

INTERVIEW I

DATE: January 19, 1974
INTERVIEWEE: DR. JAVIER BAZ MANERO
INTERVIEWER: DR. JOE B. FRANTZ
PLACE: His home in Mexico City.

Tape 1 of 1 (both sides contain same interview)

F: Dr. Baz, to get underway, how did you get to know President Johnson?

B: I got to know President Johnson through President Miguel Alemán of Mexico and through his friend Miguel Guajardo. Miguel Guajardo as a young boy worked with his father in the hotel in Acapulco by the name of the Club de Pesca, and having been to school in the United States, I think in Texas, spoke English. Therefore, he used to be the person in the hotel that would come and take care of the influential or outstanding men coming to Acapulco at the time. Through that he knew President Johnson, I think as a senator, and they were very friendly. So later on, Guajardo, in the Consejo Nacional de Turismo, and a friend of President Alemán, spoke to President Alemán a lot about President Johnson. The first time I knew of him was on a trip that, with President Alemán and Guajardo, we made to Washington on occasion of a seminar in Washington, D.C.

F: Is this the one at Georgetown?

B: The Georgetown. At that time we visited President Kennedy, and Guajardo arranged for a visit of President Alemán to Vice President Johnson where I was not present. At that time I did not hear any

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 2

remarks about what had happened at the visit.

F: Probably just a social call.

B: Very likely.

F: And then what was your next possible contact? Can you recall?

B: My next possible contact did not come while Mr. Johnson was president. I knew of several occasions in which Guajardo went to visit with the President and his family, and I had always recollections of Guajardo and what had happened. But at the moment I did not take very much care about it, because I thought he was just a young boy that was bragging about his good relations with the President. But I remembered very distinctly at the time that the impression I had from Mrs. Johnson from the press, from seeing her photographs in press, was not nice. I thought she was a dominant, strong woman, not a person with a heart.

F: Yes.

B: I discussed that two or three times with Guajardo, and he said the contrary. He said, "The moment you get to know her, you're going to change your mind."

F: Did you first see the President after his retirement at Acapulco, or was it in Texas?

B: I never saw the President after his retirement in Acapulco, because Mr. Alemán took great care that practically nobody was near him or had something to do with him but Guajardo and a man we have in Acapulco by the name of Ricardo Olvera, a lawyer representative of the Consejo

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 3

in Acapulco. It was Ricardo Olvera who was in charge of receiving the staff of President Johnson, showing them to their house and giving them all the facilities. From Ricardo I have some recollections. He said that the President was very much fond, or liked very much the question of communications and of everything mechanical being perfect.

F: Yes.

B: And whatever he found at the house he did not like he would tell to Olvera, "Now we are going to change this, or put this." On the next trip of the plane he would have the equipment, and he would see that the equipment was installed. And he said, "You know that President Johnson gives me more work in all these mechanical things than all the rest of the people that come to this house in the whole year."

F: President Alemán, does he spend much time in Acapulco, or did he just have a house there and he had guests a good bit of the time?

B: President Alemán likes Acapulco very much. He finds there the ideal place to rest, and he goes at least maybe once a month or more to spend a long weekend. But during the time that President Johnson was there, he did not live at the house. If he went for a couple of days, he stayed at the house of one of his friends. He would only come for lunch one day with the President.

F: Did his staff look after the President, or did Johnson bring in his own?

B: He brought most of them. You would say that eventually the normal staff of the house always stayed.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 4

F: Yes.

B: But President Johnson liked to bring his staff and some of his food to be prepared the way he would like, and the house staff would order the other staff to help along.

F: Was there any conflict, did you ever hear of between the staffs?

B: No. I never heard anything. On the contrary, the staff of the house liked Mrs. Johnson and the President very much.

F: Did you ever meet the girls?

B: Yes. I met the girls in the Ranch when Mr. Johnson was not president any more, on this visit to Austin and to the Ranch. At the time I thanked very much Guajardo, because it was him who said to Mr. Alemán that I could come along. I have always been very fond of being a witness of my times. I had met other presidents of the United States, and I felt that I really wanted to meet Mr. Johnson. So I was very happy when I knew that I could come. We made a trip from Mexico City to Austin in a private plane, and we were met in Austin and taken to the office of the President in the Federal Building. From there we went into a small helicopter.

F: Did you take off from the roof? That must have been intriguing.

B: We took off from the roof with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Alemán, and we went directly to the Ranch.

F: I've never ridden in the presidential helicopter. I've ridden in some of the supporting ones. You know, they're noisy.

B: They are very noisy.

F: Was his quiet enough that men could talk in it?

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 5

B: Very little. They had to talk in a very loud voice, but the advantage is that it goes so close to the ground that you can be saying what is being seen. And President Johnson was giving us an idea of how we were going through Texas and the type of land we were crossing.

F: Just like a tour guide.

B: Exactly.

F: Right. So then you set down at the Ranch.

B: We came to the Ranch in the evening, and we had dinner at the house. The President had invited a group of persons for that evening, some of them that came from quite far away. I think we had three round tables of about twelve persons each.

F: Pretty good group.

B: And most of these persons came as guests only for the dinner.

F: Well, now where did you eat? Did you eat in the family dining room?

B: In the house there was a little larger room, and I think there were three round tables in that larger room, a kind of playroom or something. There were three tables of about twelve persons each.

F: Did President Johnson talk primarily to President Alemán, or did he visit with everyone?

B: He was talking with everyone all the time and receiving all his guests, but he was particularly nice and attentive to President Alemán. And also Mrs. Johnson, she was all the time being very nice to him.

F: Did you have to take the inevitable trip around the Ranch?

B: That was the next morning after breakfast.

F: You got there too late to do it that evening?

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 6

B: On that evening, yes. But the next morning we had the tour of the Ranch in his car, and that was quite an experience, extraordinary. I was amazed by one thing. The President had kept all this interest in communications and in efficiency he had in office, and I think that in the same way he must have related to his Cabinet ministers and his generals and his staff he did now, too, with his ranchers and his people around. So we would be in that car and he would be pushing a button--

F: He's driving of course.

B: Driving, of course, with Mr. Alemán in the front and Ricardo and myself in the back, this large Lincoln car, I think I remember. He would be pushing a button and he'd say, "You know, now the fence here is going to open," and the fence is open. Then we went into another place and he pushed another button, and he was getting in contact with the rancher and asking him what was the situation of the cattle in this moment and communicating by wireless. I had envisioned, "Well, he must keep this same attitude and this same speed and this same work he has to do, the only thing that has changed is the subject."

F: Right.

B: But I had envisioned he was running the United States on another scale.

F: Right. He really had a facility, I think, of keeping several conversations going at once. I'm sure, you know, he's not so busy running the Ranch that he's not talking to President Alemán.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 7

B: Oh, no, definitely. He was doing that on a low level, and at the same time talking to the President and telling him how difficult it was readjusting to civil life in the house after so much pressure and tension in high office, something that Mr. Alemán understood so very well.

F: Did you have the feeling that he was adjusting?

B: I had a feeling that he was--how would I say, I am trying to find my word in English; I know exactly what I would say [in Spanish]--nostalgic.

F: Yes.

B: Nostalgic. Of course, I think that when you are used to running, let us say a company, and somebody else comes and runs the company, you think that you would be doing better, or at least had more insight on how to do it. But that you cannot say, not even to yourself.

F: That is something the psychologists have not probed yet, what it does to a person who's had such tremendous power suddenly just to be another kind of prominent person, but to have lost all the power. It must really do something to you.

B: In a very different field and in a different context in history and in another place in land, it is said that one of our former presidents once said that being a president in Mexico was to be in a tremendous state of drunkenness for six years and having a very long hangover for the rest of your life.

F: That's very well put. Yes. Do you remember any particular statements that President Johnson made?

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 8

B: No. I was very conscious of trying to recall something that would be outstanding in this meeting, and I do not recall that there was anything but a general level of very deep cordiality.

F: Yes, just friends visiting.

B: Very nice friendship.

F: When you were driving around, did the President tend to talk almost entirely to President Alemán, or would he talk to you in the back?

B: He was talking to all of us.

F: Did he ask you any questions about yourself?

B: No. On that occasion, he did not. My relation was much more on that visit with Mrs. Johnson.

F: How did that come about?

B: Well--(Interruption)

F: How long were you there on this trip?

B: We left the next morning around noon.

F: What did you do the afternoon then?

B: In the afternoon we arrived a little late. We were sent to our rooms for a while to rest. Then there was a moment around six that we had to come down for cocktails with his guests and then have dinner around seven or something, and we stayed together until the guests parted sometime around eleven. All through that time, less the time that we were in the plane, it seemed that the conversation was mostly general. There was no personal rapport. But on the next morning we had to have breakfast together, and we had breakfast, Mrs. Johnson and the President and President Alemán and Guajardo and myself.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 9

I do not think that the girls stayed over at the house that evening, so they were not there for breakfast. It was a much more intimate affair, and there was more rapport.

F: In the family dining room there?

B: Yes, in the family dining room. There was more rapport at that time.

F: What did you eat, just plain old Texas fare?

B: Yes, for the breakfast. And then we were preparing to leave. Then we went on this little tour of the Ranch, and we prepared to leave around eleven, again to Austin, to take our plane back to Mexico.

F: Did you go back?

B: Yes, from there.

F: To the Ranch I mean, did you visit it again?

B: No, only on the occasion of the funeral of the President.

F: On this particular occasion you visited a considerable amount of time with Mrs. Johnson?

B: On the first occasion?

F: Yes.

B: I was sitting next to Mrs. Johnson at dinner.

F: I see.

B: At that time we had a conversation, if I remember, about traveling in Mexico and how much you could travel as a person going in small villages and seeing archaeological remains. I think that she was very much interested in archaeology, and I mentioned that in a ranch that President Alemán has in the state of Veracruz there's a little mound where archaeological pieces are found. I said, "Maybe you have

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 10

some time and you could come and dig yourself and find something that you would like to see in a small pit." She was very much interested about that.

F: Did she seem to have some knowledge of Mexico?

B: Very much. Not only knowledge, but she was very interested in knowing more and more about Mexico.

F: Did she ask good questions?

B: Many, very interesting and very to the point. I changed completely my idea about her. I found she was a very intelligent woman, but very kind and very nice. She could show a tremendous amount of warmth. She was very fond of the President, and she understood him very well. She knew how to manage him--let us say manage him--in a very nice and soft way. Many of the things that the President did that could look a little harsh, she could change and put a velvet glove on them to make them really sound like the President intended. Because I think that the President also was a very warm and nice person. But sometimes--

F: He could speak rather abruptly.

B: --his ways were a little harsh. And she could put the velvet glove on the thing and say, "What he meant was this" and "He looks for this." She could make things appear in the way he would like to have said them, in a soft, nice way.

F: When you were driving around, did the President talk entirely in English?

B: Yes.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 11

F: Did he ever try his Spanish on President Alemán?

B: No, no. I never heard him speak Spanish.

F: Did he ever talk to any of the ranch hands in Spanish?

B: No. No, not on that occasion.

F: He did have a number of Mexican--

B: Ranchers.

F: --employees, and he would talk with them--

B: To them in Spanish.

F: --in Spanish. But I wondered whether he [spoke Spanish with you].

B: No. No, we didn't.

F: He may have been a little bit shy with three good Spanish-speaking people around.

B: Maybe, yes. I remember that he mentioned in two or three occasions that President Alemán was with him and introduced him to the people at the Ranch.

F: It was all, I gather, rather informal and relaxed.

B: Very informal and relaxed.

F: You sort of had a problem realizing you were with a former president.

B: Yes, definitely.

F: But, of course, you're used to former presidents.

B: Well, yes. You see, at the beginning when I started working for Ezequiel Padilla, the former secretary of foreign relations, many years ago, I was amazed to find that great people, people that look great in the light of history, are very human, and they have a very nice, warm way of being by themselves. Later, when I came to work for

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 12

President Alemán, the first few days I looked at him and I had an impression I was looking at photography in the paper, because I used to see him only in the paper, you see.

F: Right.

B: But after a while I got used to it.

F: Well, you're looking also, and I think this has an effect on you certainly at first, at history.

B: Yes.

F: This is something that is going to be talked about for as long as the history of a particular country is studied.

B: Right.

F: And so it does have an effect. But you did learn to just sort of treat both presidents as a kind of man-to-man. Learn is not the right word, you just came to do it.

B: Yes. Because I think that they also have a certain reaction to people that look more at them than at their name or at their occupation, let us say, at their great importance in government. I have the theory that a man is good in his office as long as he keeps being himself and he doesn't change into his office.

I want to explain. I think that Lyndon Johnson was all his life Lyndon Johnson, and the fact that he became president of the United States did not take out of his importance of being Lyndon Johnson. He was Lyndon Johnson as senator, he was Lyndon Johnson as vice president, and he was Lyndon Johnson as president of the United States. The moment a man ceases to be himself and becomes the president of the

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 13

United States and loses his identity, he's lost. I think that great people--and I have been fortunate to know several great people--have this thing that they are always bigger than their jobs. When you address them as the man, and not as the job, they feel a certain rapport with you they never feel with the people that deal with them in their jobs. I learned to do that from old times, and I think I have always had a good rapport with people when I address them as Mr. So [-and-So] now, in the capacity of the president of the United States eventually.

F: Right. Were you in Mexico at the time that President Johnson came down here with Mrs. Johnson?

B: Yes, I was.

F: Were you here when the Kennedys came?

B: I was here.

F: Was there any difference in the two receptions?

B: Yes. I think that the Kennedy reception was prepared long in advance. Kennedy had a certain attraction or flair for the people, and many people wanted to see him and came to the street to see him.

F: And her?

B: And her. She added a tremendous glamour to the visit. I think that the visit of President Johnson was prepared with less advance. People knew little about it, and eventually it appeared to be less popular.

F: You didn't feel, though, that given the differences in circumstances, President Johnson's visit suffered by comparison.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 14

- B: I do not think so, and I don't think that he noticed very much. Mexican people are very warm to receive guests, and they like the popular fiestas. So on whatever occasion they have they come to the street, and they are happy about a little time to loaf.
- F: And let it be known that they can quit work and come down and stand around.
- B: That's the thing.
- F: Right.
- B: Again, it was a very good reception. Kennedy's was outstanding because, as I said, it was prepared long in advance. You know how much can be done when you say in the television and in the radio, "Our friend is coming," and you start publishing photographs in the paper and giving all these editorial things. All the people get inflamed, they get happy about the thing. It could not be done in the case of President Johnson because of lack of time.
- F: This really isn't relevant to what we're talking about, but something I've always wondered. I've never heard Jackie Kennedy, Onassis now, speak Spanish. Is it a good school girl's Spanish, or is it a good Spanish?
- B: I have never heard her speak Spanish. Recently I heard--
- F: You know she said something down here in Spanish while she was here, made a short speech.
- B: Did she?
- F: Yes.
- B: I don't recall.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 15

F: And everybody cheered.

B: I don't recall. Yes, I think I heard that speech, but it did not strike me very much. I know that she was here when she was a student. There was a house in the Lerma Street in front of the British Embassy, where a refined lady of Mexican society used to receive girls from the United States. That house was very popular among myself and my friends; we used to go there and meet the pretty girls and take them out.

F: Maybe we ought to conduct the interview on that!

B: And later, you see, many years later one of my friends by the name of Hinojosa said, precisely on the occasion of the visit of President Kennedy to Mexico, "You remember that night that we went out and took two girls? One of them, the one that was with me," said Mr. Hinojosa, "was Miss Jacqueline Bouvier." I did not remember at all, but that happened definitely.

F: Yes.

B: She was here. She was here for several weeks, and she was practicing Spanish and she was living in that house.

F: Getting back to the Johnsons, where were you when you heard about his death?

B: I was traveling with President Alemán from someplace in the Orient to Europe, and we heard it in the airport at Rome. I think the President had stayed in the plane. He did not come down. I came down to, I don't know, maybe to walk a little at the airport, and I got the news and went back to the plane and told him. We had all the

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 16

news from all the passengers in the trip from Rome to Paris. That evening I was looking for the Herald-Tribune in Paris as soon as it came out, sometime around ten-thirty or eleven. I bought it in Champs Elysees, and I took it to the President's room and we were discussing it and reading.

F: Well now, you went to the funeral of President Johnson.

B: Yes.

F: Did you come from Mexico?

B: Yes. Also I went again with President Alemán. We took a plane again to Austin, and we were met in Austin by a car and we drove the car to the Ranch.

F: You stayed out at the Ranch then?

B: No. We came in the morning. We were there only for the funeral, and we went back from the Ranch to Austin. That day Mr. Alemán returned to Mexico, and I took a plane to Washington. I had some errands to run in Washington.

F: Did you see Mrs. Johnson at the funeral?

B: Yes. I was amazed by the assurance, the poise she had. I expected her to be completely down, and she had a remarkable mastery of herself.

F: You saw her there at the house?

B: Yes. She was receiving all the persons with her two daughters, and she was very, very composed, as if she expected some time ago that the President would die. I remember now that Miguel Guajardo told me he had been at the Ranch. I don't know if he told you that in his interview.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 17

F: That he talked with him that morning before he died?

B: Yes. No, but that two or three weeks ago [before] he had been at the Ranch, and the President took him to the place where he was [later] buried and, Guajardo told me, the President told him, "I want to be buried under this tree on this place." And Guajardo thought, "Well, why should he be thinking about these awful things?" This is not a thought normal. But at that moment he realized that the President must have been thinking that he was not feeling very well. Because, he said, "Otherwise he would not have brought me and my wife to this place to show us, 'this is the place where I want to be buried.'" He remembered that very distinctly, and he told me at the time of the funeral.

F: Did Guajardo go with you to the funeral?

B: Yes. The three of us, President Alemán, Guajardo and I, left from here, and there were also Mrs. Guajardo and a friend of Guajardo and his wife. We went all together.

F: Did Mrs. Johnson say anything to either you or in your presence about the death and how it affected her?

B: Well, no. At first we came and we did not see her on arrival. We did not expect to. At the time of the funeral, we were already there in a place with several of the former friends of the President, while first the family came and then the funeral took place.

F: It was very cold.

B: It was a very cold day. Then we all went to the house where she was in the entrance of the house, or in the lobby of the house, receiving

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 18

the people in a long line. She was receiving everybody there. And we just said, "Hello," and she said to President Alemán how thankful she was that he had come so far.

F: Had she gotten close enough to President Alemán by then that she would hug him?

B: Yes, yes. They had maybe one minute together while the President was reassuring her saying, "Well, these things happen in life."

F: As two former presidents did the two men ever become first name, or did they call each other "Mr. President" or "President Alemán" or "Mr. Alemán" and "Mr. Johnson," or how did they?

B: I don't remember. Definitely they did not call themselves by their first names, that I am sure. But I think that on the part of President Alemán, he found a way not to say either "Mr. President" or "Mr. Johnson" or "Lyndon" or anything. I don't recall.

F: He just stayed off that subject?

B: See, I was translator. I was translating. So when he talked about him he always said, "President Johnson." But in front of him, I do not recall.

F: When the two stood and talked together, you know, Mr. Johnson was very famous for using his finger and punching it in your chest.

B: Yes, yes.

F: Did he ever do that with President Alemán?

B: He did, yes, definitely. Yes, he did.

F: Is President Alemán a sort of a demonstrative man like that?

B: No. But he was not amazed, or he did not resent it or anything at all.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 19

On the contrary, he was very happy because he felt close.

F: When the men sat, did they just tend to talk low, and quietly?

B: Yes. For instance, on the evening of the dinner they retired a little to a corner, sitting next to a small table, and they were there for a while. In a certain way everybody respected that privacy for a while, and nobody wanted to interfere or to come around until the moment of dinner that Mrs. Johnson came and said, "Well, it is time for dinner; let's go."

F: What time of the year was this that you were at the Ranch?

B: I don't recall. I think it was in September or something, September or October. I don't recall.

F: I think it must have been in the fall, or at least after summer, because usually in the summer she couldn't get him back to the house before nine o'clock.

B: Yes. Yes, it was, I think, in the fall.

F: As she used to say, her life was just one fallen souffle after another to try to get him to quit talking and come to the table.

B: Yes.

F: Can you think of anything else we ought to get into? Did you ever go up to the ranch at Chihuahua?

B: I have been at the ranch in Chihuahua, on what, one occasion.

F: President Alemán really didn't pay much attention to it as a working ranch owner, did he?

B: No. No, actually I have never known about the ranch from President Alemán. I have known about the ranch through the newspapers and

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 20

through other people. Newspapers said that the ranch was a gift, the land was a gift of two politicians to Mr. Alemán while he was president, that some house was built there. I don't think that President Alemán ever had the rancher's idea, and I think that he never paid too much attention to the place. I think that at certain moments Miguel Guajardo asked him to sell the ranch to him, and I think he was pleased to do it. It was at this moment that Miguel Guajardo entered into an arrangement with a gentleman, I think it was Mr. Jenkins.

F: That's right, Walter Jenkins.

B: Walter Jenkins, that was a very close friend of his. I think they managed to make an arrangement to have the ranch work in some way so as to be at least not a losing enterprise--

F: Yes, right.

B: --and giving President Johnson the possibility of coming there and enjoying his time.

F: Yes. Is the ranch structure somewhat primitive, or do you have a nice ranch house?

B: It has a very nice ranch house, Mexican-Colonial-California style [with] several rooms and bedrooms and a nice court. It's quite a nice place.

F: Does it sit near any kind of stream, or lake? Is it well watered?

B: No, no. I think there is only a well. It is a very, very dry country. I think there is a well where they get their water from.

F: Is it kind of an oasis?

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 21

B: No, you wouldn't say so, because vegetation is very poor. I think that if there is some water, there is no more water than needed in the house for the normal course.

F: Not a sort of little tree-nested place?

B: No, definitely not. [There are] very few trees in the region.

F: Is the country fairly flat in there, or is it broken?

B: It's flat country. It's a valley. There are little hills on the surroundings, but the center is flat, definitely, where the ranch is.

F: Do you have a dirt runway or a paved runway?

B: Many, many years ago there was a paved road that has given away because of time.

F: But where did you land your planes?

B: In the dirt place.

F: You always flew to the ranch, I judge.

B: I think so, yes.

F: There are no facilities in Camargo that are usable?

B: I think that Camargo uses the landing strip of the ranch.

F: I see.

B: Camargo is a very, very small place. I've never been in Camargo.

I went to the ranch some mornings, stayed there for lunch, and left in the afternoon. I did not even stay for the evening. It was, I think, in a trip that President Alemán made to somewhere else, I don't recall where, but it was just passing by that we went through the ranch.

F: It's a long, desolate trip from here to there.

BAZ MANERO -- I -- 22

B: Yes.

F: Not much along the way. Can you think of anything else we ought to talk about?

B: No, I don't think so.

F: Well, thank you, Dr. Baz.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Javier Baz Manero

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, Javier Baz Manero of Mexico City do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on January 19, 1974 at Mexico City and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recording 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 transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Donor

Date

Archivist of the United States

Date

Javier Baz Manero
28-IV-83

Robert H. May

May 19, 1983