh, five, ten thousand people sitting there listening, you know. They're hanging on every word, or they're reacting. They're laughing with him or enjoying his speech, and he'll stop and listen to them laugh. He gets a real charge out of this thing.

Now how I learned this was the hard way. We had a speech in Pocatello, Idaho. It was at the nuclear reactor plant out there, one of the first ones in the nation we had run by the government. He went out on a dedication of the first X number of years, I believe it at this time was twenty years. It had been built in 1947, and this was now 1967, and he went out to make a dedication of this thing at that time. So I had to hire a local contractor to come in and put in a public address system. We expected a huge crowd, about twenty thousand people. So we built a system, a monstrous system. Oh, I don't know, it must have had twenty-five to thirty huge speakers, tall, almost as tall as the doors there, and driven by some huge amplifiers. I took precautions to have two generators. In addition to commercial power I had generators backing it up. I had done everything I thought was necessary. And so they went through all the introductions. The governor spoke and the head of this reactor site out there spoke. The President got up to speak and he hadn't mumbled more than two or three words and it quit. The public address system quit. Now we had him on nationwide radio, nationwide TV and the cameras out front. That part of it was not affected. It was the amplifiers that went from the original connection, that connection failed. Not the amplifiers, they never failed. The connection, that cord, the

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inter-connecting to the PA system just completely quit. He looks around at me and he's doing like this, and I said, "Go ahead, you're on television," and he kept going.

Well, for some agonizing four-and-one-half minutes he talked. The crowd's getting restless; they can't hear. Nobody can hear him except the people on the stage with him. Finally the PA system came back on. My people are frantic. They're changing cords, they're changing wires, doing everything in the book. Finally they got the right combination and it came back on. Then he finished his speech.

Well, we went on back to the helicopter and went back to the airplane, and he called me in and said, "What went wrong?" I said, "I don't know yet, Mr. President. We're still investigating. I'll let you know as soon as they call me back." Well, within ten minutes I called them on the ground and said, "What happened?" They said, "Well, it's a nightmare. It's one of the things you dream it couldn't happen, but did. It's what you know as a hot solder joint came open. As it gets hot and the longer it stays hot it tends to open the solder joint. That's a rare case, but it does. You've all heard of cold solders, but not hot solders. That's what happened. This connection of that wire to that plug actually quit, came apart, and as it stayed off for a while it cooled and made the electrical connection again and the PA system came back on, you could feed the PA system again. Your voice could get through." And they said, "It's not one chance in a million it could happen again. But it did happen."

So I went in and told him, and he said, "Well, I'm sure glad you people found it while I was speaking." I made the mistake of saying "Sir, we didn't find it. We didn't find it till just now. We don't know why it came back on." He said, "You mean that

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thing could have quit again?" and I said, "Yes, sir. You could have finished your speech and had none, but you're on TV and radio." He said, "Son, don't ever do this again. I'm not interested in all those people out there on the radio and TV. I'm assuming they're there, but I don't know they're there. But did you ever try to stand up and talk to twenty thousand people and you stand there flapping your gums and everybody saying, 'I wonder what the hell he's saying?' Next time that happens you walk on and say, 'Hold it, Mr. President.'" I said, "Mr. President, you really don't want me to do that." He said, "You're blessed right I do! You come tell me to stop till you get it fixed. I'll sit down and wait for you." I said, "That would make you awful mad." He said, "I wouldn't be any madder than if I couldn't talk to those people. I was pretty unhappy. They came there to see me, and that's what's important." So he did feel very strongly about a crowd; live audiences appealed to him.

G: Did you ever interrupt him subsequently?

A: Not in that environment. I have interrupted him a couple of times when we were making rehearsals, yes, where something had gone wrong or the teleprompter was momentarily faulting, or slowing or something, and I've stopped him in that. But these were not critical times. Never in a public speech, no.

G: Could you argue with Lyndon Johnson?

A: Well, yes. I was one of the first ones that I know of that ever worked for him that argued without getting fired. He never called it arguing, he called it expressing my opinion. But I used to discuss things very vociferously with him sometimes. But that was after the first year. The first year I did not; I had a great deal of fear and awe of the man I didn't

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know.

But after a year of working literally twelve hours or more per day, seven days a week, I got to the point where I really said, "This is crazy. I'm doing a job. I'm not doing a job I enjoy. I am doing a job because it needs to be done, has to be done. But why should I be afraid of him? If he fires me, I can go back to living like a white man. I'm not going to continue this."

So he called me over one day at the office about some little thing, I don't know, he wanted done to the Ranch. So I said, "Mr. President, let's discuss another way of doing this." He said, "Why? Don't you like my idea? Don't you think I know anything about this?" Then he started that usual stuff he'd tell me. I said, "It's not that, Mr. President. There's a better way to do it and cheaper." "Cheaper?" he says. So he perks up and he listens to me. Well, the staff was about to go through the floor. By this time Marvin Watson is having apoplexy. He said, "You can't talk to the President like that!" I said, "Well, I've got to tell him, and I will." I told him. I said, "Mr. President, now here is what I suggest we do"--I didn't ever tell him we've got to do it--"but I suggest we do it this way. Now one, I think you've got a better system, and second, you're going to save money," and I told him how much it would save. He said, "Okay. You do it your way and then you bring me the bills and show me you saved money. When you do, I'll I say you're the greatest."

Well, I don't know, two weeks, three weeks [later] I did, I took it to him and I showed him. I said, "Now this is what I told you it would cost you, and that's what it is." He said, "My God,' He knows what he's doing for a change."

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No, I never really argued with him. I discussed things with him. But I got to the point where I wasn't afraid to. His staff was deathly afraid of him. I don't know what Marvin and them talked to him [about] in private. I was never privy with just the two of them alone, but I was there when there were groups and they wouldn't dare say anything to him. If he said something, that was it, you did it that way whether you understood it or not. They wouldn't ask questions. I said, "Marvin, I can't live like this. I've got to know what he really wants. You're not telling me what he wants. You don't know what he wants." He said, "No, I don't." I said, "Let's go in and ask him." Well, he said, "You sure you want to?" So from then on I had no trouble. But if you worked for the President, you learned very quickly, you either had to have a rapport with him and try to do what he wanted done, or you weren't there. He didn't keep people around that didn't try to please him. As long as he knew you were trying, he'd give you every effort in the world.

He never fired me. That's another thing. He never once fired me. I've seen him fire George Reedy on a regular basis. Fired Bill Moyers a couple of times. I never heard him fire Watson, but Watson told me he had fired him a couple of times. But he never fired me because he asked me one day, "What will you do if I fire you?" I said, "Well, I had a job before I got here, Mr. President. I'll go back to the military, and if they don't want me, I'll retire." He said, "Well, no, but I mean what would you say?" I said, "Well, I'd say 'All right, Mr. President, that's what you want,' and I'd leave. He said, "You really would leave?" and I said, "Yes, sir, and I wouldn't come back. I'm not one that you could fire today and hire tomorrow. If you don't want me here, say so and I'm gone." He just

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laughed and said, "Well, some of these other people know I love them too much. Old George knows this. He knows I wouldn't fire him. I just get mad at him sometimes, let my temper get the best of me. But he gets about as far as Dallas and I call him and say, 'Come on, George, let's come back. I'll send a plane for you.'" This happened time after time. I guess George told all this, too, if you've ever read his stories of it.

G: Anything else on the problem that he had relating on television?

A: Well, cut that off a minute.

(Interruption)

Speaking back to the specific day of this, 31 March, 1968, we were aware that something was amiss, something was up, by about two o'clock in the afternoon when Jim Jones and Marvin Watson, who was then postmaster general, called me and said, "Have you got a young man that's an excellent typist for the teleprompter and he's one of your teleprompter men and a man that we can entrust implicitly?" And I said, "Marvin, you can trust any man I've got implicitly." He said, "No, no. I want a man that will come in here and go over something with us and not even tell you. He works for you, but he'll come out and say, 'I can't tell you.'" And I said, "That doesn't bother me, Marvin, whatever you want." So we picked a young boy whose name escapes me now, but he's one of our teleprompter operators, a very good one, but a young fellow, twenty-one, twenty-two. He'd been with us for a year or so, but he did an outstanding job.

So they called him into the office, and this is on the order, let's say, of three in the afternoon, and his speech was scheduled for I believe, I recall, it was nine. So they called him into there and he typed up an approximate seven-minute addition to the regular tape.

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Now we had rehearsed the tape in the morning. We knew what was on that. There wasn't a thing about this. Of course he just made an addition at the end of it. And so this kid stayed with them. I saw him again the next time, after he had put the tape back together and after he had put it into the machine, and they rehearsed it one time with the President in the President's office, and we weren't in there. Only he was in there, only this young kid. But when I saw him, oh, before the broadcast, somewhere around eight-fifteen, eight-thirty I guess it was, he was as white as this piece of paper, literally numb, just scared to death. And I said, "Now just relax, son. Nobody's going to bother you at all. You go in there and do your job, that's all he's asking you to do." He said, "I've never been put in a position like this before," I said, "Don't you worry about it. The President asked for you this way, and it's up to you to do it right. Don't you worry about anything, what we think or anything else, it's not up to us to know. We'll hear it tonight."

Now he went in there, and of course when he made his speech I'm standing behind the camera as far from me as the door, in front of the desk there and so on, during everything, watching my boy sitting off to one side running the teleprompter and so on for him that night. No hint of anything wrong except we knew something was coming. We'd speculated all day on the thing.

G: What did you think? Did you have any speculation?

A: We thought he had some breakthrough on Vietnam. That's the consensus of the crowd. The cameramen had sensed it was going to run longer than they'd thought. They didn't know about the addition, but people in the staff did, many of them did. They knew seven minutes is all they knew. And Marvin said to me, "Your boy is a good kid. He's holding

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up very well." Jim Jones said the same thing. And I said, "All right, nobody knows anything, Jim. Just go ahead with it." So when he got to that then he stopped, just a pause, you know, and then went into when he announced that he didn't intend to run. This kid began to get color in his face for the first time, toward the end of that thing, like he's breathing normal, you know, it's almost over. And when it ended we literally had to help the kid out of that office. Had to send another man in to get him. He was so nervous he sat there shaking like this, just like a leaf. Did a beautiful job to the point of the end and then he just broke down.

Well, I told the President about this two, three days later. He asked about the boy, said, "How's he doing?" I said, "He's great." "I want to send a letter," he said, "Give me a draft of a letter to thank him for this," and I did. He was empathetic. He liked to have people around him that did a good job get credit for those kinds of jobs, and he's thoughtful in that regard. And so I told him about the letter, I said, "This man was a nervous wreck. If he'd been a drinking man, we'd have had trouble with him that night, because we had to carry him out of there, literally hold him to lift him out of there. He was frozen stiff in there and shaking." He said, "Well, I guess it's a lot of responsibility. That kid has known since about three o'clock today what I was going to say. Question is, how do I say it? That's what we manipulated all afternoon. We massaged it and rewrote it and tore it up and he did it again. I must say that he worked hard all the way through it. He's a fine boy."

So that's the story on that one. This kid had added it to it.

G: Did President Johnson at that point, when you were talking to him about it, say anything

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about his speech and how he regarded that last seven minutes?

A: Oh, no. No, no. I heard a very interesting one, and I don't know whether you want this one on the tape or not: Marvin Watson's explanation as to why he didn't run. Have you ever heard that?

A: I'd like to hear that. No.

A: Well, I was a member of the White House staff mess, being the commander of the unit. I was the only one in my unit that had membership in there. So I frequently ate there, not every day, but when I was there I would eat there. They had a big round staff table in the corner, ten seats at it. Marvin and Bill Moyers and Jim Jones and so on ate there frequently at that staff table. You could come in and order your meal and slip quietly out. You didn't have to sit around for any protocol for the rest of them to wait to come and eat and so on.

I was in there about, I don't know, I recall about a week, ten days later. Marvin came in about the time I did and Marvin now was postmaster general. He was not in that environment, but he ate there still. He said, "Would you have lunch with me?" and I said, "Yes, where are you going to eat?" He said, "I'm going to sit at the staff table." So we sat down, the two of us, and then the table sort of filled up. I don't remember who all was there, but it was a bunch of, I'd say, junior politicians, up and coming politicians. They're all either advance men or they work in some capacity in there. Not any of the high level staff, not a one. They were all, oh, I'd say early thirties, late twenties, I mean youngsters. So they all sat down. We introduced ourselves around the table, to me. Marvin knew them all; I didn't know them. But he introduced me. So he said, "Gentlemen, I got a

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question for all of you and I'd just like to hear an answer from one of you at a time.

Everybody but the General. I don't want the General to comment one way or the other. I know he's got his own views, and he's not a politician, so I'm not going to ask him.

Gentlemen, just why did President Johnson choose not to run?" And I'd hear answers.

He gave them a few minutes to nibble on their salads and so on. He said, "Okay, now."

He started with the first one.

Well, in short I don't remember what they all said, but the consensus of the group was that he had had really a tough presidency, that Mrs. Johnson had been urging him to quit, and he felt that it was an appropriate time since he was the top of the heap in effect and [to] leave at that point was the best time. And in general, that's the theory. One of them did even advance the theory that he felt that because of Vietnam that it would be a difficult campaign and he didn't look forward to going through that kind of thing. He didn't feel like he was anxious to fight, that was the way he expressed it.

When they got all through Marvin said, "Gentlemen, let me tell you something. There's not a one of you that understands President Johnson, not one of you. Now first of all, he's a fighter. He's a born politician and a fighter. No group of demonstrators out there are going to run him out of anywhere. He's not scared of a single one of them. He's not scared--no personal safety concern at all. And Mrs. Johnson, yes, she's urged him to leave, But more than once, and he's always said, 'Now, I'll let you know, Lady Bird, when I decide to quit.' That's all he would ever tell her, never said yes or no. That's not the answer. I want you to know something. This man does everything for a reason, and so he's got his reasons. This is the reason."

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"During the month of February we asked for and received a report back from each of the states, the Democratic apparatus in each state, to give us a feel, a grassroots feel, how would the President fare if the election were today? And then a projection, did they see any change in this--what they knew about things--between now and the election itself, which would cause that to change? Gentlemen, not the majority, not the consensus, 90 per cent approximately came back and said, 'Mr. President, if the election were held today you wouldn't have a prayer. If the election were held in November and if certain things occur you've got a reasonable chance.' But the reasonable chance only made it move back to about 35 to 40 per cent in his favor, that he might have that kind of an odd. This is fairly unanimous then. I went to him with that and showed him that. He's a man that won by a landslide in 1964, and he was not about to be defeated by this kind of a coalition in 1968. And gentlemen, that's the answer. He's not going to be embarrassed by a defeat in 1968, and he doesn't want to risk it."

That's what Watson's explanation to that group was as the reason why he didn't run. I'd never heard it from anyone else. I'd never heard the President himself say so. I don't have any reason to question one way or the other. Marvin won't deny this; he'll remember saying all this, I'm sure,

G: There were a lot of other witnesses, too.

A: There were eight others, right. Now whether they remember it the same way--but that's basically what he said. That's why he made his decision.

G: Did the President seem relieved after he had made that decision? Did he behave as if some of the pressure were off of him at this point?

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A: No. Momentarily yes, I guess that's correct. But within a matter of a week, two weeks, he was still back to his nervousness. He'd come to the point where he was thoroughly paranoid about making a trip. He was concerned about demonstrators. He was concerned about people disruptions of all sort. So therefore we had no notice. We'd get no notice. I mentioned that we'd have to board a plane with him. He'd want to make a speech, for example, in New York, and I'd get the word between six and seven in the evening. I'd catch a plane with him, with my people. We'd go to New York and take the speech environment equipment with us, set it up on the stage at the Waldorf-Astoria or the Americana, wherever he was speaking, connect to the public address system in the house. Sometimes I had less than an hour to do this. In the meantime there's a banquet going on down below, and he's coming in there to speak to the crowd, to some special gathering. They frequently didn't know he was coming until such time as they'd see us working up there behind the curtain, or know we were putting the microphones in place and the podium and so on. But they caught on pretty quick and then the hubbub would begin. The Secret Service were all over the place checking doors and so on. So then they knew. But he was already in the building, he was in a suite somewhere upstairs talking to somebody, and then finally he would come down. But that's how it came.

It became a very, very difficult job. Now he never complained when we had a little slowness, I've had to delay him sometimes. I said, "I'm not ready yet," and he'd say, "Well, when are you going to be ready?" I'd say, "Five minutes," "Ten minutes," whatever I thought it would take. And he didn't ever give me any hell, I'll say that for him. He used to chafe under it, yes, I knew he did. But he was still nervous.

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Now I can tell you one story that I'll bet you never heard, or if you have, stop me if you've heard it. Even until they nominated Hubert Humphrey, the President still expected to be called as a unanimous nominee again. Did you know this?

G: No.

A: The only other men that know that story is a few members of his staff such as Jim Jones, Marvin Watson again. We were in the hotel in Chicago, the Blackstone Hotel, and Marvin Watson and I were sitting together as the convention went on. We'd been out and prepared this whole hotel for the President to come up from Texas. He had the Jetstar sitting down at his Ranch in Texas where it could pick him up and bring him up there. I had people there to come with him. We had everything in readiness, all the presidential podiums and everything else right there in Chicago. I had forty-some odd people in Chicago waiting, and we were all ready. And so at three o'clock on the afternoon Marvin said--word had come back they were preparing to nominate Humphrey that night and the groundswell was not there. I tell you how far we had gone, we had the camera, the 16 mm camera, projector loaded with film from the 1964 campaign, "Hello Lyndon," and we had a screen and were prepared to drop down from the roof of the auditorium, that huge screen, and he was supposed to walk in with us playing, showing that picture, and singing "Hello Lyndon." That's how far he thought they would nominate him by acclamation.

Marvin called him on the phone, put me on the phone with him, and he said, "Mr. President, I've got some bad news. It's not going to go that way. They're going to nominate Hubert." He said, quote, "Those ungrateful sons of bitches. Okay. Who's with you there?" Marvin said, "General Albright is here." He said, "Okay. General, how

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many people you got there?" I said, "About forty-three or four," I don't recall the figure, but about that. He said, "Get the equipment. Quietly get them out of town. Don't get them out through the Chicago airport. Run them all over there and get them out of different airports. I don't want anybody to know we had made any advance preparations. Clean it up." I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. President." He said, "Well, that's the way it is." Then I got off the line and he talked to Marvin some more. But I heard that much of it and then went out to order my people to clear it up. But that was somewhere between three and four on Wednesday afternoon when they nominated Humphrey.

G: I don't think it was ever publicized that all that was, there.

A: It won't. You ask Marvin Watson about it. He'll confirm it, because he was sitting there with me on the phone. Maybe he was going to put that in his book later, I don't know, but that's the facts of life.

G: How is this set in motion to begin with? Did he call you in or was this something Marvin Watson arranged?

A: No. Jim Jones started me to work. Jim Jones ordered me a week before to go out and make the advance preparations. Then I didn't really see Marvin until that morning. I was in Chicago from one Monday, and Marvin was there but I didn't see him until Wednesday morning. He said, "Well, this will be either a very good day or a very bad day." He told him what was happening. The President was sitting at the Ranch waiting, anticipating. He said, "We're still seeing what's happening. It's not dead yet. There's a good possibility they'll still call for him. And if they call for him he will jump in that jet, he'll come to Chicago and come wheeling in here and he'll be nominated again. He fully

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expects them to nominate him." Now I had gotten to know Marvin fairly well and I asked him, "Marvin, what do you think?" he said, "I'm hesitant to speculate at this point. I'd rather just wait." He wouldn't comment one way or the other. Don't think. he really believed they would, but nevertheless he's playing always the loyal politician and aide to the President. So when it came, he knew by mid-afternoon it wasn't going to happen. He said, "Well, we have got to tell him."

G: His March 31 statement was so categorical in ruling that out.

A: He said that, recognizing that at the moment he wanted to express to the people so he would be free then to work to end the Vietnam thing. That's the way he expressed it, as you know. But in his own mind and among his own people, the few really close people to him, they knew better than this. They knew he didn't really mean that. George Christian, I've heard him say the same thing. Jake Jacobsen, I've heard him say it, that the President really said that, but in his own heart didn't mean it, that he kept hoping that they would nominate him anyway. And so I'm saying the preparation was there. That plane was sitting there. The pilots were there sitting in the airplane. Everything was in readiness. They could have left there within certainly ten to fifteen minutes after he got the word "come on," and that's what Marvin called to tell him. Either come on, or sorry, and that's what he told him.

G: Well, at the time it was speculated that Frank Erwin and some other members of the Texas delegation were prepared to put his name in nomination. Was this part of that, do you know?

A: I really don't know who was behind the scenes, because I didn't keep up with many of the

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other politicians. The only one I kept was the one I worked with on a regular basis. Of course, Marvin came back into that at that time. He were never close to the group that worked directly with Humphrey, because we were never allowed to be. That's another story.

G: Well, how did you get your people out?

A: First of all, I called my man in charge and I said, "Okay, the President has said clean it up, get them out of town, two to an airport. So rent cars, take your equipment, go out in different directions." We scattered them all out. We sent them out through Minnesota and down through Illinois, Indiana. It took them about a day and a half to get them all out of there and scatter them. Some of them had to catch the same airport, but half a day later or a day later, where it wasn't obvious. Because that called for equipment. We hauled in huge equipment. They'd go down and put it in on the freight. They couldn't identify it as White House. They couldn't do any of that stuff. They just had to take an ordinary ticket. All in civilian clothes, they couldn't tell it. But just cleaned it out of there. They made it. Oh, they thought maybe broadcasting system had decided to pull some equipment out and so on. The airlines couldn't tell that when you don't block up at one airport. If it all had gone out through Chicago, sure, they'd have known it. That's why he said not through Chicago. We couldn't go out through that airport, O'Hare, at all. Cleaned them out.

G: Do you think he wanted Humphrey to win that election?

A: That I'm not sure about. I really don't know. I know this, I think if he did he waited too long. I think the facts will bear that out. That had he thrown his weight to Humphrey

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earlier than he did, I think that Humphrey would have won. The difference between them, as you know, was extremely small, some four hundred thousand votes difference. It could easily have gone the other way. But he really didn't throw his full weight behind him until probably Friday before the election itself.

G: What did he do then?

A: Well, he made a speech at a gathering with Humphrey I think or a speech in which he said "that's the man to have" and he spoke up for him. But up until that time he had not spoken or done anything at any press conferences or anything. He just sort of let it go by default. And that's what they said, the way they accused him, the other Humphrey people said, "Well, he's killed us by faint praise or no praise at all."

I'm not sure how he felt about it. I'm sure he was deeply hurt that he was not nominated. I know that. I heard his expression, I know it. But I don't think he had any personal animosity against Humphrey. Not that at all. It's just a question of the deep feelings he had of his own abilities and desires. I think as much as anything.

G: That's fascinating. We were talking about the people you worked with in the White House. Bill Moyers and then Marvin Watson and I guess Jim Jones.

A: Mostly these were the appointments secretary or a special assistant to the President for domestic affairs, someone like Jake Jacobsen, Joe Califano, some of that crowd. We worked very closely with them day by day. I never really knew Califano personally. Very aloof, very business-like. But I got to know other people such as Jake Jacobsen and Bill Moyers, Jim Jones, now a congressman from Oklahoma. I've seen him in recent years, testified before him a couple of times. And Marvin, I hear from Marvin

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occasionally, talk to him on the phone. I got to know those fairly well. In general, the rest of the staff, no. Firstly it was the people who went to the Ranch with him is the people you got to know, because they're down there day after day after day, and you talk to them day after day after day. You sense the things that are bothering them and that are frustrating them, the things they need, the things they're working on. You got some feel of all of that.

G: Did you sense a lot of rivalry among the White House staffers?

A: No. I was never close enough to the rest of them to ever sense that. If I had ever felt there was any, it would have had to been from those who were driving the hardest to be closer to the stage and it might have been people such as Valenti, Califano, some of that group, who were always appeared to strive for it [?]. But certainly no striving, no stress, I mean people like Moyers, George Christian, Jake Jacobsen, that crowd, none of that, or Watson either. Never felt that at all.

G: If you were going to--just from your own perspective--identify one staffer as being the closest to President Johnson, who would you--

A: It would have to be Watson.

G: Really?

A: Yes. I don't think there's any question.

G: Why would you feel that way?

A: Well, primarily, and my mind is biased admittedly, because he was there probably the greatest length of time. Now, Jim Jones was an assistant to Watson, see, when I first got there. He had just come on board there when I got in there in April of 1965, and Watson

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was the key man. Well, Watson left there. I don't remember the exact date when he became postmaster, but somewhere around the beginning of 1968 or late 1967, I don't recall exactly, yet Watson still travel. Every time we had an overseas trip Watson went with us as a close confidante. And whenever the President would need something he would tell either Jim Jones or Watson and they would call me. That's the reason I say they were the closest.

But in the day-to-day workings of the office, while others had access to the President--that's an interesting point incidentally--the President had a general rule that had been passed to us through even Moyers before I got there that only a limited number of people could call the President direct through the switchboard. Now I ran the switchboard. But I had to set up ground rules. "This is the list that can call the President day or night." That's what the President wanted. And he'd accepted this.

G: Where would this ring? Would this ring in--

A: Wherever he was. See, we always knew where the President was, He couldn't get away from us at all, because Secret Service were always adjacent to where he was. If he was in his bedroom they were in the outer hall out there, or somewhere in the Mansion watching things. But we formed a series of lights throughout the Mansion outside the room he was in, and that light would always light up green when he was out of there, and the same thing would light up down in Secret Service, showing on a big board what room he was in: the East Room, Fish [?] Room, these little lights just followed him. Now, we didn't have that the first couple of years.

G: When was that put in?

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A: I'd say it would have been somewhere about my second year, I don't know, 1966 sometime. But he thought it was fascinating that people could tell where he was without having to talk on the radio. They didn't have to say a word, all they did is when he moved to the next room that light would change and come on there, and then people down in the Secret Service office following him could always look up at that board and say, "Okay, he's out of the East Room. He's now in the corridors. He's on the way to the West Wing. He's now in the Oval Office or he's in the Cabinet Room," wherever. They could always follow it very carefully. And it helped. Now that was available to us only in the White House. We didn't extend that outside of there. It was always Secret Service who did the notification when he went somewhere else.

G: They'd tell you.

A: We told the Secret Service board, but I ran all the radio systems and could say that my switchboard knew at any time where the President was, because we manned the console, the radio console for Secret Service. They always had their own down there, but I always listened on every one, on Channel B and all the other channels that they had, Secret Service channels. I heard everything that was ever said on those channels, because I'm monitoring them. If something happened to one of the Secret Service men, could not pick it up, if they're based down at the Secret Service office, one of my men answered. If we went on a trip, we always had one. We'd give them a base in their own office, and then we handled all the channels, we heard them all. So we knew, too, where the President was at any time,

Because if you get a call--let's say it's an emergency, and you've got to get the

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President in a hurry, we don't want to have to look for Secret Service and beg us [them] to tell us where the President [is], "I've got to get a message to him." So we watched these movements and we kept it on a piece of paper, on a trip. The President is in his car, the President is such and such a place. We could always reach that agent. We did have to on many occasions call and say, "We've got a telephone call for the President. Does he want to take it?" "Who is it from?" We'd tell him. "I'll ask him." He asked him. We generally called a staff member, either Jake Jacobsen or Watson or Jones later, and say, "Telephone call for the President from"--let's say--"one of his men in California, the fund-raiser," or one of that crowd, "wants to talk to the President." "Well, can it wait?" "He says not." And he said, "Wait a minute," and he asked the President. The President, "Yes, let me have it." So he picks up the phone in the car frequently and talks to him, through the radio system. Now, it's a non-secure system and it wasn't very smart, but he did this occasionally. Now if he could get to a phone, he'd have a more secure [system].

G: What do you mean by a non-secure system?

A: Any radio system is non-secure.

G: You mean somebody could pick it up on the same frequency?

A: Anybody who's got a radio set on the same frequency can hear it. There's nothing peculiar about it. None of those VHF systems at those times on the radio were secure. It's conceivable that you can do that, but it's a complicated system, especially if you jump out and run from here to there and no time for preparation. You can't do that very well. So those nets were highly vulnerable.

We suspected the press always of listening in.

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G: Is that right?

A: The press had their own radios in the cars and they'd listen to that channel. We suspected that. There's nothing we could do about it. It's a public channel. It happened to be allocated to Secret Service but I couldn't keep them off of it. So that's what I say, an open circuit.

No, I'd say there's not a doubt, Watson was undoubtedly the closest to him. The man who spent the most time with him was not Watson, but Jacobsen. Jacobsen spent month after month after month at the Ranch with him. He'd go there and he'd literally--he'd move out of there at night if the President would go to bed, and that's the last he'd see him until the next morning, seven-thirty, eight o'clock he's back over there and the President's up again. But he was with him every minute, except that six, seven hours he was allowed to sleep at night. So in our speaking with him, he was with him. I'm not saying he was that close to him.

G: Sure.

Well, let's talk about the telephone system a little more. Did the White House operators work under your supervision?

A: You've got two different kinds of telephone systems. We had a telephone system in the White House, which in effect belonged to Mr. [William] Hopkins. That was called an administrative telephone system. The telephone operators were women, and they worked for Mr. Hopkins. They did not work for me.

The other switchboard, which was in the protected area within the White House itself, in the sheltered area, was called Signal. That switchboard worked the President,

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the White House staff, the trunk circuits to the Ranch, the overseas circuits and so on. Whenever he went on a trip, all circuits terminated back there, all came back to that board. That was all military, not a civilian in the whole crowd. All military.

Now when the President traveled to the Ranch, after 1965 he wanted the girls to go with him, and so we used to take three or four operators from the White House board, the administrative board, take them to the Ranch, and they operated the board at the Ranch. Because the President said, "I want to hear that good old girl's voice." Now I tried to get him to let me hire some girls, but he wouldn't change it. "No, that ain't worth it. Just take these girls over there with you. That crowd will know exactly what I want, who I want, and so on." During the day, when he wanted to get his political friends and so on, he'd say, "Get me Dick Russell." Well, you don't need to explain further to one of these girls. They'd done it on that board hundreds of times before. They had the contacts to the civilian government and the Congress, and where he'd been before, they knew all of his friends. We kept them informed wherever he was, also. Again, they could always trace a call right to where he was. They could do it.

However, when he was on a trip away from the Washington area, everything went through that Signal, the military board, which I owned and controlled. Only at the Ranch did I use these women. I tried carrying those women on a couple of other occasions on overseas, and it was disastrous. They just are not used to a fast moving condition. They worked beautifully in the White House, where you've got a set condition, and they're used to looking for the same people. They knew exactly what to do, when. But when you're out there and the Secret Service are moving here and somebody is looking for some there,

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they didn't know who these people were, and they didn't know where to find all these strange names. Every time we'd go on a long trip, you'd bring in advance people to do the advance arrangements for the local stops. And there might be a name they had never heard of. It might be Lloyd Hand. It might be the mayor from Killeen, Texas. Name escaped me right now, but he traveled with us a number of times. But that's the way it works.

G: Oh, Connell.

A: Yes, Ted Connell. Ted. They'd throw Ted in there sometimes, made a lot of trips with Ted. Okay, the guy is out of Philadelphia, sometime out of New York. But these girls in the White House didn't know these people. They never saw them. So as a result, my boys did. My boys had been on numerous trips with him, and so as a result when somebody said, "Find Ted Connell for me," they knew exactly where to look and they knew where they could find him. Because he always--they had a rule they had to keep us informed. When they're going to move out, going to leave the room, going to be away from the phone, you've got to have a radio on your person to let us know where you are. We didn't have beepers in the first few years; we didn't carry those. It's only in the last year we got into the thing where everybody carried a little beeper in his pocket, and if we needed him we could buzz it, he'd hear a buzz, and he'd have to come back to a phone and talk to us. We didn't have that at first. . .

G: They just carried walkie-talkies.

A: Had a radio, walkie-talkie he kept in his pocket, and they were big things in those days. They're not small. They were a burdensome thing, but they carried it.

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G: Well, the President had a phone console in his office I suppose and in his bedroom as well, is that right?

A: Had a multi-button phone. He had one of the only phones that we'd ever had built like that. He wanted all of a great number of people to be right on his phone, where he pushed the button he got them. So at the Ranch we built him one with twenty-four buttons. They don't make them like that.

G: Really?

A: Made it special by AT & T for us, and we put several like that in his office and his bedroom and so on. But he's the only one that ever had that. He probably got one--

G: Was this more of an intercom?

A: No. No. Each one of them was a direct circuit where when he wanted to talk directly to another man, he'd push a button and it'd ring that man's phone. It was a direct line to those other individuals at the Ranch when he wanted them. He didn't want to go through the switchboard.

G: Oh, it was at the Ranch as well as the White House?

A: Oh, yes, he had them both places. But he wanted all of the certain select lines on there where he could buzz them directly. Also in the White House he wanted a connection to the administrative board, that one I told you that the girls operated and Hopkins was responsible for.

G: But these were not just aides' lines within the White House that tie could punch and buzz?

A: Oh, yes. Yes.

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G: They were.?

A: Yes. They were people within the White House environment. Some of them were--he had a couple to secretary, one to secretary of defense, and one to another, but most of them were not. Most of these lines in there--he wanted to have eight or ten lines when he'd pick any one he wants to talk on now, and he could then go to the switchboard. Now, we had a rule that almost everything that came out of that board, except the two that went to the White House and the direct lines to staff members, went through the Signal switchboard, Then they placed the calls for him and then called him back and said, "The Secretary of Defense is on the line, sir," something like this, and then he'd talk to them. But he rarely--and we almost always returned it, except when he had asked for it personally in the bedroom or something of that nature. If he had a secretary along, she took the intercom back and said, "Okay, it's ready," and she'd tell the President and he'd go. Or Watson would, or Jones would or somebody. But when he's in his own bedroom, he'd call two or three in the morning and he'd say, "Get me so and so." That's all he'd say and he'd hang up. So you'd get so and so, and then call him back and say, "Mr. President, so and so." "Okay, thank you." I've had him call me many times at night, and I've called him many times.

I started to tell you a while ago this list. At the telephone thing there was this list of names, and they were the only people that were authorized to disturb the President, when he's asleep or when he's in his quarters or something. Now, you don't have a copy of that list in here. There's none of that in this.

G: Oh, I've seen it I think.

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A: Well, there is one somewhere. You don't have it here,

G: Who was on the list?

A: Well, this is a different list. This is a different kind of list that's in here I think.

(Interruption)

An example of a case like this--

G: Now, go ahead. This is a list of people who--

A: List of people, and it was a limited list. As I recall, there were seven names at one time.

These seven were the only ones that were authorized by the President to call him when they had something to tell him or to talk to him about anytime day or night. In other words, if you've got something to tell him, wake him up. He didn't ever want to be waked up with a surprise. And so on several occasions I've had to call him. The night that we had been informed that Robb had been injured, we had to inform him, in Vietnam. Now, he did not want Lynda to know about it and so the President again instructed us specifically, "Do not tell Lynda. She's not to know." And we did not tell her. Word never got to her until he got home.

Another case, the President called me sometime around twelve-thirty or one o'clock at night. I was asleep and it was about that. And he said, "How much money you got?" I did a double-take and I said, "Well, Mr. President I've got"--I said, "What do you need it for?" He said, "Never mind. How much you got in your funds? How much can you make available to me by tomorrow morning?" I said, "Well, I don't have that much, Mr. President. Probably not over two hundred thousand. Do you need more than that?" He said, "I need a million, and I need it by tomorrow. It's for a very highly hush-hush

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project. I'd rather not talk about it. Can you get it?" I said, "Yes, sir." So I hung up and I called Califano, Joe Califano. Joe was asleep, too, and he said, "I'll call you back." And some twelve, fifteen minutes later he did call back and he said, "Okay, everything's set up." I called the President, called switchboard, identified myself. They knew my voice but I think I identified myself and I said, "I need to speak to the President." He said, "He's probably gone back to sleep." I said, "I know that, but he asked me to call him." So I called him back and after two or three rings he answered, "Yes." "Colonel Albright." "Yes, Colonel." I said, "Okay, Mr. President." That's all I said to him. He said, "Okay. You'll have it in the morning?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Come see"--who did he say?"--"Jake Jacobsen." "Yes, sir." That's all that was said. He went back to sleep and I went back to sleep.

But by now I was on the list of the people could do that. The officer in charge of the Situation Room in the Pentagon was on that list. Now, he's not by name, but by position, with a direct circuit from the Situation Room in the Pentagon and the JCS to the switchboard. All he'd do is identify himself on that line and say, "This is the duty officer, Colonel so and so." They may come out of the log. He'd say, "I need to speak to the President." Now the President, one of the things he wanted to know after he got deeply involved in actually how the war was going--he was literally controlling the movement of aircraft and strikes and this, that and the other, but he wanted to know when they'd come back from a raid whether there were any planes lost, how many people, and so on, this time of day, This fellow would call him and tell him this. Now, this is hell. Often three and four in the morning. And he'd just say, "Okay, thank you," and he'd go back to sleep.

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G: Do you think that he was awakened every night with one thing or another? I mean, surely with these--

A: He didn't get much sleep. He didn't require much sleep. I've seen him in periods at the Ranch, I can't say in the White House how much sleep he got, I don't know. I would always see a log when we woke him; they always gave me a log the next morning as to the time and who called and so on. And I saw it, but it was not every night. It would be an infrequent basis.

G: Did Signal keep its own logs?

A: Yes. But they kept them for the Situation Room, Bromley Smith, and that crowd in the Situation Room. They always wanted them the following morning. We delivered them to them in the morning.

G: Oh, so you didn't retain them?

A: We didn't retain them, no, no, not for us. It was for the Situation Room, so that Rostow in earlier years would know exactly who called and who said what. Generally we didn't say what the message was, we merely said who called and what source and so on, And he would know. Now if he had a question--I've had him call me, Bromley Smith or somebody would call me and say, "I see where you called the President last night. Do you mind telling me what it's about?" I said, "Not at all." He said, "Do you want to tell me over the phone?" I said, "No, I'll come over and see you," and I'd go and tell him what it's about. He'd say, "Fine, I just want to keep informed," and he'd tell Rostow or whoever was the security secretary at the time.

G: Did you ever find out what he wanted the one million dollars for?

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A: Yes. It was for Jim Cross. [He] had told Jim Cross to do something in regard to a relocation site, and Jim Cross had figured out, finally gotten the papers that day late as to what it was going to cost, but informed the President that he didn't have the money, and if he went for it under the guise of that thing--if he did it, it was going to become an item known to the Congress. And the President [said], "No, we don't want that." So he said, "I'll get another source." Now, I eventually had to go back and explain to Califano what this was about. But that night he wasn't asking for any explanations, he said, "All right," and that ended it. But that's what it went for, went into one of these relocation sites, something Jim Cross needed. He needed a million dollars for it. The President, had told him to do it, and Jim said, "All right, I'll do it, but I've got to either make it plain to the Congress what I'm diverting money for. I don't have the money in my contingency fund to do this."

He said, "I'll get it, don't worry," and he called me. He said, "Can you get it?" And he said, "Give it to Jim." Next morning when I saw him he said, "Pass it to Jim." All I did was inform my comptroller--in the DCA, I worked for the DCA, that's where my money flowed through, Defense to DCA through there. And it appeared then as an item in the communications budget. That's all they ever knew.

Now that didn't happen that frequently. But that's one case where it did.

Other times he's called me. He called me one night in Texas and woke me up. I'm sound asleep, it's three in the morning. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm sleeping." I was in Johnson City, and I said, "I'm asleep, Mr. President." He said, "Aren't you watching TV?" I said, "Mr. President, I don't watch TV at night. I try to sleep. I am

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down there all day at the Ranch and I see TV all day long." He said, "Well, there's a good western movie on here on channel 4. You ought to be watching it. It's a good western. But by the way, something is interfering with it. Something keeps running lines across it back and forth." So I tried to explain to him. I said, "Look, Mr. President--this was in November 1965--"That's a phenomenon we have this time of year. It's known as a ducting principle [?]. The cumulous [?] layer of air above the earth drops down in height and it tends to trap radio signals, television and so on. In some cases it carries it hundreds of miles beyond the service area. Now, it's temporary. It may last two hours, it may last six. It may last ten minutes. You can't predict it. But there's not anything you can do about it."

"Look," he said, "I didn't ask for a long explanation. Just get that fellow off my channel." I said, "Mr. President--" He said, "Do you know what station it is?" I said, "Yes, sir, It's Corpus Christi." It was right on a line with San Antonio. I said, "It's just slightly off line, but it's enough to interfere." He said, "Well, don't give me all the technical jargon. Just get him off the air." I said, "Mr. President, there are only two ways I can do that now and you might get some publicity if you do. I'd call him, identify myself, and tell him that he's radiated outside his service area, to go off the air, or reduce power. If he can't reduce power, he'll have to go off the air. Or, if he won't listen to me, I'll call the FCC and ask them to call him and take him off. Either way you're liable to get some publicity." "Look," he said, "I'm not looking for publicity this hour of the night, and I'm not worried about anything. But don't you identify with me or with the White House. Just call him and tell him to go off the air." I said, "Mr. President, he's not likely

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to listen." "Look," he said, "I don't tell you how to do your job, and I don't want you asking me how to do it either. Just get him off." So he hung up. I did the only smart thing I'd done all night long, I rolled over and went back to sleep. I didn't call anybody, because there was not a thing I could do, not one. That fellow wouldn't have listened to me if I had called him.

G: He was a radio broadcaster, television broadcaster?

A: Television station in Corpus Christi was broadcasting the same channel--right across the top of San Antonio--and coming in right on top of us and he was watching that channel at the Ranch. And there's not a thing you can do about it. It's there and it's there till it goes away. You can adjust the antenna, you can move it off or you can reduce it somewhat, but you can't get rid of it.

G: He didn't call you back I assume?

A: He never said a word, not the next day or any other time. He would do this. He would call me and ask me a question and unless I went back to him with an answer of some sort, he'd never, never ask me about it again.

G: Was it a good rule of thumb, if he was asking you to do something that was unreasonable, could you ignore it?

A: Well, in this case I did, because this was totally unreasonable. In general, the first year I tried to do them until, as I said, I got to the point where I really didn't care. If he fired me, all right. And so then I'd go back to him, after he'd get this, and I'd usually get a mission not from him direct but from other people. They'd say, "Oh, by the way, the President wants that podium reduced by four inches," and I'd say, "That's not right. He

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doesn't want that. It will be too short, hit him on his belly button. That's not going to work." That's an example of one. I went back and I said, "Let me see the President and ask him what he wants." And when I got in there that wasn't what he said at all, not at all.

So I say I'm getting my messages wrong, but once or twice I went to him and I said, "Mr. President, there is a problem with what you've asked me to do, and this is what the problem is." He'd listen and sometimes he'd say, "Well, why can't you do it the way I want you to?" And I'd say, "Mr. President, you can. But I don't think you're going to be happy." "Well, how are you to judge whether I'm going to be happy or not?" he said. "Just do it that way and let's find out." Well, I had to do it that way once or twice. I did it exactly as he asked me, and sure enough, he wasn't happy with it. And he said, "You're right. Change it!" He was the first one to admit when he didn't like something. He'd tell you quickly. But I don't call that arguing with him, I call it trying to clarify it with him, trying to be sure that that's what he wanted, and did he understand the difficulties in doing it that way. But sometimes he was adamant, he said, "No, I want it just that way." And we did it.

G: Again, on the White House telephone situation, could he dial a number himself from his telephone?

A: Yes. But they couldn't dial in to him. Nobody [could].

G: They'd have to go through--

A: Had an operator intercept, either the White House administrative board with the women on it, or through my boys. No number dialed directly in to him. He had no direct access.

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He wanted it that way. And of course, the Secret Service wanted it that way. Because you'd get calls all hours of the day and night, crank calls and everything. Once that number gets out, you just couldn't keep it a secret. So, no, he could not.

Now, he could originate. If he really wanted to call somebody he could pick it up and tell one of these operators, "Give me an outside line," or have his secretary say, "Give me an outside line." Then she could place the call. All he had to do with the board is then give him an outside line connected to the line and he just dialed it straight out. No problem at all. The phones all worked interconnecting. But no, he could not. Neither Nixon nor President Johnson had a [direct access].

G: What sort of a ring did the phone have? Was it a one ring? If the President punched your button--

A: It started ringing and rang till you picked it up. Not continuous, it was a buzz really, b-z-z-z-, like that, and it continued to buzz two seconds, three seconds. Then it would stop and again in another two or three seconds and so on. But it was an interval type thing. It would do that until somebody picked it up. And if nobody was in the office at all when he rang, they never did answer, and so he said I guess nobody's home, that kind of thing.

G: The recording system that he had for recording the phone conversations. Did you ever have any idea why he wanted to--what his motivation was in getting a recorded record of these conversations?

A: Yes, I understood that from the beginning. Now, that system was in the White House in a very limited form when I arrived.

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G: Dictabelt type thing?

A: In earlier years, yes, that's what it was. Not a very good system and very poor, as a matter of fact. The girls each day would transcribe it and give him back, as best they could, a verbatim record of what was said. Watson's initial discussion with me, he said, "Look, we get a lot of calls in here from politicians and they want this done, they want this judge appointed. I can't remember all those names. So the only way I can do it is get them down on some kind of tape where I can record it later and say, 'Okay, Mr. so and so, I'll get back to you as soon as we have a chance to look at this.' But we wouldn't realize how many calls we get in a day. Hundreds of calls and everybody wants something, wants this postmaster appointed or this judge or wants this guy fired, or something they wanted, always. I want to just make a record of it." So these girls typed these up every day and made a record. I'm sure you've got hundreds of stacks of these in the White House.

Now, an interesting story.

(Interruption)

This is going to be a public record now of this?

G: Well, in time, sure. It's not something you need to release anytime soon.

A: All right. Well, in the case of the recorder, when I arrived in the White House they were using a dictaphone belt-type recorder, and it was in selected desks. The instrument itself was in a desk, and to be actuated they had to reach under the desk and flip a switch, actually an overt act to turn the recorder on. And it could be selected and fitted only on certain lines within that telephone. That was the way it was wired.

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G: Was it strictly a telephone operation?

A: Only a telephone operation, in those rooms, in those offices. Now I'll describe some things later that were different.

After we'd been there for about five or six months they began to not be pleased with the quality of what they were getting, and at that time Watson said to me, "I want to expand the system." Now mind you, it was fairly close-held, a lot of people didn't know about this. Of course, Mary Jo Cook and some of the other girls there all did, Marie Fehmer, that crowd did, because they worked on them day to day. Juanita Roberts and so on. But Marvin said to me, "Isn't [there] any better recorder you can buy that could get us a longer carrier on this thing?" I said, "Well, certainly there is. There are high quality recorders that will tape up to eight, ten, twelve hours if that's what you want, a long-playing recorder." So he said, "Well, why don't you get some of those?" I said, "Marvin, give me a list of where you want them." So he did. He sat down and said, "Now I want my desk, I want it in Jake's desk, I want it in Califano's desk," and so on down this list.

So we went out, bought these recorders, installed them after midnight. Everybody was out of the building. We went in and recorded [installed?] them. Now these were placed different. They were wired into the telephones in such a way that he had to literally push a button below the desk, the same thing with his knee to push it now, and turn it on. But it went across whatever line he was talking on at that moment. In other words, it was across all lines, but he could only talk on the one at a time. Whatever line he picked up, that's what recorded. So the problem then was in the recorder sets he couldn't tell you what line he was on. So if later he said to me, I wonder what line I took

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that on, you couldn't tell that except any call that came in for certain selected people, we kept a log at the board. Log such and such a time to the President or to the appointments secretary or Califano or Jacobsen. Selected people he said--we kept a log of how many calls they got, and then they put on it what line they put it on. So this was a recording device for the aides as well as the President?

A: The President didn't use those. No.

G: I see. Okay.

A: The President had them available to him, but the only few times that he ever used it, it would be there in the Mansion somewhere. I don't think he used that in his office.

G: I see.

A: But he wouldn't have done it anyway. He wouldn't really have gotten involved in that kind of thing because Juanita Roberts was sitting right outside his desk and would handle all of his calls, just about all of them he placed. Now he could, as we said, call the operator, place his own, and did. But if he wanted to be recorded, he'd have to tell somebody so they'd turn on the recorder out there to do it.

Now, we could do one more. At the switchboard itself we had two recorders, and if the President told us, "Make a record of this," we recorded it on line before he ever got back on the line, the recorder was on. Then that tape was delivered to his secretary the following morning, next work day, and then she in turn did the transcription.

G: Juanita Roberts would do this?

A: Or Marie Fehmer, whoever was outside there at the moment. We never recorded [transcribed?] any of them. We didn't do any of that. Nor did we retain them. We never

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retained a tape. They all went to that group.

G: Did you maintain Juanita Roberts' system and Marie Fehmer's, I mean the system that allowed them to record the [calls]?

A: Yes, right. Yes. We maintained all of those. Every one was in a desk. I'd have to refresh my memory of the actual documents, I don't have them.

They wouldn't let me have them when I got into this trouble of having made a statement. I tried to retrieve those documents, and at that time [General] Brent Scowcroft would not let me have them. He had them. They had been turned over to him by the White House Communications Agency. But he would not release them to me, because now he's in the midst of a Nixon Administration, and I'm trying to find documents to defend me from a previous administration. And while he was nice enough about it, he just didn't feel that in that environment he could do it. Now later they played false, because they gave those records to [William] Gulley. Gulley's got them.

G: They did?

A: Gulley's got them in his book [Breaking Cover]. Have you read his book? You might should look. Those things [that] are spelled out in his book are the records I couldn't get, even though they are ones that I originated. Unclassified. The only one that was ever classified nature was this one that we kept on where the recordings went.

G: Well, Marie Fehmer or Juanita Roberts could turn on the recording and record his conversations.

A: That's right. Or their own if they chose to. It didn't matter, if they could record. Because they had the job also of transcribing or seeing them transcribed by another secretary the

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following day. They even had two or three girls that did nothing but that. Every morning, the first thing they'd do they'd have to transcribe these. And that's a tedious task.

G: Do you think he ever utilized these as proof of what he had said or as proof of what someone else had promised him?

A: No. Not the tape per se, never, that I know of. He used that record. Now I've seen him refer to these records, and Watson and others. They'd have a transcript of so and so, "I talked to so and so yesterday morning at eight o'clock and this is what he said, this is what I said." Now they had those.

Now he generally didn't pass those around. They weren't passed around to anybody, they only came from the secretary back to the man that was involved in the recording. However, I was in there and close enough to them that they knew that I would service the tapes. If I wanted to listen to them I could listen to them the night before. Nobody is going to stop me. I could go through the House anywhere. So it wasn't a question of curiosity; it was a question of doing my job, making sure that they worked correctly. That was my job. So I provided that service for him. And I put it in there the way they wanted it to work. There was never in the telephone system in there anywhere an automatic recording device that came on. Never an automatic, nor in the offices, never an automatic pick-up.

Now let me tell you one other interesting [thing] we tried and it didn't work. The President asked me could I put a recording system in the Cabinet Room with multiple microphones to pick up conversations of different people and record it out somewhere

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else. Well, we did. I don't recall the number of microphones, but we bored holes throughout that cabinet table--it's got holes all in it--and then we covered the holes up every time where you couldn't even see it from the outside. But these little microphones--oh, they're no bigger, well, less than the end of your finger. Now your problem is, if you've ever tried to make a recording of anything with ten people in the room, three of them whispering, two beating pipes, like [James R.] Schlesinger and that crowd, beating pipes on the ashtray, the other guy coughing and another guy scraping his feet, there is no way. You might get a smattering of somebody, because you can't change your microphones. All microphones are wired, they're open, and any sound anywhere in the room is picked up and thrown on that tape. But to go back and make sense out of it, even if you could identify what somebody said, only rare cases could we identify the voice that clearly. The President, yes. A couple of others you might get through, George Christian, that kind. They spoke a very distinctive form. But so many of our cabinet people we didn't hear that often and they'd come in there and talk, and so we couldn't do much about it.

Interestingly enough, about a month or so after we'd installed this the President said, "Well, is it working? Working well?" I said, "Working but not well, not with that number of people. We're not getting anything but gibberish." He said, "Well, could you do it if it's just one or two?" And I said, "Well, I can record that easy later on." What I didn't know is Bobby Kennedy was scheduled to see him.

G: Oh, in the Cabinet Room.

A: Bobby Kennedy was coming to see the President, and he met him in the Cabinet Room.

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Well, Bobby had a briefcase in his lap and never opened the briefcase. What we found after they left is he had a high frequency buzzer in there that buzzed all the time he was in there, ultra sound, where it was just getting enough of the sound on to that microphone, you couldn't hear anything except the noise. R-r-r-r-r-r-.

G: How did you realize that?

A: Well, when we tried to transcribe it back. We knew that something was wrong. We knew the President hadn't done it, and all the microphones were working before he walked in. And then something happened when we tried to run the tape back and tried to run it and there's that noise, that high frequency buzz. So we knew somebody had interfered with it. So our guess is--we couldn't prove it. And the President, we told him about it, he just laughed, said, "That crooked little so-and-so."

But we were pretty sure that he had something in that briefcase. It was nothing more than a continuous buzz. All you needed was something with a battery-type buzzer that makes a fairly high frequency buzz, might interfere with dogs' hearing and so forth, but it also plays hell with that microphone, because it picks up all frequencies.

G: You know, in some of these books, though, that meeting is recounted in such detail, just verbatim, that you got the impression that somebody must have recorded it.

A: No. You can take my word for it. It didn't come out of any recording in that meeting, unless Bobby had a recorder in there himself. I don't believe it.

G: Could he have had one that would not be sensitive to the buzzer?

A: I don't believe so. Because our microphone was some of the finest that you could buy anywhere in the world, a very expensive one itself. But when it interferes with all of our

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pickup, it had to interfere with whatever he had. So I don't believe so. I don't believe anybody could have recorded that conversation. And the President was a little miffed at us, but he realized what had happened. I let him listen to it. And he said, "That son of a bitch."

G: How did you know he had the briefcase? Did you see it?

A: Only because I was told that. I didn't know it. See, I wasn't there at the time he went in. But somebody told me, Jim Jones, or I guess it was Watson told me later. He said, "He went in with a briefcase in his lap." When he heard the tape he said, "Uh oh, something's interfered." And he could tell it was a buzzer or a deliberate interference. And he said, "He must have had something in that briefcase." They didn't look in his briefcase. Now this would be common; they do other visitors coming in there to see the President. You might look at it. But a political figure like that you wouldn't have, I don't think. Certainly no question [inaudible].

Tape 2 of 2

A: Now that's the only time to my knowledge we ever tried to record anything with an open mike. It's just pandemonium, it's just not feasible. One on one you could; ten people, twelve people, it's impossible.

G: There was no capability in the Oval Office to record a meeting with say a senator?

A: Negative, nothing. No, he was very, very careful. I know that office very well, there's nothing in there. But the tape recorder was there if he chose to use it only for telephone calls. There was no microphone in there. He couldn't record anything.

G: Lyndon Johnson seems to have been a man that just loved gadgetry.

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A: He did, very much. There's some very interesting stories I could tell you, but you'll run out of tape before we get through. There's hundreds of them.

He loved to call you up and surprise you and say, "Okay, I see they've got such-and-such a product on the market. I'd like to see some of them." He read it somewhere or heard about it. "Get me some and bring them over." We'd take them over and show them to him.

Case in point, just a quickie I'll tell you, make it short. He wanted a cheap, small tape recorder. What's the cheapest on the market and the best quality and all that. So I went out and got all of these little ones made by Americans, which weren't very good at that time. Then I brought him a Japanese one, it's called the X100 I believe, is the name of it. He looked at all of them. Now this X100 was about five inches wide by about seven inches long and it would record on a full [four?]-I think it was an hour on each side. He just loved it. Oh, he thought it was great, thought the quality was great. He said, "How much is this going to cost? I'm worried about the price of them." I said, "I don't know, Mr. President, probably a hundred or more." "Oh, hell," he says, "it ain't worth that." Now, he was looking at others that were selling for twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five. The quality of this one was far superior. He said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'll-give them fifty. I won't pay more than fifty for it." And he said, "I want fifty of them." I said, "Mr. President, that's an experimental model. It's just in the United States, the first models. They're not here in quantities of fifty." He said, "I didn't ask you to explain where you was going to get them from. Just get me fifty. There's no hurry. I'd like them by tomorrow morning." Now this is three in the afternoon, four.

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So I went to the dealer where we get Sony products, Sony 100. I said, "I need fifty." This guy almost died of apoplexy. He said, "There's not fifty in the United States. If I took every, one of them away from every dealer I distribute on the East Coast"--which is what he was distributor for--"I couldn't get you fifty." I said, "Where are fifty?" He said, "Japan," I said, "Get on the phone. Call and tell them to ship you fifty by the first airplane. I've got to have them before the night's over." Oh, my God, he thought I was crazy. Then I told him the second [request], and this really stunned him. I said, "Well, how much are these going to cost?" He said, "I don't know. I'm retailing them at a hundred and fifty-five. I probably get them wholesale for one [hundred] thirty-five." I said, "Okay, give me two invoices. One invoice for fifty of these at fifty dollars apiece, and the other invoice for the remaining amount of money. Whatever it is, I want them, I've got to have them." And all the extra freight and all the rest, I had it on the other bill, not on there. I said, "I've got to take that to the President tomorrow morning." "Okay."

So he gives me the invoice. Now the sets are not even here. All he did was give me the fifty invoice, and the price of it and so on. They called and put them on a Northwest Orient airline out of the Sony factory, delivered them to New York. I had a man waiting in New York, took them off the airplane, got another plane, brought them down, and I delivered them to the President somewhere around nine or ten the next morning.

So I went in, took them to him, told him I had them--told Watson first. Watson said, "You better tell him. He didn't think you'd ever do it." I said, "Well, I got them." I

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showed him. "Well," he said, "that's fine, fine. I knew you could do it. Now where's that invoice?" I handed it to him. He said, "Fifty dollars? I think you're pulling my leg."

"Why, do you think it's worth more than that?" He said, "No! That's all I told you to pay for them. That's all you're going to pay?" I said, "Well, you see the invoice, don't you?" I never did say that's all I'm going to pay. I said, "You see the invoice?" "Yes," he said, "but I've a suspicion you've pulled a sneaker on me. You got another invoice?" "You don't want to see that one, do you?" He said, "Not really. This is good enough."

He had a group of people, visitors, through that day. There was a congressional group coming over for lunch, or a discussion of some sort. And he gave them all away, all fifty of them. Then Watson called me and said, "You're going to drop dead. He gave those fifty away, and he wants fifty more." I said, "Watson, you killed me last night." He said, "Now don't give me your sad story, just get them." I said, "By tomorrow morning?" He said, "Yes, the same thing." "And another invoice for fifty?" I told Watson, I showed Watson that invoice, he knew it wasn't true. He said, "Yes. They're so cheap, he wants fifty more."

So I called this fellow again. We went through the same routine, got that fellow in Japan, he shipped them back. And again I delivered fifty the next morning. He looked at these invoices and he said, "You've sure learned the White House way. You sure learned your way around the White House in a hurry." I said, "No, sir." He said, "That's the way Texans do business. You say to somebody, 'oh, that's too much money. I'll give you fifty dollars for it but I'm going to buy X number,' and the guy comes down in price. That's the way you deal with these Japanese." I said, "Yes, sir." He just laughed. He

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knew damn well. I felt sure Watson had told him. But that's all he ever saw was that invoice for the first fifty that were shipped--

(Interruption)

An interesting point. In November, 1968, after the election you'll recall that Nixon set up his offices in New York City. The first people that I met were [H. R.] Haldeman and [John] Ehrlichman. They came and asked me to join them in Miami Beach, down at Key Biscayne, to talk about setting up the President[-elect]'s home down there and arrangements for that. So we went down there and met them. Haldeman did most of the talking, a very brusque, not really unfriendly but certainly not friendly at all, as much as though I was a part of the criminal element and so on. However, he knew I was a military man and he said, "I respect you for what you've done. You've had a job to do. But I want you to be perfectly honest with me."

So we went through what was to be done for the house. We made the plans and he agreed to them and we left. I gave instructions to my men and I left and came back to Washington.

Somewhere about mid-November--and I don't know the exact date--J. Edgar Hoover either asked for an appointment with the President-elect or the President-elect sent for him, I don't know which way it occurred. I'm not sure of that. But he went to see Nixon. He had an appointment and he went to see him. He spoke to Nixon in the presence of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and two Secret Service [men]. The gist of the conversation was this: "Mr. Nixon, I think you should be aware that there are recorders on every phone in the White House and that every call made through the White House

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Signal Board is recorded. So my advice to you is don't make any calls through there that you don't want them to know about. If you want to make calls that are sensitive or to your own people, make them on a commercial system out of here where they can't record it."

Well, this shook the President-to-be. It shook Haldeman, Ehrlichman. But fortunately for me one of the Secret Service men there was not only reporting to his own boss, but a personal friend of mine. He reported it to his boss in the White House, Bob Taylor, and Bob Taylor called me over and repeated it to me. He said, "J. Edgar Hoover has told this to Mr. Nixon, that that's true." Now, the Secret Service never asked the question about it, but we never had a question that they knew. We never denied it; we knew they did. Because they handled the internal security devices, the workings in a room, the sweeps. They handled all of that, the Technical Services Division of the Secret Service. So he said, "I think you had better tell the President."

So I went to see Jim Jones and told him that I had to talk to the President. He said, "What's it about?" I said, "Well, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me have a chance to tell him, and you come in with me because I want you to listen." I went in and I repeated--now, this is third hand at this point. I'm telling him, "This is what I've been told, Mr. President. I did not hear it. I cannot swear it to be true, but I've been told this twice, once removed from the man who heard it. They've already reported this to him." His comment was, "Well, I'm not surprised. He's done this any time we've had a president come in office. That's his way of ingratiating, 'Welcome to the club. Now I happen to have this list of information about various people. I'd just as soon not release

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it, but. . . .' That's the way he kept his job."

The President was very disdainful of him, said, "I should have fired the son of a bitch when I came into office"--that's the way he said it--"but I was soft-hearted and I didn't do it. Okay, what do we got to do to get them out? I want you to come to me by 10 January"--10 January is the day, I remember because it's my birthday--"I want you to come to me by 10 January, me personally, not in a memo, nothing. You come in and stand up and tell me, 'I've removed every trace. Every recorder is gone, every bit of wiring is gone.' You've taken it all out of here. Nobody can ever find anything in this White House where I had these recorders in these desks, where you could record down on the board. I want them all out. You clear?" "Yes, sir." He said, "Now I tell you, unless you have them, you come tell me you're not ready. But you be sure I'm the one that knows. But I want you to know where everything's gone and nobody could find them." "Yes, sir."

So I called my people in who had done the installation, and I said, "Okay, here's your job. Now this is the sequence I want them taken out. Some will be at night, some from now on. All the wire, all the traces, everything else. If you have to paint the desks where we had screws in them, all that's got to be corrected and covered over. All is to be done between now and"--certainly I gave them a deadline of the sixth of January. Then I went through the building with them at night to look, and sure enough I didn't find any traces. And I knew where they had been, not all but most of them. So I went back to the President on the tenth of January and I said, "Okay, Mr. President, it's all clear." "Now you're sure?" "Mr. President, I've been through and looked." He said, "All right. Now

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you haven't failed me yet, I'll take your word for it."

So comes 20 January, they take office. Three o'clock in the afternoon I'm in my office. I did not go to the inauguration. I had work to do and I was there in the office in the Executive Office Building and I get a call, "Mr. Haldeman wants to see you." Now I had only met him one time and had not talked to him since. That was down in Florida. I went to see him and he shut the door and [had] a very worried look on his face and he said, "We have been told by a source unnamed that you have recorders here in the White House on the telephone lines and all on the Signal switchboard. Is this true? I respect your views as a military man, but I want to know is it true?" I said, "It is not true, Mr. Haldeman. There are none here." He said, "The second question, and I'll leave it to your discretion to answer if you choose to: were there recording devices here at an earlier time?" I said, "I'd rather not answer that." So he surmised to himself. He said, "Now it isn't as though I don't trust you or I trust you, I don't know either way. But I assume that you'll be as loyal to us as you were to President Johnson and his crowd." I said, "You have no reason to doubt that, Mr. Haldeman, none at all. I'll show you every element of proof of it." He said, "But I've got an expert here I want to go through with you and look." So he buzzed and the girl got an expert. Now what he picked up was a man from the Pacific Telephone Company who had followed his campaign throughout California and sort of strung with him. When he won the election he came there as an adviser on telecommunications matters. He was there.

So he introduced this man. I didn't know him. I'd never seen him before, didn't know who he was, didn't know what he knew. I took the man with me and went through

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the White House. We went and looked at desks, desks outside there--we hadn't changed any of them; they were the same desks--desks in various other people's offices, in the President's desk, went to the basement, went through the Signal Board, went through the main frame. That's where he thought it all was, in all these big taps hanging there. He went through everything. He looked here. We worked about four hours. About seven o'clock, seven-thirty we finished and we went back. Mr. Haldeman was still there and he said, "Okay." I left the room. The fellow talked to him for a minute. Then he called me back in and he said, "Okay, thank you very much"--I was now a general,--he said, "Thank you, General. I do appreciate it. I recognize that this was awkward for you, but better to get it out of the way now so we trust each other. My man informed me there are none here and no evidence there's ever been any here." The man then left--he left the office that day, he was in the office I guess still, and he left. So I said, "Mr. Haldeman, I'm a member of your team now and if you don't like what I say, you fire me real quick. But I want to tell you something. The next time you call in an expert to go and look at something, for God's sakes, get a man who knows what he's doing. That fellow couldn't find a menstruating elephant walking through seven feet of snow. He doesn't know a thing about telecommunications. He might have been an administrator in the telephone company on the West Coast, but he was never a technician. He knows in general what they're supposed to look like, but I could have hid forty recorders down there, and he never would have found them. He didn't really know where to look." He laughed and said, "Well, that shows you what we don't know about our own experts. I appreciate you for telling me. Now you've assured me that there are none here?" I said, "I have.

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assured you, that is true." He said, "Okay. Now would you send me a memo tomorrow morning and tell me that you assure me that there are none. I want your handwriting." So I gave him one, it's in the records, a memo to him. That's how much they trusted us based on what they had been told by J. Edgar Hoover.

Now my boss--I went to my boss immediately, too, before I ever went to the President and told him. His first question is, "Well, should we tell the Secretary of Defense or what should we do?" Well, I left it to him, what he told him I don't know. Whether he ever told him, I don't know.

G: You in effect had two chains of command, because it sounds like the President in so many cases wanted you to report directly to him, and yet you did have a regular chain of command in the Defense Department.

A: Yes. On the military side, I had a boss. My boss was the director of DCA. In earlier years General [Alfred] Starbird, later General [Richard] Klocko, and at that time it was General Klocko. He was there when I left. Now, these people provided all my money for me. They handled all the recruitment of my personnel for me. I selected the people, gave them the polygraph and everything that was called for, but they did the actual physical moving on their orders. So as long as it appears that the DCA was hiring these people and moving them around and they're paying all the bills, nobody in Congress or anyone else could ever trace what it cost to run the White House. Because the records don't appear like that. They've got a different system today. They've got a better feel, but there's no way to detect it exactly. They don't know.

So at any rate, that was my boss in the military chain. But my instructions from

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the Secretary of Defense, when I went over there was "You've got one job and that is to keep that President happy. I don't care what it costs, I don't care what you have to do to do it, I don't care whether it's legal, illegal or otherwise, if the President wants it, that's an order. We'll worry about the legalities of it later. If you need money, you call Califano." That's why I called him, see. That's the contact that I had. Then later he left and there was a colonel on the staff that did the same job. But he said, "That's the man you call. Now if you can't reach us, go to your own boss, tell him what it is, and he's got the problem of finding the money if you need money. But that's it. We're totally here to support you. Your job's over there. If I hear a gripe out of him, you're not there. You're gone. Your career is dead." Just in effect like that. So here I'm standing on tenterhooks. If my President doesn't like what I do my career is dead. And of course at this time I had over thirty years service, or close to it. No, it was twenty-seven years.

G: I understand that another WHCA function that was expanded was the coaxial cable tie-in to the White House.

A: The coaxial cable from where?

G: Well, didn't you have one installed, an antenna sort of thing to improve the television reception?

A: Oh, you mean the in-house television system?

G: Yes.

A: Yes. Yes, we installed that while I was there. As you know, President Johnson was a great believer in televisions. He was given a set of televisions side by side. We called it the three-eyed monster.

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G: Where did he get it, do you know?

A: Well, the first three I had to deal with were GEs. He had three little seventeen-inch GEs side by side. They call for a great deal of electronics below that to do this. Because what you're doing is you're switching by remote control from television to television, but you only hear one sound at a time and you could only watch one channel at a time. You see, put it ABC, NBC or CBS; that's what he watched. He could see all three pictures, but the minute something came on that he wanted to hear, he'd flip through there until he heard the voice on that channel, channel 1, and there was a light underneath there which told him which one he was looking at and listening to the voice. Somebody gave him one back in the spring of 1965, I guess about the time I arrived there.

One of the first jobs I got--and I'd been on the job probably a week, about 7 or 8 May--we took and showed him a twenty-five inch RCA, some of the first on the market. This was a twenty-five inch color in a console about so big, a beautiful set. We had taken and shown him one. He liked the color, he liked the contrast. He said, "Yes, I'll let you know how many of those I want, if I want some." Now this is something like two or three in the afternoon. Well, he had a speech scheduled that night, I believe it was the Waldorf Astoria in New York. I flew to New York then after this. He made his speech and we came home.

We had had a dinner engagement that night with a Canadian couple over in Arlington. My wife had gone, and by the time I arrived there it was roughly ten o'clock. I got back from New York on a flight and helicoptered back in to the White House and then drove to Arlington and went to the dinner. It was either ten or later. They had all

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finished eating; they were down to the liqueurs and so forth. Of course, they got to bring out my dinner and I'm sitting there eating my cornish game hen they had rewarmed, chitting and chatting about what the day had been and what the job was like. I don't know, I had a lot of friends around me, fifteen or twenty, some I knew very well, some I didn't know so well.

The phone rings. They said, "The President wants to talk to you." Well, Christ, this is consternation in that house and to me, too. He had never called me before because I had only been on the job seven days. Then he said, "What are you doing?" Same old question he often asked me. "Where are you?", he'd sometimes say. This night he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm having dinner with some friends over in Arlington." He said, "Well, that's nice, to have lots of friends. You know that television set we saw today?" And I said, "Yes, sir, the twenty-five inch RCA?" "Yes. Now you've seen these little three sets we've got here that I was given, little GE sets. They ain't quite big enough to look at. Can you get me some of those big twenty-five inchers and put them side by side and make them into this thing?" I, said, "Well, yes, sir. What I'll do, I'll get the same one not as a console, but as a table model where we can fit it on this box. But we'll have to work the electronics up; we never built any of those electronics. It might take a few days to do this." He said, "Well, there's no hurry about it. I would like to have them by"--I don't know what he said, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, something like five or six days later. Now we hadn't even looked at the design. We didn't know exactly how to go about it. We had good technicians, good people and so we obviously could do it. But we hadn't looked, we just hadn't done it. Because I didn't

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have any idea he wanted them in three-eyed configurations.

He said, "Now, I want you to get me eighteen of those sets." I said, "You want them made up in six of these?" He said, "No, make five of these three side-by-side [sets] and keep three of them as spares. I'm sure you'll have trouble with some of them." I said, "That's good thinking, Mr. President. Fine. I'll do that." But then he said the one that stumped me and stunned me. He said, "Now I guess there's no real hurry about them, but I'd like to have them by ten o'clock tomorrow morning." I did a double-take. I was just new on the job, I didn't know what I could do, what my people could do. I knew little about the job. I was just beginning to get a feel, and I didn't like what I felt so far, I wasn't sure. But nevertheless I said, "All right, Mr. President, I'll try. I think those are not production-line models; I think they're first-run. I don't know whether they've got eighteen." He said, "Look, don't worry about it. You'll get them. I'm sure you will, Colonel," and he hung up. I am a lieutenant colonel at this point, I haven't even been promoted to colonel. I was scheduled to be promoted a week later, and I was. Not anything he did there, I would have been normally.

So I called my man, who did procurement for me. He choked a little, but he said, "Okay, I'll go to the dealer and I'll see what I can do." He went to the RCA dealer local in town that we had gotten these experimental models from to show to the President. This guy almost died of apoplexy. He said, "Eighteen? There aren't eighteen! They only built forty to begin with, and these are scattered in the homes of the executives and distributors of RCA products, in their homes up and down the East Coast. Offhand I can tell you there's four or five in the Washington area, there's four or five in Philadelphia and

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a couple in New York. I wouldn't know where to get eighteen." All my man said, "Well, you've got a problem. You've got to have eighteen by tomorrow morning." Well, I don't know what he did, I don't know what strings he pulled, I don't know who he made mad. All I know is by the next morning I was told at nine o'clock I had eighteen of those sets. So when I saw the President--called him at ten o'clock. I didn't go to see him. I called him, first time I had ever called him. I said, "You asked me about those television sets? We have them, Mr. President. Do you want me to go ahead and configure them like we talked about?" He said, "Well, I knew you could do it. Yes, go ahead and make five of them up, keep three for spares." I said, "Thank you, Mr. President."

Well, I did. It took me--I don't know, after we got the first model working, we had our bugs with it. We made it up. Then after we got them made and put them in there to him, he liked them, But he said, "You know, television reception is not very good here. Can't you improve it?" Well, we knew the system in the house was antiquated, it had been there a long time, it had been patched up and people had added to it. I said, "Well, Mr. President, I probably should be able to go with a complete new system. The one there is just not adequate for what you want. We should do the whole thing and do it right. I can move the recording studio. They've been bitching at me to move it for years. I can move it if you want to at the same time. I'll put it over in the Executive Office Building. I'll put my reproducers and everything all over there." "Yes," he said, "You go ahead. It's going to cost you a little money, isn't it?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You got any money?" I thought then, oh, God, I said the wrong thing. I said, "I don't know. I'll find out." He said, "Well, you can get it. Just call Joe Califano. He's got money." Well,

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he knew what the SECDEF [secretary of defense] said.

So I did call him and I needed, I don't know, four hundred thousand, five hundred, whatever it was to buy what I needed to do it, and got on with it. But that's when we expanded the system was in the spring of 1965. Now they expanded it later again and moved it later after I left there.

G: Did the three televisions, the three RCAs, have more or less the same electronic system that the small GE's had had? Did you just kind of duplicate that system?

A: Yes. Just duplicated is all we did. We went over, looked, saw what they had done to it and built one identical.

G: That was presumably something that GE had done?

A: GE did it and they did it sort of as a lark. One of the engineers in there said, "We ought to give this to the President," so they did. Once he saw it he said, "Well, I don't know why I can't do it on a big old color. That's a little black and white." See, GE's were seventeen-inch black and white. So we then made all these up. We left them at the Ranch, we left them. . . You may have some in your offices there.

G: We've got one in the Oval Office, I know.

A: One of those three's?

G: Yes.

A: That came out of the Oval Office here. That's because it was an exact [copy]. I guess they just moved the equipment down from here when they moved down. Well, we left all those spares at the Ranch, you know, the other three spares are down there.

G: I guess so.

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A: Now let me tell you an interesting one, just to carry that story one further. Some year--I don't remember when it was--probably I think it was Jim Jones that asked me. That's in a memo in here, the date's on one of these memos and I don't recall what it is. But he came by and asked me if I could arrange it where one channel on one of those sets would change channels. If he wanted to look through channel two through thirteen he could do it. I said, "Yes, we've locked them all into position. They really don't turn now with the remote control. But now you've given me a different problem. Now I've got to have remote control that's bigger because it's got to have now thirteen channels appearing, all are switched at sequences through that or turned to those thirteen channels on the one set." So what we built was another separate remote control for each of these. The first one and the second was voice only, and the third one we could step it. You could hold down a button and it would go two-three-four and so on, and then it would reverse. If you held the button above you could reverse them, if you got to five and wanted to go back to four you could, and that's what he wanted. So I had to change all of them, and one set on the right was always the one that changed. I changed all five of those sets.

G: When you moved your White House television center or whatever you [called it]--

A: It was a recording studio really.

G: Yes, recording studio. Did you also put in a videotape capability so that you could tape programs and play them back?

A: Yes, we started that before that.

G: Oh, did you?

A: We started the videotaping of his programs, oh, somewhere--we started out using Sony's.

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Sony put out a little Betamax, an earlier model.

G: Was it a half-inch format?

A: A half-inch format. We found out that that was no good, because we could play it on that Sony but you can't take it and pick it up and move it and play it on another, and you can't transcribe it from one to another one. It's the doggondest mess you ever saw. They just were incompatible tape-wise to exchange. So that didn't work. We'd have to mark on there, "play it on recorder so-and-so." You had to play it back on the same one, because the little grooves and things in it--it was not a commercial model, it was a home model, and so it was not a perfect head on it.

So somewhere after we'd been in this job for three months recording him, when he made a televised program we made a copy, only when he made televised programs. If somebody else was making a tape of it, we made one and we placed it in the archives. Well, we then changed off to Ampex, and Ampex had a commercial model. God, it cost, I don't know, twenty-five, thirty thousand dollars apiece. And it would be small enough, like so, that we could travel with them, only you had to buy enough of them that wherever he went we had to travel, because then he wanted to get--you've got to get a camera and all this stuff that goes with it, to pick your pickups. And that worked out better. Now that was still half-inch tape, but at least they were interchangeable. You could take it off of one Ampex and play it on another.

Then we got a set-up where we bought two, I believe the originals were RCAs, big ones, two inch. And we took them and transcribed the Ampex into two-inch for the record. Now they've changed it since; I believe they've got all Ampexes in there now.

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But I think the ones we had last [were Ampex]. I'm not certain about that, but the ones we had were RCAs. Yes, I know we did. We changed them out because I had to give away the RCAs, so I gave it to a movie--out to a relocation site. We had some emergency relocation sites, and I moved it out to one of those, those RCAs and put in I guess Ampexes.

G: Would he often want to watch, let's say, a "Meet the Press" program at another time, or would he ask for these?

A: Yes. Yes. We were asked to record certain programs of that nature. We always had this capability, if he wanted to, we'd take it right off the air, record it. We had it on a patch right through to the signals and [we would] take the output of the TV itself and record.

G: Did you wait for orders from him to record a particular program or did you just automatically--?

A: Certain programs were automatic, "Gunsmoke" as an example. That's one of Mrs Johnson's favorites. We used to record that. Frequently after we built the system at the Ranch, the cable system and all that down there to give them good television and so on. That's a long story in itself, but we did build one down there in the fall of 1965. She would occasionally have a television set that somebody would start playing with and moving the adjustment, and the next time you got nothing. So she would get panicky. It's near time for "Gunsmoke," she would call over there and say, "Can somebody come adjust this television set, it's all out of order."

So one night my television man had gone to dinner. I don't know, this was eight o'clock, whenever the show was, eight or nine at night. She called and said, "Colonel,

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can anybody fix the television set over here?" I said, "I can fix it. What's wrong with, it?" She said, "Well, it's just out of adjustment I think. I want to see 'Gunsmoke.' It's coming on in about ten minutes." So I rushed over there and here she is in her gown, robe and everything, lying in bed, ready to go to bed, but wanting to watch from the bed. So I went in and it was true, that's all it was, just out of adjustment. So I got it back, got the color straight and so on. And she said, "Oh, you're wonderful. I don't know what I'd do without you people." So I left then.

But we always recorded that because if they wanted to play it back later they had these recorders and they could play them into their machine and see these. Or we could haul them over there and they could play them. We did that sometimes.

But generally the things we recorded for him were either press conferences, people that spoke on "Meet the Press," if he was going to church and wasn't going to see it. He'd want to see it later and we'd record that. Anytime he'd have a press conference he wanted to maybe have a chance to look back at it later, see who was asking the questions, these things. We did speeches and put them in the archives. We did a lot of those. You've got all those tapes down there.

G: You bet. You bet.

A: And they're all Ampex I guess, aren't they now?

G: I believe they are.

A: Yes, I believe so.

G: How about the nightly news? Did he like to--

A: He'd watch that on the three-eyed monster somewhere. But he rarely ever asked us to

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record that. I don't recall that at all. He made it a point to be somewhere where he could see one TV or two or three when the news is on. If he was in the White House, he frequently didn't leave his office until after the six or seven [o'clock] news. He was in there until maybe seven o'clock and that's about a normal hour for news. Because I could generally go home after he left the office and went to the Mansion.

G: He also, I understand, had a ticker tape in the office. Did you have any control over that?

A: Oh, yes, we ran that, too, the two in his office. That was AP and UPI, those were the news releases, the Associated Press and United Press International. They were on two machines side by side. We had to put a shelter over them to keep the noise down. He'd go along and look at these things and read the paper coming out of the top. Sometimes they didn't work right. He'd call and give us hell, say, "Get over here and straighten this goddamn thing out," and this kind of stuff. So we did.

G: Did they just go constantly?

A: Anything that came on the air came on that line. He just read it off when he wanted to.

G: Didn't it all pile up there?

A: Yes. But every so many hours his secretary would come in and tear off a chunk of it and carry it back out in her office and she would make it into sheets about so big and put it back on his desk so he could read it later. He thumbed through this stuff. Say, he'd read it or glance through it. Or she'd mark in red those items, anything she'd think he might be interested in. She got pretty astute, either Juanita did or Marie. They got to the point where--or all the girls that worked in there. There were a couple of others that worked in the outer office and they knew exactly what to look for.

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G: This really isn't a picture of a man who's isolated from information, is it?

A: Oh, my God, no. If I had to judge what he saw compared to what his predecessor saw and/or what Nixon saw, there was no comparison. He was an avid reader of the news. And of course they had this group every morning that screened the papers and took out the articles and clipped them and summarized them and so on. Now here there wasn't a whole lot of effort spending on retyping and so on. You could send him in one all scribbled up or cut out of the paper. He would read all those things. He didn't really worry about how pretty it was. It used to worry some of his staff that it wasn't pretty. But he would read them all. And if a flash message came in where he had to see it, we had it delivered to somebody in his staff in a hurry and they wanted him [to see it]. They snatched it and [would] go right on in there with it and he'd read it. Sometimes there wasn't no more than a half-minute from downstairs the Sit Room, that's where they'd come in. Because they passed over there and then Rostow, whoever it was, the man said, "Send it upstairs quick."

But he really kept up with the news. And when we traveled, I had a real problem in foreign areas keeping him with enough news, because I had to arrange for an AP and a UPI interconnection no matter where I was. He wanted the news. I usually had to put that in the press secretary's office and then we tore off the pieces of it and gave it to the President.

G: Was he interested in mainly political news?

A: Not necessarily. Almost anything that was of international import, anything about the war in Vietnam especially he was interested in, whoever wrote it, no matter whether it's a

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Swedish paper or what, whoever wrote anything about it. And in late 1967, 1968 the articles in the overseas areas were not complimentary. But he would read them anyway.

G: Would he?

A: Yes, he would. He didn't hide from them.

(Interruption)

G: He really just seems to have had a thirst for information.

A: Yes. It was hard to keep him fully informed. I know some of his staff really struggled on it, especially the press secretary, Johnson, the press man, Tom Johnson. Tom, of course, was assistant press secretary there from, oh, I guess from the time I came in there with Bill Moyers and then stayed on through George Christian until the end. But I got to know him very well. But he was the one who had the phone list. Then later they brought in a man, director of communications, but it was a misnomer. He was trying to make sure that all this information was collected and gotten in to him. But he never really had a strong position around there. He was just sort of a collector of everything and it eventually became a booklet form which went to the President.

G: Did Robert Kintner have a role in the communications aspects? He had that background with NBC.

A: Not really. I remember the name, but I never worked with him very much. He was in the staff there somewhere. I recall the name but I don't know what he did.

G: Do you recall any other occasions where you woke the President in the middle of the night on something important?

A: Well, your term what is important or not wasn't the reason I woke him. Usually it's

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something he asked me to do and said call him back. At the Ranch he has called me a couple of times and asked me something.

He wanted to go to--well, I don't know how much of this should go into the record there. He wanted to go to Mexico. He had talked to Jim Cross about it and Jim was arranging for the Convair to fly down there. He was going to fly inland about eight or nine hundred miles to some ranch down there and look at it because he was considering buying it and he wanted to go see it. Well, again, Jim Cross was urging him, "Please, Mr. President, don't do this. You've got to notify the government of Mexico. We'll get shot down crossing the border." No, he wasn't going to tell nobody, didn't want nobody to know. This was the hairiest trip I ever had, but he gave me a call in the middle of the night the night before we left and asked me what kind of communications we were going to have from down there. Now, we're nine hundred miles in the hinterland. We're not going anything near a commercial establishment. We're out in the middle of a ranch.

So I tried to explain to him the only thing that I knew, and he said, "Well, think about it and call me back and see how we can get some." So I don't know, I sat down and scribbled some stuff, wrote down my thoughts and so on. Basically we still had to depend on the airplane. There wasn't a hell of a lot I could do. The airplane was the only one that had any communications on it that could have reached back to Texas. So I finally called him back and I don't know how late it was, but it was after midnight I know, and I told him this. I said, "Communications would totally depend on that airplane. I don't know how much fuel he can carry in there. I've got to talk to Jim. But if he can carry enough in there to keep one engine running after we get off, you can ride

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around, look at the ranch., whatever you want, but you've got to keep one engine running to keep that radio working. That's your only link out of there, Mr. President." He said, "Well, get together with, Jim, and see what you can do." Well, I talked to Jim, and Jim said, "Well, yes. It's a pretty fuel-efficient airplane but we're going to be almost three hours going in." This was a Convair, a turboprop, these converted Convairs that they had. They were turboprops. He said, "We can get pretty good mileage on about--" but he said, "Let's think a minute. That's three, six, it will carry enough for about eight. Let me talk to the crew chief and call you back." So he did a call--this wasn't at night, this was in the morning I talked to him. He called me back and he said, "Yes, all right, if we're not on the ground for more than an hour." I said, "Well, Jim, you know as well as I do you and I can't judge that. What did he tell you?" He said, "He just said he wanted to look at this thing. I didn't know whether he wanted to buzz it and look at it or whether he wanted to land and look at it, what he wanted to do. But nevertheless, he wants to go look at this thing." I said, "Well, all right."

He said, "Well now, he don't want anybody but you to go with us from your place." I said, "Is he expecting any photographers or anything to take pictures of this?" "Oh, yes, Okamoto is going." I said, "Well, okay."

So we took off: Mrs. Johnson, the President, Jim Cross, Jake Jacobsen, Jim Jones I believe, I'm not certain about that one, myself and about four or five Secret Service men, in this one plane. Now this is a plushed up Convair. We landed. The airstrip was gravel, not a nice airstrip at all, rough landing. But he landed there. Probably the Secret Service was just having a fit, and of course we were worried, something happen to the

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plane while you're there how are we going to get out?

G: Was there any follow-up plane or anything? No protection?

A: He didn't want Mexico to know about it. Mexico knew, of course, the minute he crossed the border. You couldn't hide the damn thing. But they didn't send any planes of pursuit, they just took it as a small plane, smaller than some of the big ones that fly across. And it was low and they didn't pay much attention. They had sort of a sloppy system in Mexico. They never learned anything, but they could have. That's what worried Cross and what worried me. I tried telling him again. I said, "Now, we may get detected in here." I told Jim. I didn't talk much to him again about it.

Anyhow, we stayed on the ground about an hour and ten or fifteen minutes. How they knew it, somebody met us there with a car and a jeep and a pickup truck. Three or four things showed up there, and ranch hands I guess [who] belonged to this fellow. Now this was the former president of Mexico, his place, and they were negotiating to buy it. It was either nine hundred thousand acres or just less than a million acres in this ranch. There was a consortium in the Austin area, they were negotiating to buy this thing.

G: Was this Las Pampas, is that what they called it?

A: I believe that's the name of the thing. I don't recall the name. All I know it's a hell of a long sweaty trip in and sweaty one out, because I worried all the way.

Well, we never lost communications with the base back at Austin. We were working with the air force base [Bergstrom] at Austin, never lost them.

G: So they knew you were down there?

A: Well, that's all they could do. They knew we were somewhere. They wanted to be

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[inaudible] and I'm sure Jim Cross had told the Air Force, because if something happened they'd have to come after us. I bet he told them but he never told the President he told anybody. But that's who we were working. And then they had a direct circuit patch back to the Signal Board at the Ranch. That's how we would have gotten out of there. We talked to them several times while in the air going and a couple of times coming back. We didn't need to talk to them while we were on the ground so we didn't try. But we just kept contact; we knew the circuits were still working. But this was one that Jim and I sweated blood on, and until we touched down at that base back at the Ranch old Jim was just as white as this thing and I felt drained, I was just like this. I just didn't know where--because I worried. But he was so adamant, "Nobody is going to know about it, you ain't going to tell nobody," and so on. He really had his mind made up. I really questioned why he should have done such a thing. It would have been so simple to have asked the Mexican government for permission to come in for this kind [of thing], but he didn't want anybody to know it because he didn't want--I think it's because of the sale. He didn't want anybody to know he's interested in it because it would run the price up or so on. But how they could ever have got--these people on that ranch, I'm sure they weren't that loyal to us that they wouldn't go tell somebody.

G: Did he seem to have a passion for secrecy?

A: A bit of it. It got worse as time went on, as I say, as he got to the point where he was beginning to be disturbed by what was happening when they protested and so on. He began to have more of a passion for it.

I did not notice that the first year. The first year, year and a half, he would give us

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time to do something. He'd say, "Well, we're going"--and we'd get a list--they'd publish a letter, "We're going to Des Moines next week and so and so next week," and your list was published two or three weeks in advance. And he let us go out, he didn't control it. But after he got fearful about it I had to have a signed paper from Jim Jones or from Watson earlier, before I could send a team out. They'd tell me, "Well, you don't need ten people. Take two or three." I said, "Look, how you going to do your job? You've asked me to do a job now, I say I need ten people out there. This is what they're going to do. Why in the world do you . . ."

You've seen all this argument about the people at the Ranch on here.? You've read these papers? Now again, he wanted to get into everything. He did get into everything. He's the one that got into this. He kept saying, "How many people have you got down there? Why do you need so many?" I kept saying, "You've got a facility in Austin, what do you want to do with the press? Do I just tell them they don't get any support?" "No," he said, "You've got to support them." "And at the Ranch you've got a switchboard, you've got all these other facilities down there, a communications center, a secure voice facility, you've got television, you have press conferences. What are you going to do if you have one of those? You want me to go to Washington to get them if you decide to have one, Mr. President?" "No," he said, "You know I don't. But I want you to keep them to a minimum." "Well, that's what I call a minimum." "Well, that's too many." That's all he'd say. He wouldn't say how many was too many, but he said, "That's too many." And so we went round and round several times on that discussion. Well, he finally got off of me and I did get the detachment down there, and I got a

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detachment that slowly grew.

Now, that's another funny one. As they grew and as they were stable there and when he wasn't there he wanted that bunch of people to work as farm hands. He wanted them to report to Dale Malechek and work for him and do things on the farm. He had people out constructing and building fences and this kind of stuff, just like they were regular farm hands. Of course, I would have people still on the facility, on the board. You could always reach it and always do the other thing. But those on television sure weren't doing anything, so he'd say, "Why can't you be out there taking care of fences or building gates?" and this kind of stuff. Well, I didn't have a good answer, I really didn't. Some of them resented it at first but they got to where they laughed about it and enjoyed it. He talked about my WHCA farmhands. He used to tell his Secret Service when he'd get mad at them, "I'm going to fire all of you and get me some Border Patrols to protect me." And Lem Johns would say, "Now you don't want to do that, Mr. President," and calm him down a little. He used to have some times.

G: He seems to have had disdain at times for the Secret Service.

A: He did. He resented them staying so close to him. He called it overprotected. "I'm a big boy. What the hell you protecting me now for?" The times he would walk through a crowd is when they really were at their sweatiest point. He thought nothing of wandering out through a crowd, leaving his Secret Service man, saying, "You stay back here." The first time I ever saw him do it was in the spring of 1965, and he walked through a crowd of Mexicans down there at San Antonio. He said, "These people love me." He had just spoken to them and the crowd was applauding, beautiful reception to him. He walked

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through that crowd and pressed the flesh with certainly several thousand people. And the Secret Service are dying. All it takes is one little knife in the rib cage and there ain't nothing they can do about it, not a thing. Because they couldn't even get close enough to him. He's say, "Now you stay away from me. You stay back there. Now there ain't nobody going to hurt me. These are friends of mine." He really believed that.

That wasn't true, 1968. He didn't say that anymore.

G: Anything else on his interest in gadgetry that is memorable?

A: Well, except for his radio system in Texas, as you know, the longer he stayed in office he acquired more and more area that he roamed over. He roamed all the way from Governor [John] Connally's place down south [Floresville], all the way up north of there to Lake Lyndon B. Johnson and Llano on the left and Fredericksburg on the extreme west and so on. That was his playground. And when he was out he wanted to be anywhere he wanted to go in there. Now he had a ranch up in the middle called the West Ranch. She still owns it. And that was one of the most difficult places to get to. Really, we couldn't reach it from anywhere outside of this thing unless we did a lot of extensive extending of the radio system.

So I went to him in the fall of 1965 and told him this, and he said, "You're going to make me so obvious down here people are going to say, 'Yeah, spending all that money on the President.' Go putting the towers up there. I don't want to know all this." I said, "Mr. President, please, you're killing me. You can't do this. Do you want a quality system? Tell me what you want. Let me figure how to do it. Please, let me figure it out." He said, "But I don't want a whole lot of visibility. Those old towers sticking--". I

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said, "Look, I'll paint those towers. Nobody is going to notice a tower on top of a hill. After a few weeks they're not going to pay any attention to it." He said, "Well, okay. But here is where I want to cover." And he drew on a map, a big old road map, "That area there. And I want to cover all that silent." I said, "Man, there are some places in there that are terrible." He said, "Look., don't give me your problems. Just do it." That's where problems began, because some of those valleys and some of those areas in there, those high hills, there's just almost no way to keep communication going.

He used to love to drive around in his car and talk to anybody. His favorite trick is to call people all over the world from his car, and say, "Yeah, I'm riding around looking at the cows, looking at the deer." It came around and passed it through the Ranch and back to the White House and to Germany, England.

The most difficult time I had one day with him though was after we got the system built. Now we spent a lot of money and built a lot of towers and a lot of systems.. And it was a repeated system, whatever closest picked up the signal reflected as the strongest signal back at the home base and that console is what they used to talk back to him. So you could keep in touch pretty well.

But when they had the blackout, we had just arrived at the Ranch about, I don't know, three or four hours before, and he's out in his car and the blackout in New York City, remember that, some years ago. When was it? 1966, late 1966, early 1966, but about then. We called him and told him, "Mr. President'. there's been a widespread blackout in New York City and its vicinity." He said, "What do you mean?" We said, "All the power is off. Power is off for forty, fifty, sixty miles in any direction from New

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York City." "Well, my God," he said, "Ain't that something. Let me talk--" whoever the chief assistant for domestic affairs was in the White House. I guess at that time it might have been Jacobsen. "Let me talk to Jake." So we got him on the phone and we're driving around in the car, still in the Lincoln. He talked back to Jake and said, "Jake, what are they doing about it?" Jake said, "Well, we're on the ball. We're looking, we're trying to find out what the trouble is. We don't know where it broke down. We don't know how it can happen. All of our information, we all have record, on file, it can't happen. But it did."

He said, "Well, can you get me the Mayor of New York on the phone?" Well, of course, that was really shooting in the dark because this guy is sitting there probably with no candles, no nothing, and he's lucky we can catch him in his office. Well, God was with us one day. When we dialed his office they answered and we said, "Is the Mayor there?" They said, "Yes." We said, "The President wants to talk to you." Of course, the President got on there and sort of sympathized with him, said, "I'm sorry about all the trouble we're having. Any idea what caused it?" Of course, he had no more information than we did. Nobody knew at that time--it was days before they ever figured out what caused it. Anyway, he said, "Well, if there's anything I can do for you, just pick up the phone and call me." The Mayor made some crack about "I wish I could see my phone. No electricity. No lights on the phone. I really can't see the phone to call you." He said, "Get your cigarette lighter out," In fact, it was what they were using I guess.

He told me later, I guess it was a day later, "You've got a pretty fair system now. There's a few sort of dead spots and spots where they're weak. You've got to improve

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those." So I have to start all over again. Found out the worst areas there were in Llano and that western area where it got real hilly. I had a heck of a time with that. I didn't have any problems to the east of there at Johnson City and all the way down to Austin and east of there. It wasn't any better from Austin to San Antonio, I had to extend all those; so I had to put systems in both of those. But at any rate, before I got through I had seven separate sites, seven separate towers and bay stations and everything there. All those were keyed by keying lines back to the Ranch. Whichever was the strongest signal that came back to the Ranch and received him the best, that's the one we worked back to him on. It was a voting [?] system as we called it. But it worked fairly well.

But we still had times--even when I rode through the country-side--and I was around there all the time, I saw every bit of it like the back of my hand and tried to talk back there--there are times when I was really gritting my teeth. There's just literally no way to cover it complete. We could put one in almost every valley and still we'd miss some. But he accepted it at last and didn't complain about it. Now and then he'd bitch at me about it, never really telling me go out and spend a lot of money on it, never did that then.

G: Did the Lincolns have any other capabilities other than the telephone pickup?

A: Yes. He had a couple of nets in there, the net that the President always used.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about the Lincoln's capability?

A: Yes. In his Lincoln we had only the capability of the channels that he was going to reach. Now he had two. In all the other cars the Secret Service had all of theirs in those. And

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we had some arrangement where we could take them in and out. You could take out the Secret Service net by removing a piece of it, or they put it in their other little handset, what was called a handy-talky. They could set it in a rack and operate it that way. But in his, no. We kept only the staff net and the primary net that he used, what we called the LBJ net.

G: What would you do if he wanted to drive the amphicar, for example?

A: Drive the what?

G: The amphicar, that little car that would go into the water, little blue car.

A: Well, we never had it in there, and he would have been only what the Secret Service had with him when he went in there. He would still have communications with the Secret Service. But it certainly wouldn't have been in the vehicle, unless we had known it beforehand that he had wanted it, then I'd put it on there. But he never indicated it.

Now you know we had stereo in all of them, too. He had tapes and tape decks and so on; we had all that in there. He carried along a lot of country and western music.

G: Did he?

A: That was one of his favorites.

G: I didn't know that. Is that right?

A: Yes. A lot of tapes. I've bought tapes by the hundreds. I'd have a pack of ten, at least ten tapes in each of those cars. Well, pretty soon I begin noticing they're getting shorter and shorter. People steal them out of there. I don't know what happened to them. I'm not sure the Secret Service took them or who, but somebody would gradually remove one. I got nine, then I got eight. Every now and then the President would say, "Where are my

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tapes going to?" I said, "Well, I don't know, Mr. President." "Well, by God, find out. Get me some tapes back in here. Where is this one for--?" whatever it was, a country-western. Anita Bryant, he loved her. He said, "Where is that tape of that?" and that kind of thing. I was always having to replace them.

G: Amazing.

A: He used to go out on a boat now and then, a strange boat, you know. He's got somebody out there that owned a boat. I'd have to make some arrangements beforehand to put a radio on it, so he could call out. He loved to do that; he'd call from the boat and talk to us. Fortunately up near Heywood Ranch, where he had one of his favorite places up there on the lake, I had a tower up there where he could reach any place from the lake.

G: Do you want to talk about the White House recording studio? You haven't gone into that at length.

A: Well, there wasn't anything unique about this, except that each time we recorded a program, after the program was over we were required to reproduce a certain number of these. Now in earlier years we didn't reproduce at all for the press, but as time went on occasionally we would have a program where the press were either not invited and therefore the press got no copies of the recording, but the press office would make a determination that they're to have a tape. So we had a multiple tape preparation machine that would make up to six tapes. Play it off a master and you make six other tapes identical to it. And that's the way we made it. Once in a while he'd want to release maybe six tapes, ten tapes, fifteen, and so we made them through that.

Now the recording studio initially was right below the President's office. Almost

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you could drill a hole through the floor and you were down there, right underneath. A lot of the people worried about it. The Secret Service never liked that, But from my standpoint it made a lot of sense in that many of our activities took place either in the Oval Office or the little Cabinet Room or the other little office across from the Oval Office, this kind of thing. Many of them took place on that floor. Or if they didn't there, they took place in the Rose Garden, right outside there. Well, it was ideal for us. Our cables ran very short distances back to the studio. So we didn't have to record at all out there perfectly; sometimes we take a microphone, feed it back to the studio and record it. We could do it that way, too. As long as it's in the house, we had plugs on the wall we could plug into and record. But it's the minute you left that you were dependent then on the recorder itself. We used some very fine recorders. That's another story. We had a real problem getting the recorders.

G: Why was that?

A: Well, we didn't want U.S. recorders; we wanted foreign recorders, UREIS, made in Sweden. We had a heck of a time getting anybody to agree to let us buy them. In the Defense Department, they didn't want me to buy a foreign product with U.S. money. But I said, "Well, no, that's the one." The press office had listened to it and they traveled with it. It operated battery or AC, either one, you didn't have to worry about this kind of thing. So we finally kept prevailing on them to let us buy it. But by golly, I had to buy about fifty. See, whenever we traveled my recording team's always carried along spares. They used two of them on recording any speech. I had a spare standing by for the third one. So they always had three with him, every spot he stopped at. Now, if he stopped

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forty times today, each of that group has got to have recorders. Now sometimes I could leapfrog them, sometimes I could beat him to the next thing, but that wasn't always the case.

G: Did you have a problem as you traveled and set up all this equipment and everything with local codes or regulations?

A: No, no. What we've done on this is, in almost every case you've got a local political advance man there. You always have to, to arrange for a speech or some kind of presentation. Or somebody that's sponsoring that. Therefore they become the host for this, and so they set the location. If we went into a location where there was none of this, as for example, we dedicated a dam out in West Virginia, about sixty or seventy miles east of Charleston, West Virginia, really in the boondocks. There was nothing out there, no communication, no power, no nothing. And here they're going to dedicate the dam. They've got the stands built out there and they're going to pull the lever that's going to start the water flowing. Well, I had to literally bring all my communications in. I had to go to the telephone company. They built a microwave between Charleston two hops out to that location. I had to bring out generators for the power. I had to take care of all these things in preparation for it. But no, we get nothing but cooperation.

Now one that's not too well known, but most of my telecommunications was taken care of by the long-distance telephone systems or the local people in an area. Now most of the United States is covered and served long-distance-wise by one company, AT & T. But you get into local areas where you've got a local telephone company the guy doesn't have any capability at all. He doesn't have the lines and he can't do anything. So

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I had an agreement with all these companies and I'd go in there and tell them, "I'm going to bring in somebody from AT & T and he's going to make a connection from your central office out to this location. He'll provide the materials at no cost to you. We'll pay you whatever it is to make this interconnection, but he's going to take care of it for me." And they did that sometimes. I had no problem of that nature.

I ran into once or twice where I ran into a union problem. The unions objected to us putting up the lights. We put up the lights and the backdrop for the President to make a speech and they didn't think that we should be doing it. So that became a bit of a [inaudible]. However, it was all resolved before we got there, because they said, "Well, we'll raise a protest. You go ahead and do it, but we're going to raise one." So we did.

No, you got generally the best cooperation in the world because even if they weren't friendly to the President they recognized the Office of the President and he was entitled to that kind of support. I'd say offhand I got the very best--

G: That's remarkable.

A: But it was a difficult job. The most difficult jobs are traveling.

G: How about overseas? Did that complicate--

A: Oh, that's even worse. You have to carry everything with you, except your long-distance facilities. We went to places such as New Zealand, Australia, Thailand and so on, and we went to the local telephone company, told them what we wanted. But you can't do it quick, you've got to time on those. You can't do those overnight. We carried in all of our own switchboards, our own instruments, and all they do is provide the long distance and local circuits. They connect that. But they've got to do all the cross-connections at the

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main frame and do all the other kinds of things to support you. No, they break their back for you.

One surprised us and one gave us probably the best service we ever had anywhere, was in France. The French had never been really very fond of Americans per se. As a nation they've always been fairly haughty and independent. But by God, when the President came to visit--this was not with Johnson, this was with Nixon--I tell you, they broke their backs. They produced everything we asked them to do and on time. Better than the Germans. We heard the Germans were so efficient, could do anything. The Germans finally got it done, but much, much sweat. The British, they're quite good, they're most cooperative, quite good. They don't have the resources. The Germans have the greatest resources and probably did the slowest job of all of them. Even the Italians did a beautiful job. Very nice. Belgium, of course, Belgium did a fine job, they've always done a good job. They've got a good system. But I guess Germany was one of our struggle points. We went to Berlin and went to other places and had a tough time with all of them, but again, that's not Johnson, that's another one.

The worst time I guess we had anywhere with him was Vietnam. When he went to Vietnam I had to depend on what we had in hand at that location at that time to get him out of there and to get in. It was extremely limited when he went in the first time in 1967.

G: Now the last part of that trip was secret, also, wasn't it, the decision to go meet with the Pope?

A: Oh, yes. Yes. He called seven of us in before he had the thing and I can't recall who the

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seven were. I know there were seven there. It was either George Christian or Tom [Johnson], maybe both, maybe Bob Fleming, I don't know. Two from the press office I believe. The Secret Service was Bob Taylor and Lem Johns, two of them. He called me and one or two more. There were seven in the room. He said, "Now, I want you to know that we're going to take this trip, we're going to go to the funeral and then we're going to turn and go north and I'll tell you where we're going as we go."

Now he wouldn't tell us where he was going. We didn't know when we left there where we were going. The pilot was probably the only one that did [know]. The rest of us didn't. The pilot was also his aide. So, he said, "Now if word gets out of this, I'm going to personally emasculate each one of you." Now we couldn't tell anybody because we didn't know where we were going, not even if we knew we were going somewhere. However, there's sort of been a tip off. We had to ship so much equipment in standby aircraft that somebody could have taken one look and known. Now we kept airplanes away from the press and away from other people, but I had a plane with fifty-five people on it and about ten tons of equipment sitting out at the airport there down at Melbourne, waiting for his decision to go and where to go.

G: How did you know how much to get if you didn't know where he was going?

A: I had to assume if he was going to stop, that he wouldn't stop more than four or five times. He wouldn't let me make any advance preparations. I said, "Mr. President, some of these places you're talking about going, there are really no communications there. If you go to India or Pakistan or Iran, I can't get out of there. There is no international telecommunications out of there. None.

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G: Had he mentioned possible stops?

A: Well, going around the world we've got to stop somewhere for fuel. Jim Cross was saying, "Sir, we've got to stop for fuel somewhere. Are you going to stop in Pakistan or India?" He said, "Well, I'll let you know." That's all he'd tell you. He wouldn't tell him any more than us.

G: But he did indicate he was going on around the world?

A: Oh, yes. He said, "I'm going around the world." But he didn't say where. And he didn't say he was going to Vietnam, he didn't say he was going to see the Pope. None of that came out until we were in the midst of the trip. The day of the funeral, the memorial service for [Harold] Holt, he came out of there and then he went to a meeting with various presidents that were there representing other countries to speak about Southeast Asia, their support for Vietnam and so on. He would meet with this one and that one and so on. This is going on and we're up to now twelve-thirty, one o'clock. He had promised me he'd let me release one plane with all these people on it before we left there. I caught him in the hall between some of these visits and I said, "Mr. President, would you let me move my people now?" He said, "Boy, you are a nervous nellie, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Okay, tell them to fly north." I said, "North, where north?" "Don't worry me. Tell them to fly north and stop for refueling and we'll talk to them again."

Well, I told this pilot. This pilot is a young captain, air force. It's a C-135 and he is having a fit. He said, "I can't file a flight plan to nowhere." I said, "Okay. Go somewhere to Darwin [Australia] and refuel. And then I'll tell you something else. I can't do any better, it's all I've got." Well, he was reluctant, but here again he's talking to

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somebody that's in authority and Jim Cross said, "Do it, Captain. Quit your arguing." So he went off.

Well, they flew. They landed at Darwin and they refueled, and now by this time we've taken off. We're roughly four and a half, five hours south of Darwin, in the air. And they called. My man is Colonel Adams, and I said, "Where are you?" He said, "We're on the ground refueling at Darwin. Now they're ready to go and the Captain wants to know where do we fly? How much fuel does he put on? He don't know where he's going." I said, "You tell him to get enough fuel on there that he can fly all the way to the mainland. He can fly either to Philippines or mainland Asia. I don't know where we're going." He said, "Can't you get him to tell you?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, the Captain won't fly." So I said, "All right, I'll try."

Now the President is asleep and they don't want me to wake him. I said, "I've got to have an answer." I went in and talked to the President, and the President was asleep. Again, I was one of the few who can wake him, but I said, "I've got to know. I've got people involved. I can't send that plane out there like that." Jim said, "Well, I can't answer it for you. You'll have to ask him. He's the only one going to tell you; I'm not going to tell you."

So I went in and woke the President. He sat up in bed and stretched and he said, "Yes, what can I do for you?" I said, "Sir, I need to know where we're headed. I've got a plane refueled, ready to leave Darwin, but I've got to give them some indication what direction. Where are we headed?" "Well, yes." He reached under the bed and pulled up a Shell road map, so help me, of Southeast Asia. He said, "Well, we're going to some

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place up there. I don't know what the name of this base is, but it's an airbase in Thailand." I said, "Sir, there's forty air bases in Thailand!" "Well, Christ," he said, "Do you have one that's Doran or Duran or something like that?" I said, "Yes, might have. Can you find it on there?" He looked on there and said, "Yes, I believe that's it. That's the place we're going." So I went up to Cross, and I'm mad now. I said, "Jim, tell me. Is that where the hell we're going?" He won't tell me any more than that, he said, "Don't know any more." Jim said, "Yes, that's it. Big base at--"

G: Korat, is that what it--?

A: Korat, right in the center of Thailand. I said, "You're going to take this crowd in there for the night?" and he said, "Yes." So he said it's spelled K-H-O-R-A-T, K-O-R-A-T--all kinds of spellings on this damn map. I said, "Well, I'm going to pick the simple one, K-O-R-A-T. I think they'll understand." So I called my man back and told him, and the Captain looking at the map said, "Yes, I've got it. I know where it is. I've been there." He was a long-range pilot; he's been all over the world. He said, "I'll find it."

So they took off. They go ahead and they land that there. Then they tell the base commander--it's the first time he's ever heard it--there's a group of people coming by, about four hundred people, and they're going to be looking for places to sleep tonight. Well, this base commander, first of all didn't believe him. He thought we were pulling his leg. "No, sir," he said, "I'm from the White House. That's it." He said, "Well, Jesus Christ, where am I going to house four hundred people?" He said, "Well, you've got a problem there, Colonel. It's your problem, not mine. But I'm going to take all your circuits, I'm going to take all of your circuitry back to the United States and put them on

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our board." He said, "You can't do that." "I sure as hell can." So he did. He brought our switchboard in and put it in there and connected phones up to various places and the President's quarters, where they're going to put him, and did all this.

We're about an hour out of there, and the President had said to me when we left--we've got someone on the ground in Darwin. I said, "You going to make any remarks there?" He said, "No, no, no. Just going to slip in and go to bed."

(Interruption)

He said, "No. No speech. We're just going to slip in and go to bed. Too late," he says. Lo and behold, we're an hour out of there, about an hour out of there up in the air over Indonesia, I guess over Borneo, Clementine [?]. And he said to me, "What size crowd do we have to make the speech to?" I do a doubletake and I said, "Wait a minute, Mr. President. You told me no speeches." "Yes," he said, "I changed my mind. I want to make a speech." I said, "Oh, my God." He said, "Call the advance man down there." That turned out it was Ted Connell. He said, "Call him and see what kind of crowd he's got."

So I called this fellow, either Ted or Lloyd Hand, I forgot which it was, with that advance plane, but anyway one of them. I called him and I said, "What's the size of the crowd?" I got my warrant officer on the ground and he said, "Wait a minute." He's counting, and he said, "Oh, about a hundred." I said, "Well, you tell the advance man to come to the radio quick." He got him and I told him what the President said, and he said, "Goddamn it, Jack, he told me no speeches. Don't have any preparation. No podium, no nothing." I said, "He told me the same thing. But now he's changed his mind. He wants

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them. Get the stuff out and start working." "Oh, my God." He turns to the man and tell him, of course then they start scrambling. They got an hour.

We're about ten minutes from landing when the President said, "Call again and ask what size crowd. See if they've drummed up ten or fifteen thousand people." Well, this hour of the night, eleven o'clock at night, no way to do that. He said, "Nevertheless, you've got an advance man down there. He'll get somebody." Well, he called. The advance man wants to talk to the President, said, "I ain't got nobody. I got about maybe five or six hundred people here." The President said, "Well, I'm not going to talk then. Take it all out of sight. Get it out of sight." Well, wisely, we'd seen him change his mind before. We drug it out behind the crowd, the podium. Didn't disconnect a thing, left it all like it was, just got it out of sight.

He comes down the ramp and the crowd in the meantime had heard something about--word floated through the base and the crowd's now bigger, it's about, let's say, a couple of thousand anyway. He walks out of the door and sees that crowd. I'm on the ground down here. I was standing around outside of his view, just about as far from him as down to the end of the hall there, and I said to myself, "Here he's going to start looking for me." He starts down and he looks off and said something to the Secret Service. They start waving to me and I come running over. He said, "Get the podium." I said, "Mr. President, you told me not to have the podium, to get rid of it." He said, "Yes, but I know you didn't. You got it hiding behind that crowd. Bring it out." So I did, and he talked to about two thousand people there. But he said to me, "I've learned to read your mind. You're not as sneaky as you think you are."

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G: That's a good story.

A: But I tell you, we had consternation at that base. And of course most people didn't sleep. A lot of the press people didn't attempt to sleep. They were all crowded up in barracks and they didn't make any effort to. They stayed in the club and caroused all night or drank.

We had a speech at five the next morning, and then he took off to Vietnam.

G: Did you have any problems getting in and out of Cam Ranh Bay?

A: No, no. They had that blocked off solid once they knew he was coming in. We got up in the air and nobody knew where we were, even two hours after we left Thailand. They didn't know in Thailand where we were headed. Nobody told them in Thailand. Because my man called me two hours later and said, "Where is he?" No, more than that, five or six [hours]. We'd already been in there, made a speech and came out. He said, "Where is the recording man? Where did you leave him?" I said, "I left him where we made the speech." He said, "Yes, I know, but where did you make the speech? Nobody here will tell me. I've got to come get him." They had to send a C-141 over there to pick him up. I said, "Cam Ranh Bay. Same place we made a speech last time, Jim." He said, "Oh, I know." He didn't ever say where it was. So he sent it over there. They went by and picked him up. That's another strange one. Flew that whole crowd of men over there, put the plane down, picked this one man up, and every one of them got combat pay exemption for the month, five hundred dollars apiece, because they had landed in the combat zone. I said, "That's the silliest goddamn rule," but that's the way they ruled it.

G: In Italy I understand that you took helicopters to the--

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A: Yes, that's a real fiasco. That's another sad story. First of all, we were supposed to have ten-place helicopters, and they couldn't get them. Before we got off, the President said to me, "I want you to go with us." So I said, "All right, I will." He said, "You go on the other plane now with the aide there." The aide then was a tall Negro aide, a lieutenant colonel. I can't remember his name just now, but whoever it is this was the other aide to Jim Cross, one of the others. He said, "You ride in the press plane with him." So I get off the plane and stumble across there. We see the helicopter sitting over there, looked pretty small though. Didn't look like ten-place to me. I get over and here's a four-place helicopter, a pilot, co-pilot. The pilot is standing there at attention and he's saying, "I'm not going to fly. I'm not going to fly." And so this [aide]--Hugh Robinson is the aide's name--came up and he said, "What's the problem?" He said, "One, I've never flown that kind of helicopter before. Two, I've never been in Rome before. Three, they gave me a picture postcard and tell me what the Vatican looks like. How do I get there? I'm not going to do it." I took one look at that airplane and I said, "That's a four-place or ten?" He said, "It's four." Hugh said, "It's supposed to be ten." He said, "I'm not going to fly it." Well, Hugh called him off in one corner and gave him a direct order and said, "You've got to fly." The guy said, "Well, I'm a pilot, a qualified pilot, a navy pilot. I've just never seen that kind of plane before. I don't want the President on it." Well, the President wasn't. The President was on another one. We had hauled an airplane in there, and he had an airplane.

But anyway, they flew out over there and I stayed at the airport. I said, "I'll give my seat up in a hurry." So we had radios there at the airport and I listened. The dialogue

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down at the site down there, you can hear them talking. From the helicopter he's talking to the Secret Service agent now on the ground. That site was a villa nine or ten miles south of Rome that they opened just for the occasion. So they flew down there. They're flying around the thing, black as pitch, couldn't see a thing. No lights, no nothing down there except a few in the building down there. They had to open this thing. It had been closed for the winter. Had to go down and open it and get food and servants, the whole works, all in short notice, hours. Well, the Secret Service men on the plane just said, "Hey, Joe, you down there?" "Yes." "You got any trees?" "Yes, there are trees all around here." "Well, by God, is there an open area around this thing?" He said, "Wait a minute." He said, "Yes. I think you can get in if you come straight down." He said, "How tall are the trees?" He said, "Oh, about fifty feet." Well, that's where they landed, landed alone, literally more than enough for a plane on a vertical descent, but not the kind of place you want to take a President into on a loaded plane. But they had to. They went right down like a brick, right down that hole.

This pilot of course is sweating blood because coming out how is he going to do that. He can't lift that crowd. So they had to take some people off and not take them on the next leg. They had to take another plane. They could not fly with the President to bring him out of there. They took two off. They had eight on his plane--or ten, they had ten, I guess. They took two off and eight flew out through the Vatican. But then after he had met the meeting, then he went up and flew to the Vatican, and he landed in the square right out in front of there on the cobblestones.

G: LBJ did?

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A: Yes. His helicopter. Just one helicopter landed. They landed the other one up on a hill, in a park up there, and then they came down in a car. But he landed there, and they had been sitting there for maybe five or ten minutes, and the pilot happened to be out of the plane and was looking and he noticed the plane is sinking. It's going out of sight. The wheels are gone. The wheel is down about that far in this mud. It's pure mud underneath those cobblestones, never designed for a weight load like that. Here it is going into the ground. Well, he has pandemonium. So he tells the Secret Service, "I got to get out of here. I can't leave that here." So they order him to fly to the top of the hill. He comes out. The President is in visiting the Pope, doesn't know all this, and he comes out and then this guy is landed up on the hill and he's waiting up there. The President has to take a car up to this hill--it's a little steep hill up there to get up to this thing--and of course he's mad. He said, "Why didn't you leave it there?" So they tried to explain to him about this.

At any rate, they got up there and he got in it and came back, caught the airplane. Now this time he split the press. The press was sent off to Shannon, to do a northern route on the press plane, and he took the presidential plane, 26000, and started right across the middle of the Atlantic to come home, through the Azores.

We're up an hour and I'm sound asleep and I get a call, he wants to talk to me. I said, "Yes, Mr. President." He said, "Who do you know in the Azores?" I said, "Nobody." He said, "You don't know the base commander out there at Lajes [Field]." I said, "Yes, I'll get him. Now what do you want?" He said, "We're going to refuel there, and I want everything open." Now this is now arriving there, I think the time would be

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something around three in the morning, Christmas Eve morning. I said, "All right." So I called my man at the White House. This is the way I normally did it. I'd call the man at the White House, my duty officer, tell him what I wanted, they'd get on with it. He never quibbled, he went. No matter how crazy it sounded, he'd do it.

So he put a telephone call to this commander of Lajes and woke him up. The guy was sound asleep. Now we're three hours, four hours out. It's eleven-thirty at night, but the guy was still asleep. He said, "This is Warrant Officer Byer [?] at the White House, sir. I want to notify you that the President's plane is due there for refueling at three o'clock in the morning, and he'll have about seventy people with him. When he lands he wants everything on the island open." This base commander hadn't said a word at that point and he said, "Are you drunk?" This guy said, "Sir, I assure you I am not. I'm speaking from the White House Situation Room." He said, "You're crazy," and he hangs up. Well, Howard didn't get mad. Dutifully he called him back and said, "Sir, I repeat again I'm not playing a joke. I'm not crazy; I'm not drunk. I'm informing you of something. I've been instructed to tell you this." And the fellow said, "Do you think that I can go out and find all these people between now and that three hours, get all these people back over to the commissary, the PX, the clubs, the liquor store, everything, and have all the lights on and ready for these people when they arrive at three o'clock?" He said, "Yes, sir, I expect you to do that." He said, "You're still crazy." He starts to hang up. Mr. Byer said, "Sir, one warning. If you hang up again the next call you will get will be from the Chief of Staff of the air force. That's the next number on my list." The fellow said, "You're not joking now! You mean this!" "Yes, sir. I mean it. I can assure

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you. Call me back if you've got a question of who I am, where I am, if this is the number. It's the White House. We mean it, every bit of it. I've instructions to tell you this, from the President." "God," he said. Well, he hangs up.

To make a long story short, we arrived and it was lit up like a Christmas tree. Everything was wide open. They bought the PX out. They did their Christmas shopping. They bought the liquor store out. They bought everything that was in the club. They just literally cleaned the place out. Where they got those people from to work and how they got them in there, I don't know what they threatened them or what they offered to pay them. They were all Azorians, nearly all of them, a few Americans in the crowd. But they had enough in there to man all of those sites. Now, you would think that one man would have a key and nobody knows where, but he had a better hold than that. He got them.

So I saw him at the club, I guess, and spoke to him for a minute, told him who I was and told him how it came about, the President had ordered it. He said, "Well, you know, I want you to apologize to that fellow for me. I'll call him later. But when he called I thought I had a drunk, on my hands. And then the second time I knew I had a drunk on my hands, but I didn't know how drunk he was."

Then the President does the second one, the last one of that trip. We now get off from there and this is now five in the morning, Azores time. We're scheduled to arrive at Andrews at six in the morning, Washington time. I go to sleep again, because I slept every chance I got. He used to kid me about it, and he'd say, "You sleeping again?" He woke me up and I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I want to go on nationwide TV when I arrive

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at Andrews." I said, "Mr. President, that's six in the morning. There's not going to be anybody up watching TV." "I know," he said, "I know. They'll record it and show it later. But I want to be on the TV. You understand?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Can you arrange it?" "Yes, sir." I didn't know I could, but I said 'yes, sir,' anyway.

I called that Warrant Officer again, and of course he's still there. I said, "Another little job. Andrews, he wants nationwide TV." "God," he said, "I don't know. I'll call you back." Thirty minutes later he called back and said, "No problem. The networks had a camera when he left, and they left a camera there and they're now rushing a crew out there. They said they'll be ready by the time he gets there at six." Sure enough, he walked off the plane, he's on the cameras. He stops and makes a little speech at the podium. Then he turns to me and said, "It's not so difficult, is it?" I said, "You're killing me, Mr. President."

G: Why did they make that first stop at the villa and then go on to the Vatican?

A: Because the government insisted they had to see him, he could not come to see the Pope. Now, that's another story. It went on in a dialogue, an argument between our Ambassador to Italy [G. Frederick Reinhardt]. I have to give that guy guts. Even though the President fired him on the spot, that guy stood his ground. He said, "Mr. President, you cannot come into Italy, the government of Italy will not permit you to land here unless you are willing to see the government. You've got to see the Prime Minister or some representative of the government. You have to see them." He said, "I don't want to see them. I ain't going to see nobody but the Pope." He said, "You can't go. This is not a free country to land in. If you could land at the Vatican it would be a different case. You

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can't do it. You've got to land in Italian territory. They've got to be responsible for your security. They refuse to let you do it." He said, "Well, what the hell did you tell them for?" This fellow said, "Tell them! Sir, you can't go flying helicopters and moving people around in armored cars and Secret Service and everything." "Well, who the hell asked for all of that?" Now, I'm there next to him when he's talking to this Ambassador, and the Ambassador said, "Sir, you just can't do it."

He said, "You know, I'll tell you, you're a stubborn son of a bitch. I'll guarantee you, you're fired. You can't do your job. I told you I didn't want to see anybody but the Pope. If you can't arrange a little old thing like that I don't want you as my ambassador." The fellow said, "Well, that may be, sir. But all I'm telling you, you're going to see the [heads] of government, or you aren't going to land." And so finally he said, "Okay, goddamn it, where is it?" He said, "Well, they'd have to open a villa. They've already taken steps to start it, assumed that you'd agree." He said, "Well, where is it?" He said, "Well, it's down south of town about ten or twelve miles." He said, "I ain't going to ride no hour and a half over there." "Nope, you'll get a helicopter ride down there." He said, "Well, I don't like it, but we'll go."

But he didn't fire the fellow. He forgave him I guess that night. He didn't fire him. But he told me he was going to fire him, said, "Oh, if you can't do a goddamn job better than this I don't want you as ambassador." That's why he saw them. They insisted. The government insisted. Then after he had seen them, they visited with him and so on, basically he told them about Vietnam. That's what he used as an excuse. He'd say, "Well, I want to see the Pope and talk about peace" and all this stuff with the Pope, and

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get his assistance to try to bring peace in Vietnam. That's what he professed to talk to the Pope about. What he actually said to him, I don't know. We never recorded that. We didn't do that.

G: You weren't there at that leg with him?

A: No, I did not. I was at the airport. See, I didn't go in. They went from there to the villa and [from] the villa to this landing in front of St. Peters and they went inside. After they saw him, then they came out. He took a very limited number with him. A lot of people went in and took items in to be blessed by the Pope and so on, but only a few had really [witnessed] the actual talk with him. The Secret Service and one of his assistants, I guess it was Jim Jones, and the Ambassador, the Ambassador was with him. The Ambassador spoke Italian, and of course the Pope spoke English as well as we did. He could speak a lot of languages, that one did, too.

G: That's a good story.

A: I didn't see the Pope, no. I've never seen him, except at a distance. Even when he came to New York I didn't see him at all.

G: That's another story I bet.

Well, shall we break here? I've kept you about three hours.

A: That's fine. That's good enough.

[End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview I]

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Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

JACK ALBRIGHT

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Jack Albright of Vienna, Virginia, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted in Washington, D.C. on December 11, 1980 and June 10, 1981 and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
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Signed by Jack A. Albright on May 4, 1994.

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