INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: HARRY ASHMORE

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

PLACE: Santa Barbara, California

Tape 1 of 3

F: Mr. Ashmore, let's talk first chronologically. Let's give a very brief resume of your life up to the time that you began to emerge as something more than just another newspaperman.

A: Well, I was born in South Carolina and grew up there, graduate of Clemson College--it's now Clemson University. I started working on newspapers in my hometown of Greenville and was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard. Then I got caught up in the U. S. Army during World War II and had about four years of that, including a long siege of combat in Europe. When I came back from the army, I went to the Charlotte News as editor and stayed there about a year and a half, and then was appointed executive editor of the Arkansas Gazette in Little Rock. That was my westward migration.

Of course from the time I arrived in Little Rock, in late 1947, I was immediately aware of a tall politician on the south of Arkansas named Lyndon Johnson. And so [I had] some acquaintance with Lyndon Johnson all the way back that far,

which became increasingly close as the years wore on, as I was very active in Democratic politics as an editor of a Democratic newspaper.

F: Did the Gazette circulation spill over into Texas at all?

A: Not too much, a little bit around Texarkana and that corner. But we were the state newspaper; we went from border to border pretty much, and we considered the Dallas Morning News a competitor. We butted with them in the south part of Arkansas.

F: So that you would have kept at least a little bit of an eye on Texas.

A: Oh, yes, we could very much. We were always very conscious of it. As a matter of fact, it was very nervous living next door to Texas, you never know when you're going to be overcome, overrun, or incorporated.

F: Overwhelmed some way?

A: Yes.

F: When did you begin to move into the national political scene?

A: I think any newspaper editor is a sometime politician. The Arkansas Gazette is a major newspaper with over a hundred thousand circulation, and a remarkably old paper with a long Democratic history, very influential within the state of course. As a result, being the editor of the Arkansas Gazette sort of carries with it a brevet status in the national Democratic Party. Of course in the time that I was in Arkansas we had an extraordinarily influential Washington delegation from Arkansas. In fact they still do, with

Senators Fulbright and McClellan and people like Wilbur Mills in the House delegation, in those days Brooks Hays, who was a leader in the House side.

All the Arkansas people, particularly Brooks Hays and Wilbur Mills, were very close to Sam Rayburn, whom I knew very well. They were part of Mr. Sam's orbit and that made them a part of Lyndon's orbit. McClellan and I never got along well. We were factionally feuding, I suppose. But Fulbright and I were quite close, and Fulbright always had a rather good relationship with Lyndon right on up to the presidential days, despite the acrimonious and very public differences that came to light on Vietnam and on the foreign policy questions. But they functioned pretty well together.

F: It was, I suppose, Senator Johnson as majority leader who placed Mr. Fulbright on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

A: That's right. And then of course they went to the Senate at the same time. Their careers were remarkably parallel. They were both in the House and then went over to the Senate, and always had I think a fairly good personal rapport, aside from the political one.

F: Do you have any idea, any clear-cut memory of when you first met Lyndon Johnson?

A: I'm sure it must have been in Washington. It may well have been at the 1948 Democratic National Convention. I went up there. I was already in Arkansas, and I went up with the Arkansas delegation. This was the year of the Dixiecrat rebellion.

F: You know, Texas habitually fields two delegations.

A: That's right, and the Arkansas delegation split that year. Ben Laney was governor, and Ben was trying to go with the Dixiecrats and indeed finally did. McClellan was sort of sitting it out and Fulbright was opposing Laney and trying to hold the delegation in, and they did stay in. But during the sparring we set up a kind of give-and-take arrangement with some of the southern delegations to try to keep track, and Texas was one of the key delegations. I spent a good deal of time around there trying to see what they were going to do. And I'm sure I must have gotten to know Lyndon to some degree at that time. That would probably be the first personal contact I could recall.

F: Did you see much of him in the next few years, or do you have to go down into the mid-fifties before you begin to?

A: Not a great deal, but I was around Washington a lot, and I used to see him around the Senate. We kind of got on first-name terms somewhere along in there. There was no particular business with him. In 1952 I was fairly active in the Stevenson campaign, not as active as I was to be in the 1956 campaign. There was some contact at that time. I was attending all the Democratic conventions through those years. As I say, there was no reason for any particular sustained kind of contact, but I got to know him quite well.

[There was] another contact with him that became of some significance later. Our Washington Bureau was run by Elizabeth Carpenter in those days, and she had some Texas papers and was very

close to Lyndon--and of course finally went with him when he became vice president and continued on into the White House in the presidential years. So I always had a kind of a social contact through Elizabeth. It seems to me that I saw him a number of times at her house or various places at parties in Washington.

F: I think the Gazette may still take Les Carpenter's column, even today. You really first came into a sort of a public contact with him in the 1956 convention?

A: Yes, I think so. I don't recall anything of any consequence in 1952.

F: Governor Shivers was the big figure from Texas at the convention.

A: Lyndon wasn't even a favorite son in that one, was he?

F: No.

A: In 1956 I had taken a year's leave from the Gazette, and I went with Adlai Stevenson very early, in the fall before the convention, and moved up to Chicago. Then we got tangled up in the long primary fight with Estes Kefauver, which we tried to avoid and couldn't. That meant an endless campaign, beginning in Minnesota and running all the way through Florida and California up in June. There was a good deal of dickering around. Lyndon held himself available as a favorite son and came to the convention in Chicago, as I remember, with a delegation still pledged to him. He didn't actively get into any of the primaries. I'd suspect he was probably genuinely neutral in that contest, and if anything probably favored us a little bit over Estes' people. But that was a fairly amicable primary battle, and there were a lot of people on Estes' side who

were good friends of Lyndon's as there were on our side. So I don't recall his having any particular part in the primary phase of that campaign.

I do remember one of the problems that I tried to handle without too much success. In the middle of the spring Strom Thurmond decided to draft a manifesto, the famous Southern Manifesto denouncing the Supreme Court, really a pretty extreme segregationist statement. We heard that this was in the mill, and I went down to Washington to try to head it off, to see if there was any way to persuade Strom not to further the thing because if he did so he was going to put a lot of these southerners on the spot who didn't want to sign it. Many of them were Stevenson supporters, and it was going to rub off on us, people like John Sparkman who had run with Stevenson in the campaign before.

So I went down. I remember I talked to Olin Johnson. That's a kind of a great story, if this tape can accommodate a little obscenity and I'm sure it can; considering the subject matter it will have to. Otherwise we'll alter history rather badly.

F: We have a fair amount of obscenity, even a few salacious stories somewhere.

A: I would think. I went in to see Olin, who was an old friend of mine from my days as a political reporter in South Carolina, to see if he could do anything about Strom. I knew there wasn't any point in my talking with Strom because we had been at odds pretty much since the Dixiecrat days, when we had been fighting pretty

strongly. And I said to Olin, "Can't somebody talk to Strom and get him to at least put this damned thing off, because if he pushes it, there are all kind of people that are going to be put on the spot. They're going to have to sign it." Olin said, "Oh hell, it ain't any use for anybody to talk to Strom. The trouble with Strom is he believes that shit!" And I think he did too.

But I remember distinctly that Mr. Rayburn and Lyndon were specifically exempted because they were national leaders of the party, and therefore they weren't even asked to sign it. We couldn't get a deal like that for anybody else, and the thing finally did come out and it was a considerable handicap to Stevenson. I may have talked to Lyndon about it, I don't recall definitely. I think I saw him around that time. One person I did talk to, and this has a kind of a place in history now, was Bobby Baker. Bobby wasn't able to help either. I guess I was working with John Horne and John Sparkman, principally, around the Congress. I don't have any other recollection of rubbing against Lyndon in the campaign.

F: You weren't aware that he was particularly jockeying at that time too for a nomination?

A: I thought so. We assumed that he was at least getting himself ready for a deadlock. By the time we came to the end, and we beat Estes in the primaries, it was very close. Estes, if you recall, won in Minnesota, the first contest. It was a long struggle coming back, and we finally beat him in Florida and California, which were

the last two. They came right together, and fairly shortly after that Estes withdrew in Adlai's favor, released the delegates he'd picked up, and that gave us the nominating votes going into Chicago. We didn't have much question that we had the nomination by the time the convention assembled.

F: Of course you've already got the kind of impetus, so I imagine you would like to whittle off some favorite sons.

A: That's right. There was always a possibility that they could put together enough to head us off, and I think there was a fairly serious canvass at least--I don't know whether you'd call it an effort--during the opening days of the convention. I remember going down from Adlai's headquarters suite at the Hilton to meet privately with Jim Rowe, who was representing Johnson, and sneaking out the back way and down the fire stairs in order to avoid the press, not to have them know that there was any kind of dickering going on, and walking into Jim's room and finding Earl Mazo of the Herald Tribune sitting there. He was the first one I ran into. He just happened to be in there talking to Jim.

But as I recall the conversation, I had gone down there simply to see if they were seriously going to stay with it or if they were prepared to yield once the favorite son votes were cast--really a kind of sounding-out expedition. I suppose that my instructions were to see if they wanted to make any suggestions about any kind of trading, and I recall none. It was an amicable enough visit, and Jim indicated to me that they were not serious

about staying; they couldn't see any . . .

F: You didn't talk to the Senator directly?

A: No.

F: Just to Jim Rowe.

A: Just to Jim. And by that time I think it was evident that there was not likely to be any possible combination to stop him. I remember seeing Doris Fleeson, who is something less than one of Lyndon's most ardent admirers. It seems to me it was on my way to this appointment, and I ran into her somewhere, and I said, "Doris, you've been around a long time. Tell me, do you think that Lyndon is seriously a candidate in this thing or not? Is there any combination of circumstances where he would really get serious about it?" She said, "No, I don't think so. I don't think Lyndon would accept the presidency unless you could combine with it the offices of Pope and chairman of the board of the House of Morgan." That's a reflection of the view of the press at that stage of the game.

F: He didn't want to step down to the presidency.

A: He didn't want to step down. He was waiting for a better package. There was a lot of discussion and speculation about the vice presidential business during the convention. I was not in on any of those negotiations except I had the misfortune of being the fellow to tell Jack Kennedy that he wasn't going to be considered, and I think he never forgot that. I was like the messenger who brought the bad news. I had to go to get him--Stevenson told him--but I

had to be the fellow who went to get Jack and bring him back and take him back out after he had received the word.

F: Had Stevenson made up his mind sometime in advance that he was not going to choose the vice president?

A: I think he made it up fairly early, I'm not really sure when. I got the impression about the day before he announced it that that was the way he was going, probably after he talked with Kennedy. I happened to be in on that one, that he wasn't going to opt that. He had a tough decision. He owed a good many obligations to Humphrey, who actively wanted it. Exactly when he made up his mind I don't know, and I don't know whether there was ever any serious talk about Lyndon possibly coming on the ticket, or Sam Rayburn.

F: You don't know that he ever talked to Senator Johnson directly about this?

A: I don't know. I don't have any knowledge either way. There was a long session on the southern strategy, which I was asked to not attend because it involved John McClellan, and John always got a little agitated at the sight of me so I stayed out. It was McClellan and a couple of others. If it came up, it probably came up at that time. The argument was probably made for putting Lyndon or some southerner on, other than Estes. I'm sure that with McClellan there would have been a "Stop Estes" movement.

F: Sam Rayburn wasn't considered as far as you know?

A: I don't know. I imagine his name was up, it almost always was. But I don't recall any serious consideration. My assumption would

have been that Sam would not have considered it, was too old, and was past that kind of . . .

F: Then you went back to the Gazette and got involved in Central High School?

A: Yes. I went back to the Gazette and Central High School. A number of other things ensued, and that kept me occupied for the next few years.

F: Johnson never took any stand in this at all? He left that between--?

A: He stayed as far away from it as he could, which was also the tactics being followed by everybody who thought they could get away with it, including Fulbright. In fact we didn't have much in the way of assistance. The Gazette was almost by itself for quite a long time, and then it began to come back. We had some tacit behind-the-scenes support from the politicians, but not much in the way of open support. Brooks Hays, you know, was shot down in the course of it. He attempted to serve as an intermediary between the Eisenhower Administration and [Orval] Faubus. I suspect that he was in touch with Lyndon, a kind of a tactical matter during some of that time.

F: I haven't interviewed him yet. I had a delightful lunch with him once.

A: He probably ought to be interviewed. I have some vague recollection that he was in conversation with Lyndon. The Republicans were in, of course; it was the Eisenhower Administration. And the big problem, after the troubles really came, was what were the Feds going to do. So I was in touch with Bill Rogers, the secretary of state; he was then attorney general.

F: You mean under Eisenhower?

A: Yes, the present Secretary of State, Bill Rogers. Rogers was the attorney general who had to make the legal decision which led to sending the troops in. I was talking a good deal with Rogers on the phone, and through the late publisher of the Washington Post, who was very close to Lyndon--

F: Phil Graham.

A: --Graham. Phil, I'm sure, was talking to Lyndon because he always had a foot in that camp. He and I were talking daily, and sometimes almost hourly on the telephone. And he would then put me in touch with Rogers and the people in the Eisenhower Administration, and I'm sure he was talking to Lyndon. But I don't recall having any direct conversation with Lyndon during that period.

F: As far as you know, did Lyndon Johnson and Orval Faubus have any particular acquaintanceship?

A: I don't think so. They probably did prior to Little Rock because Orval, you know, was the great liberal.

F: I would have voted for him the first time around.

A: I did. As a matter of fact, I wrote the speech that bailed him out when they accused him of being a communist and everybody panicked. But Orval was one of the old populist boys, and he fancied himself as being kind of the Rayburn style of politican and was quite in good favor with Harry Truman. He'd come along with Sid McMath, who was a great favorite of Truman's. Whether there was any actual connection between Lyndon and Orval, I don't know. There would

have been occasion for some obviously, because Orval was governor for two terms before he blew the state up, four years, was in his fourth year. So he must have had a number of political dealings with Lyndon.

F: Did you either openly or covertly support Stevenson in that abortive bid in 1960?

A: No, I didn't. When they started talking it up out here I was already in California. I said that unless Stevenson was interested in going and would say so, I didn't want to get mixed up in the thing. I thought it was unfair to keep fiddling around when people were jockeying for position. I was personally very fond of Hubert [Humphrey] and was disposed to support Hubert as long as he stayed in the race. The Kennedy people out here, Unruh and some of those people, asked me to join the Kennedy committee early in California, to support him in the California primary. I declined to do so on the basis that it would look like somebody coming from the Stevenson camp, and I didn't think that Stevenson was making any moves. That was very early in the game; I didn't know what Stevenson was going to do, but my personal feelings were toward Hubert Humphrey, who was already campaigning in the early primaries against Kennedy. And so I pretty much stayed out of that one.

I went to the convention as a correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune and did some writing. I did have the distinction of being the first reporter to carry a story, in a national publication at least, predicting that there would be a Kennedy-Johnson ticket,

and this was when--

F: What put you on that lead?

A: It was a very simple matter of arithmetic, really. I went around to all the southern delegations, where I had pretty good contacts, and I found that Lyndon did not have, any way I could count it, enough votes. He couldn't possibly make it. This was my conclusion when other people thought it was a real contest, a real showdown. I had talked with Adlai and I was convinced he'd never go, so it wasn't going to split that way. And so if it came down--

F: The California delegation was fragmented.

A: Yes, it was just hysterical and as usual was unable to function much in any way. Pat Brown couldn't make up his mind what he wanted to do. And I became convinced early, before the convention even opened, that the Stevenson thing would get nowhere, that he in the end wouldn't go with it and wouldn't even permit it, although he was under great pressure to do it. I couldn't see anything else that could split it. It then looked like it was going to wind up as Kennedy and Johnson, and I couldn't count enough votes for Lyndon under any combination of circumstances. It just seemed to me that Kennedy had first place.

And then without knowing anything much, I concluded that the only logical solution under the circumstances was that ticket, and that if it were offered to Lyndon he'd probably take it. I remember Bill White urging me not to file the story. We were sitting somewhere drinking in the nearest bar to the convention hall, and I

told him I was sending this story to the Herald Tribune. He said, "Don't do that. My God, I was with Lyndon an hour ago. You're probably right, he's not going to get the nomination. But there are no circumstances under which he would accept the nomination from Kennedy."

Of course some of the Kennedy people I was talking about were equally convinced there were no circumstances under which Jack Kennedy would offer it to Lyndon. But my guess was purely without any inside information from either camp, was a purely objective adding up of votes and possibilities. The conclusion I reached was that Lyndon really, if he were offered the place on the ticket and he looked at it realistically, as I thought he generally did in the end of a political matter, that despite the blow to his pride, which was involved in it, he really had nowhere else to go. He had reached a dead-end for his political career. He could go back to the Senate and be a big man in the Senate, but he'd been that for eight years, and he clearly wanted more.

F: Even that reaches a peak sometimes.

A: Sure. And if he had a hostile Democratic president, he wasn't going to continue to be a very effective majority leader.

F: Right. Where were you when you heard about the selection of Johnson?

A: I don't recall. I was at the convention, and I don't recall where exactly.

F: You didn't get it particularly early?

A: No. I had no sources in either camp. I was frozen pretty much out of the Kennedy camp because they resented the Stevenson maneuvering, and they always associated me with Stevenson. As I said earlier, I think about the only thing Jack Kennedy remembers about me was that--

F: He could see you walking in and walking out.

A: --I was there when he got the bad news in 1956.

F: Did you sit out the campaign then?

A: No, I was fairly active in California. I didn't do anything in the campaign per se, I wasn't with the Kennedy troops. So to that extent I sat it out; I was pretty much out of it.

F: Did you see Johnson during the campaign?

A: I saw him once or twice when he spoke in California. I don't recall any extended conversations with him. Liz Carpenter was working with him then and we talked some, but I don't remember any contact of any [significance].

F: You thought he was making an honest effort for the ticket once he'd put his name [in]?

A: Oh yes, I never had any question about that. And I think he was probably fairly effective. I think some of those whistle-stoppings in the South, when he was making the Pickens speech or whatever it was, playing "The Yellow Rose" and touring down through the Carolinas . . . . I was tempted to go along just to see it. It must have been one of the great sights of all time. But I didn't, and I was never on the campaign planes at all.

Tape 2 of 3

F: Did you have any relationship with him while he was vice president?

A: A fairly pleasant one. I remember once going up when he was majority leader, and George Reedy was his main factotum. This was in the Eisenhower years. I was in Washington for a meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and at some raucous late-night party I ran into Lyndon and Lady Bird. We were standing around talking and drinking--it was very late, I remember--and all of a sudden he said to me, "I've got to make a speech to this outfit," a dinner speech which was about two days from then at the ASNE, which was a big showcase speech. He said, "I need some help. Can you come up and help me write that speech?" I said, "Well, I'll try to do what I can." He said, "I'll pick you up here at eight o'clock in the morning." And I said, "My God, I think that's about two hours from now, isn't it!" "Oh, no," he said, "that's about four hours from now." My wife was there and he grabbed her, and Lady Bird was there, and Lady Bird said, "I'll call you, Barbara, and tell you when he leaves the house, and you have him down there ready to go."

So, by God, he did. We got two or three calls from the house that he was cranking up the limousine, and he had cleared the initial point and was heading for the Statler Hotel, where we were staying. I was down there.

F: It was kind of like Napoleon returning to France, wasn't it?

A: It sure was. I was down there when the big car came up. He had

several telephone calls in the back seat, and we rolled up to the Capitol. George was up there, and we talked an hour or two, one of the longest talks I ever had with him, about what the speech ought to be. I agreed that I would write up some notes at least. He talked quite a long time. He got quite philosophical, and he got into that frame of mind that I've heard him on other occasions. He got to talking about the people around Stevenson. He identified me with Stevenson; that in his book identified me with the egghead intellectual group.

And he got into this business about why wasn't he appreciated. It went on and on and on. What seemed to be on his mind was that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., didn't love him like he should, and I kept saying to him, "Why the hell do you care whether Arthur Schlesinger loves you or not? You're sitting here, you're the second most powerful man in the country, which is what you really ought to indicate without saying in that speech. There's Eisenhower, and then there's you. You're damned near co-equal, as a matter of fact, right now, the way this administration is running." But he kept coming back to it. "They don't appreciate me. They don't appreciate what I've done. They don't know how liberal I really am. They beat me up on the oil. I've done more for civil rights." And at that time he had made some of the early civil rights moves, which were really, for him, fairly bold. This was a refrain. As I remember, this went on and on and on. And I've heard him on other occasions get into the same kind of thing. It has always seemed to be very much on his mind.

I went over to Liz Carpenter's office, which was our Washington Bureau, and wrote him some notes, fairly extensive. George Reedy and I talked about it, but none of this appeared in the speech of course. I think that was my only speechwriting effort for Lyndon.

F: Did you see him after he became president?

A: I never saw him privately after he became president. When he was vice president it seems to me I saw him socially a couple of times, primarily with Elizabeth. Shortly after he became president, just within, I suppose, a month or two after the assassination, we had some negotiations on behalf of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. We were putting on a big international convocation in New York, which was coming up the following year, where we hoped to bring the Russians in. In fact we did finally bring the Russians in, and a lot of people from the UN; it was sort of held jointly with the UN. The idea of this was to memorialize the papal encyclical Pacem in Terris, which seemed to us to be the most significant move that had been made in foreign relations for quite a long time, indicating some break in the hostile Vatican line toward the Soviet Union, some move toward coexistence.

We had talked with Jack Kennedy about the possibility of his participating, and while we did not have a final agreement we had had an indication of interest and encouragement to go ahead. After the assassination I went over to see President Johnson with Justice

Douglas, William Douglas, who is the chairman of our board, [and] raised the point. And he [Douglas] has always been a good personal friend of Lyndon's, way back to the early days. So he and I went over to see Lyndon in the Oval Room and were duly and relatively cordially received and made the proposition for him to come and deliver the major address at this thing which was to be held in--it was then almost a year. We held it in January, as I recall; this must have been about February or March of the preceding year. Well, he wouldn't make a commitment, but he left it open, expressed some interest. That was the main subject of the conversation there. I don't think there was anything else other than pleasantries, et cetera. And that's the last time I ever saw him at the White House, except that I was there at a couple of big receptions or something like that, the last thing that could be called a private conversation with him.

F: Did you see him in the 1964 campaign?

A: Only at a distance, I mean not to talk with. I did a little ghosting for Lady Bird, who asked me to do some writing for her.

F: What did you write on for Lady Bird?

A: What happened, first of all, on this Pacem in Terris convocation in New York, he did not come. Hubert Humphrey did come, Hubert spoke. But the President was cooling off on this whole thing, and he was getting ready to escalate in Vietnam, which did happen. The first bombing--I can't remember my dates now--but the situation on Vietnam was worsening, and he had apparently in that period made

his decision to take the harder line there, to go on in. I don't know whether the Gulf of Tonkin intervened in that period or not.

F: It was in the spring of 1965.

A: It probably did. In any case that situation was worsening, and we started finding the State Department was getting a hell of a lot less cooperative. The word was coming back that the coexistence was not the most popular order of the day, and Hubert was writhing. He was under considerable pressure. I think he was all but ordered not to do it, but he had made the commitment and told us all along that if the President didn't come he would come unless he was ordered not to. He did, and I think it was kind of an act of courage on Hubert's part.

We had Paul Hoffman, U Thant, Adlai Stevenson, Fulbright, various people. The tone of the meeting almost of necessity, as the way things were developing, was critical of the administration. And so from that time forward I would say that I was, because of my connections with the Center and the position I had taken publicly on Vietnam, at odds with the administration and the President personally. I've forgotten the sequence of events now, but also the tension grew between Johnson and Fulbright, and Johnson identified me with Fulbright as well as Stevenson because he had known me in connection with Fulbright. And I was a close friend of Fulbright's.

There was a particularly bitter eruption on the Dominican Republic, aside from that operation. I was involved in that to the

extent that I had been down there on behalf of Bill Douglas and knew something about the situation. John Bartlow Martin, the Kennedy ambassador down there, was an old friend of mine, and I had become a kind of a half-assed Dominican expert. I was outraged by it. I thought it was a very badly mistaken maneuver and said so. Then there was a very bitter exchange with Fulbright, one of the most bitter personal exchanges the President had with him. Fulbright was critical of the operation. I've forgotten what the terms were, but Johnson made a public statement that was really contemptuous. It was unusual for him in that circumstance.

F: Did you really get the feeling that Johnson had overreacted in the Dominican crisis?

A: Very much so. I think I can understand what he did. He had the sad example before him of the Bay of Pigs, where they should either have stayed out or gone in but not do what they did, which was go in halfway.

F: That's no place for token support.

A: Yes. I think he was determined not to repeat that error, but I think he overreacted to the point where he damned near sank the island under the weight of the American expeditionary force. And I think the situation could have been avoided, [this] was my own guess from what I knew about it. I think he'd gotten very impatient with Juan Bosch, and Juan Bosch was still about the only hope down there if there was to be any popular based regime. He was quoted as saying about Juan Bosch, restoring Juan Bosch; he said, "Hell,

I'd just as soon have Arthur Schlesinger take over down there. Bosch! For God's sake!"

F: Did you know Bosch?

A: I had a long interview with him during the brief period he was president. I went down there on a mission involving LeRoy Collins, who was then the head of the National Association of Broadcasters, and Justice Douglas with some foundation money to see about setting up a literacy program. They had a television station which had belonged to the old Trujillo government and a radio station. So they had a broadcasting service that belonged to the government; it had been seized. So we were trying to figure out some way to put a crash literacy program--it's one of the great problems, just to teach them to read and write--using radio and television. Bosch was encouraging this very much, and AID was coming in, and everybody was flocking down there. So I had a long talk with Bosch. I was very much impressed by him. I don't think he could run the country, but he was the symbolic leader, there was no question about that. He had the genuine affection of the people.

F: Would make an excellent elder statesman.

A: Yes.

F: This is strictly pragmatic on my part.. Would he be worth interviewing? Or would he just take a line?

A: That's a hard question to answer. I think it would be worth taking a chance. My guess is you wouldn't get too much. He's a very intelligent fellow, and he's not the fiery poet that he at some times

purports to be. He can be quite rational. Do you have John Bartlow Martin on your list?

F: Yes.

A: I think you might ask him. He knew him much better than I did.

F: I am probably going to Puerto Rico to see Governor Muñoz.

A: I think Bosch is still in Puerto Rico, so far as I know. John Martin will be able, I'm sure, to give you a good appraisal.

F: One question before we get into that. Did you have much opportunity to observe the Stevenson-Johnson relationship? How did they mesh?

A: I saw it really only from the Stevenson end. I think that they got along really better than you would expect, considering the public view of the temperament of the two fellows.

F: Of course sometimes adherents take things more seriously than principals.

A: That's right. But I think that they were fairly easy together. I don't think that Stevenson ever shared this egghead contemptuous view of Johnson. I never heard him say anything to indicate that he had that view. You know, Stevenson was a pretty ribald soul too. He had a great appreciation for the private Johnson, the barnyard Johnson characteristics which didn't offend him, but on the contrary amused him very much, because Lyndon, who's probably the worst public speaker in our time, was one of the best private speakers when the situation was right. I think Adlai respected that.

Adlai was quite fond of Rayburn, had quite a close personal relationship with Rayburn. I think Rayburn probably was instrumental in keeping his own view of Johnson more favorable. I have no idea what Johnson's attitude toward Adlai was. I think that he, again, associated Adlai with his enemies, and Adlai's supporters were his enemies.

F: So far as you know, though, there was no great tension between the two men?

A: Not on the Stevenson side. The last time I saw Adlai was not too long before he died in London. It was after he had been through the really dreadful experience, including the Dominican Republic, where he was left high and dry. Bill Baggs and I had breakfast with him at the embassy in New York, in the Waldorf, and we were talking about the Vietnam thing. We quoted this in the book [Mission to Hanoi by Ashmore and Baggs] I think. In one of the parts of the conversation he said that, "The first lesson is the one we failed to learn, but it is perfectly clear now that no white army is ever going to win another war in Asia, whether it's ours or anybody else's. That era is over. We don't understand that, and we've got to get the hell out of there as best we can." I said, "Do you ever say that to the President when you're down there in the White House?" He said, "Yes, I've argued this case with Lyndon as strongly as I can." And I said, "What does he say?" He said, "Well, he agrees with me. He says, 'I know that, but what do I do now? I'm already in. How do I get out?'"

The tone of this conversation again indicated disagreement,

because Adlai wanted out, and he would have moved in many ways I think, but acceptance of the problem as the President saw it. No great tension between the two, as I could read it in those conversations. He was not happy in his position; he hadn't been under Kennedy, that whole business. He was terribly ambivalent, it seemed to me, toward the end, not quite bringing himself to the point of getting out and then being unhappy as long as he stayed in because he was at odds with the prevailing policies of the State Department under both regimes. [It was] a terribly frustrating position.

F: And a hard one to leave, I'm sure, because too many implications are read in.

A: Well, that's right. As a matter of fact, in the period when he was wavering about whether to take it or not, when he had wanted to be secretary of state and it was perfectly clear that he wasn't going to get that from Kennedy, when he was offered the UN job with an upgraded cabinet status, et cetera, I saw him. He had not indicated whether he was going to accept or not; there was a lot of speculation about whether or not he would, and he said what did I think. I said, "I think you ought to do it. I think it's a splendid forum. You will be heard, and that's what you need." He said, "Well, it's a hell of a decision. Under other circumstances it wouldn't be so bad, but I don't know what Jack Kennedy's foreign policy is. I don't have any idea what it's going to be. I don't know whether I

can support it or not." And he said, "I'm so damned conspicuous now as a former candidate that I won't be able to resign quietly. Once I take it, if I ever get out, I'm going to have to either die or there'll be one hell of a furor no matter what the reason is. I won't have the freedom of action to simply ease myself out because I oppose the policy. A big public break will be inescapable." That in fact is what did happen.

F: He was just captured by the job really.

A: I think he was,in a sense. But again, my best view would be that his relationship with Lyndon never really badly deteriorated. I suspect it was as good with Lyndon as it was with Jack Kennedy, and maybe better.

F: How did you get involved with Vietnam, other than everybody got involved psychologically and philosophically?

A: This really was a follow on the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions enterprises. We had the Pacem in Terris convocation I mentioned in New York, and it was apparently successful enough so that all kinds of people here and abroad thought we ought to have another one. We had a bunch of people from the UN and a bunch of ambassadors from Iron Curtain countries and others out here to appraise the thing about six months afterward. They were unanimous in urging that we have one, that we hold it in Europe or somewhere outside the United States, and see if we could broaden it the third notch and see if we could possibly get the Chinese in. And if we had it, then it might possibly have some bearing on easing

the tensions that were rapidly rising in the escalation of the Vietnam war.

So we concluded that we would go ahead. We had some financing in sight, and we held the second one in Geneva. We were having a [preliminary] planning conference in Geneva and we had about fifteen people there. We had Mendès--France, a former premier of France, who had been the premier at the time the French pulled out of Vietnam the first time around. There were a couple of high-powered Russians there from the Russian Academy, including a man named [Nikolai N.] Inozemstev, who has since become an associate of ours. And Ambassador [Jean Michel Henri] Chauvel, a Frenchman who was a long-time ambassador to China, was there. There was an Egyptian, there was a Pole.

F: Did the State Department take any active hand in this?

A: We kept them informed about it. We didn't really want any official blessing because we thought that many of these people would not come except on an unofficial basis.

F: Did the State Department seem to encourage this sort of thing?

A: The State Department's attitude initially was, I think, fairly neutral. Some people encouraged it. George Ball was then the under secretary, and George, whom I had known well, I think was actively supporting this. I suspect that Rusk always took a dim view of it. The White House I think by that time was taking a fairly dim view of the enterprise. It was later to take quite a dim view indeed.

But in any case [at] this meeting in Geneva, which was a planning session, the Russians came up with the proposition that they thought that if we held this convocation the North Vietnamese would attend, along with the South Vietnamese and everybody in Southeast Asia, but that they couldn't get together any other way. But if all the nations were coming together informally it might be possible to get some representation. They didn't think the Chinese would come. That's what we were really talking about. But they were so importunate about this we began to believe that probably this was quite serious. The French reacted that way, Mendès-France and Chauvel.

At that time the North Vietnamese wouldn't treat with any American. You couldn't even see their ambassador in Paris, he wouldn't receive an American. So we wrote an invitation to Ho Chi Minh to send a delegation to this upcoming convocation to take place some time later, with the understanding we were also inviting the South Vietnamese and everybody else. The Russians went back to Moscow, I found out later, and sent word through the Vietnamese Embassy there that they thought this Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions was legitimate--it wasn't the CIA and this was worth doing. Then the French went back to Paris and sent the invitation through the North Vietnamese Embassy there, and endorsed it, Mendès-France and Chauvel.

I guess damned near six months later, the following fall, there came in the ordinary mail a letter which had been mailed in

Prague to Robert Hutchins, the president of the Center, signed by Ho Chi Minh, a very cordial note acknowledging the invitation and not closing the door and indicating that the matter was discussable. So we decided that this was an opportunity for somebody to go out there. A Mexican named [Luis] Quintanilla, who is now a professor at the University of Mexico, the former ambassador to Washington and the Organization of American States . . . .

F: How do you spell Quintanilla?

A: Luis Quintanilla. Q-u-i-n-t-a-n-i-l-l-a.

He had been at this planning session, and he was all fired up about doing something. And he got an invitation to Peking. So we sent an invitation to the Chinese out by Quintanilla, and he delivered it to the Foreign Minister in Peking and got nowhere with that. But on the way out he got permission to come out by way of Hanoi. He had an audience with Ho Chi Minh and urged Ho Chi Minh to receive a couple of Americans from the Center, and Ho Chi Minh indicated that he would do so.

When Quintanilla came back with that word, I then went to the State Department. [George] Ball by that time had been replaced by Katzenbach, whom I knew. The Secretary didn't receive me, but I saw Katzenbach and Bill Bundy, who was assistant in charge of the Far East. I told them that we had this invitation, and that apparently we would be admitted, and that we proposed to go. All we wanted was our passports cleared; that we would send Bill Baggs, who was a member of our board [and] who was the late

editor of The Miami News, [and he and] I would be the emissaries, which gave us both a kind of journalistic cachet which made it fairly simple and made it easier for the State Department to clear the passports. They readily agreed that we should go and they would clear--

F: You had no problem up to this time there.

A: Not up to that time. Katzenbach asked us to delay until after Christmas because of some other things that might be going on. I think this was the time--we now know some of the history, we didn't know it then--of the Polish maneuver, with something going on through the Poles on the International Control Commission. It was later publicized. So we said we would go right after the first of the year. The agreement was that--we had a long briefing on State Department policy--we weren't going in any sense to negotiate. But we would report what we believed to be the State Department's attitude to Ho Chi Minh, whom we expected to see, and that we would report upon return anything that he had to say. We would make it clear to Ho Chi Minh that we were so doing. So that was the extent of our official status.

We did go out just after the first of the year, and we were in Hanoi for a couple of weeks. This was a period when the bombing was still going on, really going on, I might say. We were there just after Harrison Salisbury, who was the first nonpacifist American to go in. Harrison came back, and his stories in the New York Times on the bomb damage caused quite a flap. The President got his ass over his shoulder and Rusk was denouncing him. The Pentagon

was denouncing him, because they had made the point that the targets were all concrete and steel, and in fact they'd been blasting whole cities and towns. So Salisbury came back and reported that just a week before we came back.

We were asked by the State Department to stay quiet as long as we could. And we'd agreed to do that, but Salisbury saw our name on the manifest on the plane that comes in from Pnam Ponh so the word had gotten out before we came back that we'd been to Hanoi. But we sneaked back into Washington anyway and had a long session with Katzenbach and Bundy. At that point they brought in Averell Harriman, who had been charged by the President with the settling of Vietnam.

We had brought back from Ho Chi Minh the basic proposition that's still on the table in Paris. I think it hasn't really changed much. It was that they would not hold a meeting as long as the bombing continued, but they would discuss the terms of a meeting in some fashion on the assumption that if there was agreement the bombing would stop. That beyond that anything was open for discussion, and the basic proposition as we reported it from their standpoint was that the separation of the country could continue for quite a long time as far as the North was concerned. They would insist that the NLF, which at that time was literally doing most of the fighting--there were some North Vietnamese troops in but then not too much, this was almost three years ago--had to be recognized and had to be part of some kind of a coalition

government, which always seemed reasonable to me since anything else would have been a military surrender. And that beyond that, they were fairly flexible as to how soon the American withdrawal, how long the American withdrawal would take, et cetera. Pretty much the kind of thing that emerged later in Paris.

F: Did you see Ho personally?

A: Yes, we saw Ho. We had two hours with him. It was very clear that he was--

F: With an interpreter?

A: We had interpreters there. His English is very good, but it was necessary to conduct the interview in Vietnamese because nobody else on the Vietnamese side had any English. Some had French, but none had English except Ho. So we were translated into Vietnamese, and then he was translated from Vietnamese into English. But he kept getting irritated with the interpreter and correcting him and making English asides to us, so it was quite an open and frank conversation and went on at great length. There was no question that he knew that we were going right straight back to the State Department, and he was talking through us to them.

We had this long secret session in Washington, and the upshot of it was that they said that they were very grateful and they would be in touch. We left, and then we had to surface at that time. I came back and had a public meeting in Los Angeles, and Bill wrote some stuff the the Miami News, in the course of which we sustained what Salisbury had said about the bombing. This got a

hell of a lot of people mad, including,I'm pretty sure,Mr. Johnson. Everything I could hear from the White House indicated great displeasure over this matter.

F: You never heard anything directly out of him?

A: No.

Tape 3 of 3

A: The next thing that happened was that after about a month had passed and the State Department had done nothing, Bill Fulbright asked Baggs and me to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee somewhere during this period. We had agreed with Katzenbach that we would not do that because that would just agitate the President further, and we didn't want to agitate anybody. Averell Harriman took us out to the house in Georgetown and said, "Now don't shake the boat. Maybe we can get something going here, but don't do anything that'll get that [Johnson vs. Fulbright] feud going." So we told Bill this and he agreed, and we also declined to appear at a House hearing.

After a month had passed and nothing had happened, I was beginning to wonder what the hell was going on. Fulbright saw Lyndon, either at the White House or some social event, and they had a little talk. Fulbright said, "Lyndon, what did you think of what Ashmore and Baggs had to say about Ho Chi Minh and Vietnam?" Lyndon said, "Well, I haven't seen them." Fulbright said, "You haven't seen them? My God, you mean you haven't even talked to

them?" "No," he said, "they talked to some fellows over there at the State Department. I haven't seen them. You know, Bill, I can't see everybody that goes over there and talks to Ho Chi Minh." Somebody was to say later when all this became public, I think David Brinkley, that this was a horde of two. We were the first two Americans who had seen him since the bombing started, as far as anybody knew.

This was a very curious reaction, indeed, and I've never understood all of it. But then the next day, or shortly thereafter, he called Fulbright--Johnson did, he apparently had been thinking about it--and he said, "Bill, I've asked the State Department to get those fellows back in here. I want you to be satisfied that they're being heard in the right places, so they're going to be in here Friday, and they're going to meet over there Saturday morning with Katzenbach and everybody. They're going to see the Pentagon people, and I want you to go along. I want you to be there so you'll be satisfied that it's all open and aboveboard."

This led to one of the most extraordinary confrontations I ever took part in. We got to Washington, Baggs and I, had dinner with Fulbright on Friday night--

F: Had the President cleared this with you, or had it been cleared?

A: The State Department had told us to come on in. Saturday morning in a fairly deserted building over there, we went to Katzenbach's office. While we were waiting outside Rusk passed a couple of times but didn't recognize us, couldn't seem to see us,

and he never came to any of these meetings. Rusk never talked to us, nor did Johnson. There was somebody there from the White House who was a fairly junior fellow, just sort of sitting back in the corner. But there was Katzenbach, Harriman, Bundy, and then the senior professional people from Bundy's department, the Vietnam experts--there must have been five or six of those--and Fulbright sitting over here, and Baggs and me in the middle.

So Fulbright unloaded. He came in shooting. This was when the situation was very bitter, when Rusk wouldn't even go to the Foreign Relations Committee. He told them that he thought this [meeting] was a bunch of shit. What the hell were we wasting his time and our time and anybody else's time talking? "All you guys," he said, "are committed to a military settlement. You don't want to negotiate; you're not going to negotiate. You're bombing that little piss-ant country up there, and you think you can blow them up. You've been doing this all the time. It's a bunch of crap about wanting to negotiate." Well,you could feel the tension going up until hell wouldn't have it. Katzenbach was flushing and finally assured the Senator that he at least wanted to negotiate a settlement.

I forgot to tell you one of the great lines in Lyndon's phone call to Fulbright, when he told him to go over to the State Department. Fulbright said, "Is Rusk going to be there?" "Well," he said, "if you want Rusk there I'll get him, but I think you'll do better with Katzenbach. He's more sympathetic. He was a prisoner

of war once himself." I told Nick that later, which convulsed him. "He's a little softer on these things," he [Johnson] said.

Anyway we had this conversation, at the end of which Harriman said, "Now I have personal orders from the President that you can see anybody else you want to see. He suggested that "McNamara you might want to see, he's over at the Pentagon now." This was, again, Saturday morning. We had already had a team from the Pentagon talk to us on the first visit about the bombing, technical matters largely.

F: Kind of a defense intelligence.

A: Yes. We went over to see McNamara and had a private audience with him that must have run about an hour, in which he told us that he had always been against the bombing in the North; never thought it was tactically, strategically sound. That it was a political matter, really, to placate the generals and the admirals, and that he had opposed it and he had supported the bombing pause we'd had before, and thought [the bombing] was a mistake. But they kept hollering about infiltration and one thing and another. That was the burden of that conversation, a right surprising one.

Then we were asked to come back to the State Department, and we did, and met with Bill Bundy, who had a draft letter he wanted us to sign to Ho Chi Minh. We had arranged a channel to communicate back through Cambodia. He wanted a statement in which we would say, "We have conferred with the high officials of the State Department, and it is our view that this . . ." It was a very conciliatory

letter, one that I'm sure would have led to some further contact. I think we [Ashmore and Baggs] would have been out of it. But had that letter been accepted at face value, I think that it would have probably gone on towards some at least exploratory [official] meeting. We agreed to this, and we redrafted the letter in the State Department on Saturday afternoon, and it was typed final version. We were going to Fulbright's for lunch the next day. [Bundy met us there with] a final version which Bundy wanted Harriman to see and [so Baggs and I] went out to Georgetown to Harriman's house [with the] final draft we'd all agreed on, had a drink with Averell, and he looked at it.

And then the next morning we came back to the State Department and made some final changes. Bundy said that had to be cleared and I suppose took it to the White House; at least it went off somewhere, and it certainly was cleared by Rusk. Then it came back.

F: You know it got past Rusk?

A: Yes, I'm sure it did that. So I signed the letter and put it in the mail. It stated--this has been published if anybody wants it, it's in the book called Mission to Hanoi, the text has been published. It went out I thought in good faith. We had lunch with Fulbright, and he knew all about it, which I then began to feel was some sort of insurance that was necessary. I was beginning to distrust people somewhat. We found out later that--

F: Did you know whom you distrusted, or did you feel just a vague uneasiness?

A: I was concerned by the fact that we clearly were frozen out of the White House, that nobody over there wanted to talk. I found this amazing because whether they had believed us or not, I would have thought just curiosity would have dictated that a couple of professional reporters . . . .

F: Somebody at Rostow's level.

A: That's right. And who were known. Lyndon knew us, and I guess had some regard for us. I just thought out of curiosity he would have wanted to find out what the hell went on in the two hours we were with Ho Chi Minh. That seemed to me to be a very curious circumstance. And then the fact that Rusk himself never appeared in any of this, that we were just chopped right off at the level of Katzenbach and Harriman, seemed to me to be an odd circumstance. I was beginning to feel very peculiar about it.

We found out later when Ho Chi Minh released a copy, that at time that our letter was going forward, one was going forward from the White House signed by Lyndon, a very hard-line letter which, if anything, escalated the proposition that we had made about bombing and infiltration. One that was under the circumstances designed to be rejected, I think that's the only way you could read it. It meant they [Johnson] didn't want to talk for whatever reason. When we found this out we really were outraged, because here we had written this damned thing in the State Department and we had sent it in all good faith on behalf of the State Department. We were not told, if they knew, that the White House was sending

something that cancelled out everything we'd done, and, indeed, cancelled out any possibility for conversation.

But also, paralleling this, we were getting ready for the second Pacem in Terris convocation in Geneva, which had led to the trip to Hanoi in the first place. And we still had an indication, which we'd gotten when we were in Hanoi, that the North Vietnamese would send a delegation. Well, this was beginning to alarm the State Department, I think. They didn't much want a North Vietnamese delegation there with a South Vietnamese delegation. If they all got in the same place it was going to be a kind of an outburst of negotiations whether anybody wanted it or not, or something.

So we began then to find a rather calculated effort to sabotage the convocation.

F: Do you think this then is in a sense an attempt to keep control of the strings on the various puppets?

A: I think they didn't want to have the meeting. They had gone hard-line as far as I can read it now in retrospect. They really believed they were going to get a military settlement. They had stepped up the bombings, and they thought the North was about to break. They were going all out that way. You see, this was before Tet and all of that. McGeorge Bundy, according to some other evidence, was furthering the effort to have an intensive bombing for ninety days and then make a pass and see if they couldn't get something going. But this convocation of ours was becoming an increasing annoyance to them.

We had started out--we had had assurances from George Ball [that] possibly even Rusk would be the speaker there. Well, we began running into declinations at every official level. Then we began to find pressure from the White House on some senators who'd agreed to come, suggestions that maybe this wasn't a wise place for them to be. Hubert was cancelled out this time for fair. He had made it the first time, but he was quite candid about it, he couldn't do anything. So that went on. Finally the only one we had left was Arthur Goldberg, who was independent enough to say he would come anyway.

That went on all through the spring. Finally just about two weeks before we were to meet, or three weeks, they really escalated the bombing in the North to the point that at that stage the North Vietnamese pulled out, said they would not come to Geneva. Then we ran into the Israeli-Arab war which we hadn't really had much to do with. But that happened to coincide with our meeting, so the whole thing was pretty much of a mishmash, although it produced some fairly interesting results in the end.

We did a "Meet the Press" hour-long satellite broadcast from the opening of the convocation in Geneva on a Sunday evening. Bill Moyers, who had just left the White House and was already at Newsday, was on the Washington end, and he was pretty caustic. I think he was reflecting the party line. Fulbright came, and the situation with Fulbright and Johnson was deteriorating publicly at that point.

Then after Geneva I felt rather uninhibited. That was over with.

The State Department had done all the damage it could, so I decided the time had come to publish the account of the two letters. We did that the following fall, and that created a great flap for about twenty-four hours which led to Bundy issuing a white paper from the State Department, in which he neither confirmed nor denied the fact of the two letters but suggested that Baggs and I were some kind of egomaniacs who were hurt because we had tried to settle the war and had failed. That kind of thing to denigrate it. But it caused a pretty good flap, and I'm sure that the President was not pleased by that at all. It became a kind of a celebrated cause for a while, as the tensions were mounting for Vietnam. I had tried a couple of times to get in to see him. Various people thought it would be useful, but it got nowhere. He, for whatever reason, was just not talking to anybody that was on the other side at that season. That came around to the fall . . .

F: Do you have reason to believe though that he was aware of your request?

A: I have no way to know. I'm inclined to think that he must have been, because it went in at a pretty high level, people like Douglas, who was seeing him and suggesting that he ought to talk. I have some reason to believe that Averell Harriman was. I don't know that, but Averell has always had this kind of funny role of the roving special ear of the President. I never had the feeling this was particularly personal, as far as Lyndon was concerned. But for whatever reason he was isolating himself from the doves; he was

only hearing in diluted form, I think, what they were saying.

That came around to the fall, and Gene McCarthy called me before Thanksgiving and said he was going to enter the Democratic primary on the anti-Vietnam thing, the California primary. I was then the chairman of the advisory committee of the California Democratic party, and Charlie Warren was the state chairman. [It] was a parallel advisory group. Well, within the party we were already split right down the middle on Vietnam, Charlie was taking the administration line and trying to avoid any kind of criticism, and my committee was just boiling with doves who were raising hell and had the Kennedy and McCarthy people, as it turned out, on [their] side.

So the administration moved in a very heavy-handed way, and they got Warren to just abolish this advisory committee, which was done in a big party hassle up in Fresno. So again, I was very much at outs with the White House folks. The only amiable touch during that period was that Lady Bird came through doing a Johnny Appleseed act, and [I was invited to] a big party up at San Simeon. I went up and saw her and Elizabeth and all these people. That always remained quite amiable. As I say, I'd done a little writing for Mrs. Johnson. My relationship with her survived it all, as far as I know.

The President I'm sure was aware of what was going on in California. Then when McCarthy decided to come in I agreed to be a delegate--he was going to run in the California primary--for him.

That became a matter of public knowledge. Then rather surprisingly Baggs and I got an indication that we could go back to Hanoi, that they wanted to see us again. So we were there, as it turned out . . . .

F: Did this knowledge come through direct from Hanoi, or did it come through some intermediary?

A: I guess we initiated an inquiry, which we were sort of doing periodically, saying that we were available to come back if there was anything to talk about. And we got a reply indicating that they would grant a visa. So we again went back to the State Department. Now this was after Tet, you see. Tet had really shaken the country up. Tet had come, and the situation was really desparate out there.

F: This was before Johnson had announced [that he would not run for a second term]?

A: As it turned out we were there when he made the announcement. We had no idea he was going to do it. But we went back to the State Department and said we had this indication that they would receive us and we'd like to go, and did the State Department think it was a good idea. They said yes, they did. So we got right back [together] despite the considerable amount of tension involved, with Katzenbach and Harriman and the rest of them, and we were encouraged to go. We were briefed, and there wasn't much change.

We set forth, and our visas were waiting for us in Cambodia, and we went back up again. We got there, and this time it was really

very interesting. A man named Hoang Tung who was the editor of the party newspaper Nham Dan--he was the fellow who had taken us to see Ho--is a member of the Central Committee and obviously a fellow with a lot of influence. This time we were strictly his guests, and we didn't see anybody official. There weren't any ceremonies, and we went right over to his newspaper office. Just Baggs and I, and Hoang Tung sat there for two days, just exploring in the most candid way what the possible basis would be for conversations if the two parties could agree and they could get the bombing situation out of the way.

While we were doing that, suddenly, to our great surprise--we had no foreknowledge at all--in comes by the shortwave Lyndon's speech in which he announces that he's not going to run and he's going to stop the bombing. So we were there when the bombing stopped. They took us out of the hotel and put us in a special villa, and we only saw Hoang Tung. He clearly was going back and talking to his principals. We were urging them to take the speech seriously. Although the bombing halt was not quite what he [Johnson] had said it was--they were still bombing a hell of a lot further north than the line that had been announced, and there were all kind of odd spot-bomb drops around town, some of which we could even hear--we kept saying, "You've got to take this seriously. For a fellow like Lyndon Johnson to announce that he's not going to stand for re-election, this is an act of political self-immolation; this is like one of your monks setting himself on fire. You can't ignore this; it has to be taken

seriously. You should respond, by all means. Even though he hasn't halted all the bombing, go ahead and negotiate."

I don't know whether we had any effect on their final decisions or not. But they blew hot and cold for two or three days, and finally we were given an aide memoire in which they accepted the proposition that they would meet and proposed Phnom Penh, Cambodia, as the meeting site. That's [their] response. I think it came out other ways. But we had this in writing. And incidentally we had also, through the Indonesian ambassador who was a fellow we knew, been sending messages out on his radio down to Laos for relay to the State Department about the fact that we were there and the fact that they [the North Vietnamese] were apparently going to send out some kind of response by us. So we were fairly hot property when we got down to Vientiane [Laos].

F: Did you have any reasonable freedom of movement there in Hanoi?

A: Surprisingly so on the first visit. We were escorted, and of course without an interpreter we absolutely couldn't do anything. But when we were not under escort we were allowed to walk around the town. We'd walk out of the hotel and go out and look at the gun emplacements and that kind of thing. It did occur to me that under the circumstances they weren't taking much of a chance, since we couldn't speak a goddamned word of Vietnamese. Baggs and I both are fairly tall and round-eyed and conspicuously western, and looked like two redwood trees in a grove of pygmies. They could have seen us anywhere in Vietnam. They didn't need to put a shadow on us.

F: There was no hiding place up there.

A: There wasn't anything much to hide anyway.

F: Was there any hostility on the part of the civilians?

A: They were remarkably friendly people, much friendlier that I would have thought, particularly on the first visit when we were bombing them all the time. They're naturally courteous, and of course we were identified. They had to assume we were some kind of special visitors. But there was far less hostility at any level than I expected. I was really quite impressed by it. And I think this was more than just an act. They have a kind of an Oriental politeness, a formality of manner anyway, and we had some curiosity value, I suppose.

Anyway, we came out to Vientiane and checked into the embassy there. Ambassador Sullivan was expecting us, and they cabled the proposition we had back to Washington. We were asked to come back directly to Washington, as directly as we could, and again to avoid the press. So we flew, God, the worst flight I ever remember making, from Laos [virtually] nonstop. We had to change planes. We got to Tokyo, and we had about five hours there. We saw the Ambassador at the American Embassy there, they had met us. By that time there had been some further developments.

Charlie Collingwood, the CBS correspondent, had been up there [in Hanoi]. He had made a broadcast which had apparently upset Lyndon, and there was a lot of haranguing around about "Who the hell . . . ." [They] had issued a statement at the White House indicating they had had no

response from North Vietnam. This really alarmed us, because we had brought out a response, and had delivered it to the Ambassador in Vientiane. We knew damned well it was back in Washington. So we were very caustic with our Ambassador to Japan, and he expressed our displeasure, I'm sure, in his cable.

Then we flew to San Francisco, and about fifteen minutes later the State Department had us on another plane to Washington. We got into Washington Sunday night and saw Bill Bundy briefly and then went over to the State Department and started in this rat race again. We were really pretty sore by this time because of all kinds of business about North Vietnamese not responding to the offer, not making the suggestion of a new meeting place, et cetera. We got through that--

F: How did they counter it when you told them you had an offer?

A: The answer was that this wasn't really official; that they couldn't count anything that . . . . But by that time, as Harriman said, "It's water over the dam now because now the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Vientiane has gone over and formally presented the same proposition to Ambassador Sullivan, that therefore it's in official channels." But we couldn't accept the fact that because . . . .

F: Just like the letter to Aunt Minnie.

A: That's right, or some such goddamned thing. We kept saying, "Well, you may be technically correct, but if you really want to talk it's a hell of a way to get going. You could have just said nothing. You didn't have to say you didn't have an answer." But at that point we had long sessions with Harriman, who was going

to head the delegation for the meeting when it finally took place. Of course, as you recall, it was some weeks while they argued about the site before they finally wound up in Paris, where everybody assumed they'd be anyway, it was the logical place to be. But that went on, this period of quibbling back and forth.

At that time, Harrison Salisbury called me from New York. He had had exactly the same experience when he came back the first time that we had had. He saw Rusk, but he never was invited to the White House. Nobody at the White House ever talked to him. We never even got to Rusk. He called me and he said, "Is this happening again?" I said, "Yes, it's happening again. I'm convinced that it's a matter of high policy. I don't know whether this is because the President's mad at us personally, but in any case we're just blocked out from the White House." "Well," he said, "I think it's terribly important that he hear you because I believe that the channels are really blocked up. He's only getting one side of this. It doesn't make any sense to be quibbling about this site if he really wants to have a meeting, and all this crap about Prague, et cetera." "So," he said, "let me try to see if I can get somebody that can get you in there." I said, "Well, all I can tell you is that it has been tried at pretty high level. We've testified off the record to the Fulbright Committee, and Fulbright thinks the same thing. He has tried and he has tried to get Clark Clifford to see if he would intervene and Clifford won't touch it, won't do anything

about it. Douglas has made a pass, I don't know with whom, but he has gotten nowhere. We've done about all we can do, and I don't think you're going to do it, but if you want to try, try!"

He said that he would get Scotty Reston on the phone, they'd take a couple of passes through some contacts they had, and if they could get them set up, would I see them. And I said, "Sure." So he called back sometime later from New York and said, "Well, Scotty has talked to Abe Fortas," who was still on the Court, "and he thinks that it's a good idea, that you ought to see the President. He's going to see if he can intervene. You go up and talk to Abe." So I called Abe on the phone--this was in the late afternoon--and he said, yes, he did think it was a good idea; that he would be back in touch. He suggested that I come to see him the next morning and by that time he'd have something set up, he thought. He was really into this and saying that he thought, by God, it ought to be done. He couldn't understand what the President was doing,too, this funny business that they were carrying on about the meeting site.

And so I went up to the Supreme Court the next morning at about nine o'clock to see Abe, and whatever had happened had changed him 180 degrees. He said that he didn't think it was possible and he didn't think it would be politic for him to try to intervene.

F: You mean he'd changed his whole stance?

A: He sure had. I said, "Well, Mr. Fortas, this is my last stand." I had told him what had been done before that. I said, "I've got here a copy of the lengthy memorandum which we wrote in the State

Department, which we've given to Averell Harriman, and which details everything we know about this and the whole history of the thing. Would you like to have a copy of this, which you might hand to somebody in the White House just to be certain?"

"Well," he said, "I think we can assume that the State Department will pass a copy of this along." I said, "Well, you may assume it but I don't. I'd just like to leave this." He wouldn't even take the copy! I said, "Would you read it yourself and then make a decision as to whether you ought to pass it on?" He said, "No."

[End of Tape 3 of 3 and Interview I]

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