INTERVIEW III

DATE: June 1, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES BOATNER

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Boatner's office in Fort Worth, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

B: You have asked that I give you a thumbnail sketch of Lyndon Johnson. I hope it's a thumbnail. I always said, and I'm convinced that I'm right, that Lyndon Johnson had more facets than a ten-carat diamond, beautifully cut. He reflected light in so many directions. Like a diamond he could cut and cut hard. He was a man that I tremendously admired. He was a man who, to me, was striving to carry out a self-disciplined purpose; that is, of trying to make life better for everybody, and that included Lyndon Johnson. He wasn't a man who was quick to forget something that he thought of as detrimental to him. He would remember it. He would overlook it, however, as long as it served his purpose. But he'd let you know in some subtle fashion that he remembered it. Frankly, I found him a very forceful, human individual. Generally, all of his desires were aimed at that before-mentioned purpose.

G: Was he easy to work with?

B: Easy and hard--he was both. He never lost his childhood pleasure with deeds and things. He wanted you to know of his appreciation. He also was sensitive to affronts. I remember one time--I don't know whether it's on the previous tape or not--he came to Fort Worth to speak. He

was vice president then, and he was asked by the Fort Worth Club over here. He said, "John Connally's a member there now, isn't he?" I said, "Yes." He said, "How come John's a member and I'm not?" I said, "Well, John was born to it. He was president of the student body at the University of Texas." We drove two more blocks, three more blocks over towards the Texas, and we were two blocks down the street before he said, "Oh." That was, I thought an expression of his understanding.

But I think he did have that little inferior feeling about some people that has been credited to him, and I think it was from his background from a little town in Texas that we all notice among certain people. They have a feeling towards you. A guy who was a general in the Army, well, a colonel or on up, or if you had a president of a college--I don't know that he felt inferior to them, but he admired the way that they had progressed to the top of their discipline. And yes, he felt inferior to them in their knowledge of their particular field. But I don't think in politics that he ever felt second to anyone, that is, in the years that I knew him and worked for him. Now, I had what you would call a casual acquaintance with him when he was in the NYA and when he was a congressman. Then our association started when he was a senator.

G: Right. You had talked about him and John Connally. I was wondering if you would contrast the two men.

B: Yes. John doesn't have that, or doesn't ever show--well, I can't

really say that because I haven't been around John in the years since he became governor except on a few occasions--that little town, poor boy beginning. He had become, in my mind, what I'd always thought of as a wheeler-dealer in Texas, whereas Johnson never did show that. Now their speed of mind, of both of them, is astounding. Even before the question had formed in their mind they already knew what you were going to answer, and I think still did in later years. If you gave them a different answer [than what they expected], then you really got pressed on why. They both were tremendous egotists. They both were very proud of their wives and figured that their wives were great assets, [if], not the greatest asset they had. I don't think John Connally has anywhere near the love for the members of his family that Lyndon Johnson had, I mean his relationships with his brothers and with his children. At least he wasn't as outward with it. It may have been there, but it was inside. It may be there.

G: Do you think philosophically there were differences between them?

B: Oh yes. My feeling is that Mr. Johnson always had the feeling that a lot of people could make it if they were given a little helping hand. I don't think John ever thought that; if a guy had it in him, he was going to pull himself out by the bootstraps and you didn't have to give him a helping hand. I think John represented one side of the Democratic spectrum in Texas back in the days when there was one party in Texas; Johnson represented the other spectrum, and that's what made them such a great team.

G: Was John Connally a protege, or was he a competitor in a sense? The story you described of the Fort Worth Club sounds like Lyndon Johnson--

B: They were. They were. No, John was willing to be subservient, and I don't mean that in any disrespectful sense. I mean he was learning his politics from Lyndon Johnson, although he knew his politics. But he felt, I think, [he was] getting a broader scope, and he was willing to work with Johnson and in a lesser position--in other words, campaign manager as against candidate. And I think he continued to do so until he broke loose to try his own wings as governor of Texas. There was a rivalry between them, at least on Johnson's part. There's still a rivalry. Before the President's death we were eating dinner out at the Ranch, and my wife and me and the President were the only ones there. Alice said, "What is John up to?" And he said, "Well, Honey, he wants to be president in the worst way because I've been president." I think that probably answers it.

I think right now [of] the story that was in the last Sunday paper, in which John implied that if someone talked to him hard enough in the right way and put the things to him in the right way that he could be a candidate for vice president if the candidate for president needed a candidate from the West as a vice president. I think Mr. Johnson was right. I honestly believe, and the facts haven't shown otherwise, that John went back to the Nixon group to become vice president, and then Agnew's financial immorality blew up and they

appointed a man who could be confirmed in the Congress. You remember, Democrats gave warning that they would not confirm Connally.

G: Let me ask you some more general questions about Lyndon Johnson. One gets the impression that once a man is inside the Johnson circle his whole life is swept into it, and in a sense it's hard to be one's own man. He's so involved with his staff and his staff is so involved with him that it's hard to be, let's say, an eight-to-five person and have your own life in addition to that.

B: You couldn't be an eight-to-five person with Lyndon Johnson because that just didn't happen. In dealing with the press I think it caused me to try to phrase my answers as I thought he would like the answers to be phrased, not give my beliefs. I was working for Lyndon Johnson, and so I stuck to Lyndon Johnson policy, as when I was working for the Star-Telegram I stuck to Star-Telegram policy or now I stick to Department of Interior policy. I'm playing a position on a team, and if the ball calls for me to make the throw to home rather than throw to first I'll throw home, although in my own mind I figured I could catch the man coming down to first and the run was going to score on me anyway, if you follow that baseball analogy. Yes, when you were working for Johnson you were caught up in the Johnson scheme of things.

G: Did you consider it an intrusion at all to your own [private life]?

B: Members of your family do. I don't know whether I covered this in that first tape or not. But, for instance, when I'd been up there two or three weeks--we'd been to Berlin and back--finally one day he said:

"Where are you living?" I said, "Down at the Ben Franklin Hotel." He said, "That's expensive isn't it?" I said, "Yes sir. But I don't get off until nine o'clock at night, and that's no damn time to go house hunting." He then related that he and Bird had bought a house out on 52nd Street, and they had stuff over there and some of the rooms were fixed up and the cook was working over there every day. Why didn't I come out there and stay? Fine, I liked it. He said, "Now clear it with Bird before you do it." I called Bird and she said, yes, she'd love to have somebody out there from the standpoint of protection. Because the workmen sometimes failed to lock all doors of the house, and they were moving more things over from the apartment all the time.

G: I believe this was in that tape.

B: Yes. But what I'm saying is then--I don't know whether I put this in or not--they moved over, and when they'd come in at night he'd holler at me, "You awake?" I was wondering, this may be on the tape. He would ask me if I'd come in for a minute, he wanted to tell me something. I'd go in there, and Bird would have to undress around me and go into the dressing room to get her gown and robe. I guess she had put up with it so many years she was used to it. She'd put on her robe and she'd go into the next bedroom, which they called the slumber room, if it was indicated that he was wound up. If he got in before the newscast we had to stop talking and watch the newscast, the eleven o'clock, ten o'clock down here.

G: Did he listen in silence, or did he give his own commentaries on the news?

B: He might have a pungent word or two to throw in if it was something that he disagreed with. But then he'd start to pick up right where he'd quit talking before, something that somebody had told him that he wanted to find out more about. Then finally he'd get up, and [in] all this process he was still undressing I was taking notes. I quickly learned to take a pencil and a note pad whenever I was called up to that bedroom. Then he'd lay down on the bed. He would be laying there, and I'd think, "Well, he's going to sleep. I'll slip out." I'd start out [and he would say], "Wait a minute, Charlie, who said you could go?" And he'd tell me something else. Finally, he'd talk himself to sleep, and I'd go back to the room.

The next morning, just as regular as rain, at five o'clock there'd be a knock on the door, "Charlie, are you awake?" What the hell do you say to a vice president? "Yes, sir." "I was down in the kitchen fixing me a cup of Sanka, and I just made you a cup of coffee." He'd bring the coffee on in and say, "Would you like it?" "Yes, sir." And he'd bring it on in. He'd sit down on the bed and drink his Sanka. I'd take my coffee and put it on the night stand next to my bed and pick up my pencil and note pad, because I knew I was never going to drink that coffee. He'd start in right where he'd left off the night before and continue pointing out things and saying what more he wanted to find out about it. Then he'd say, "Now, when I get up there to the office at noon I want the answers to all these questions." So I'd get down

there about seven-thirty, eight o'clock and assemble enough people, if I could, to get the answers to as many of the questions as I could, then have a typed draft laying [on his desk] for him. But this was in the years of the great unpleasantness, the frustrating years to him.

G: Let me ask you about this.

B: But what he was trying to do was keep himself as well informed on everything he could. I think it was an honest-to-God effort to stay busy.

G: Really?

B: Yes.

G: How was he different as vice president, let's say, than before or afterwards?

B: He always gave me the impression of having a hell of a lot of important things to do when I would go up from the paper and go by to see him as Senator. He'd always be glad to see you, but he'd give you the impression, "Boy, you're breaking in on a hell of a busy schedule, so don't waste my time." So you'd say, "I just wanted to tell you hello," and get the hell out of the room. But as vice president he just didn't have all those things to do. Then when he became president again he had more than enough to do.

G: Do you think--

B: But he never did drop one of the great human qualities about him, [which] was trying to keep up with what was happening to people, the little town aspect of him. Their jobs and their sorrows and their sicknesses and their crop failures and their accidents--he still wanted to know. This was his old community, and as president he just expanded that community.

G: I guess it's interest in details about each person's life.

B: And he kept them. He kept them in his mind.

G: Do you think that if it had not been for the assassination he would have continued on for another four years as vice president, or do you think he would have, let's say, gone on into private business or something? Did he ever talk to you about his intentions?

B: Yes. He not only talked to me, I think he talked to the individuals and any groups. Even before they moved out to 4040 [4040 52nd St., The Elms] once a week we would have a staff meeting over at his apartment. It'd be Walter and sometimes Cliff, and George Reedy, me, and Liz Carpenter. Frequently, while we were eating fruit or canteloupe or something, he'd say, "I just don't know. . . ." I remember one incident. They had sold a small TV or radio station. I don't know whether it was radio or TV now at the time, but it was a Weslaco station, or two of them down there. And they got [what] in those days was a fabulous amount of money, two or three million dollars. He said, "I don't know why I just keep on working. I've got this. My retirement amounts to more than I actually take home in take-home pay. I just can't figure out why I keep on working now." Now this was to the whole group. Then at individual times he'd express his dissatisfaction with the ineptitudes of the people that Kennedy had on the Hill and Bobby's continual sniping at him.

G: Can you give me an example of this sniping? An occasion where, let's say, Bobby Kennedy--

B: We'd get a report that Bobby would say, "As soon as we get rid of

that oaf from Texas. . ." See, Bobby had never [supported Johnson]. You know, he was I guess a [Henry] Jackson man at the convention, and then he came down and tried to get John to get Lyndon to withdraw.

G: Do you think LBJ would have stepped down rather than to go on for another four years?

B: I think he had always had this obsession about the Johnson men dying young. He also always had an obsession about becoming paralyzed and senile, or what you would call it, as his grandmother, Mrs. Bunton, who had lost much of her mental capacity, and was confined to a wheelchair.

G: Did he talk about this?

B: Yes. "God, I just can't have this happen to me." But he also had this obsession about dying young, and he always thought about his heart attack. I believe that had the Kennedy operation continued with the inability to function in government as it was--there wasn't a Kennedy program put through until Johnson took over--the combination of the two, just frustration with the ineptness as displayed by the President and his crew, or by the crew of the President to put bills through, yes, he would have retired.

G: Excuse me, on the subject of him dreading some sort of paralysis as his grandmother had had, Doris Kearns reports that he told her of dreams in which he had envisioned himself paralyzed in such a manner. Did he ever say anything?

B: I never heard him say that he dreamed.

G: About being paralyzed?

B: No, and I don't know, but Mr. Johnson always had a habit of saying he didn't read. Well, I think that was a pose with him. I think he read more than people thought. I do believe that he read quite a bit about President Lincoln, because he would sometimes say things about President Lincoln that wouldn't normally be told by somebody to President Johnson.

G: I see. He had to get it out of a book.

B: He had to get it out of a book.

G: You mean in a speech, or just in informal conversation?

B: In an informal conversation.

G: Can you recall a particular example here? Are you thinking of something?

B: I remember when Buzz [Horace Busby, Jr.] and all of us were working on the second Gettysburg Address--that's the Johnson Gettysburg Address.

G: That is a good speech.

B: You should've seen Buzz's first draft on that! It was long. It was long. But at any rate, at that time he remarked to us that, "He may have written it on the train, but it was the seventh of eight draft that he wrote." Now unless he had read that someplace, I don't think anybody ever told it to him. You [were] talking about those dreams, and the thought popped into my mind, "Did he read about Lincoln's dreams and just to impress Doris took an affair in Lincoln's life and used it to project his own?" Now I'm not saying he did it. I'm not saying I have any basis for it, but knowing Lyndon Johnson, he could have done

it. I'm not saying that Doris is not right; I'm not saying that he didn't have dreams. I just never heard him say it.

G: Perhaps sometimes he would tell people things just to get their reactions?

B: Yes, to get their attention for one thing. Sort of the old story of first you have got to get the mule's attention. You hit him in the head with a cedar post.

G: Let me ask you some more about the--we could go in any direction.

B: We're not getting down to any bases here. I know that.

G: Okay. Let me ask you one more thing about that staff meeting which you discussed with all of his aides. What was the conclusion of the meeting? Did they decide anything?

B: Oh, no. This was just opening remarks on his part. He was going around the table describing to each one of us how much we made. See- "I've got a hundred thousand dollars worth of talent right here in the room, now what have you done for me lately?" sort of thing. And, "Why should I go on? I have just sold this TV station. I can give each one of you fifty thousand dollars. You can bank it, and I'll have enough and we'll all retire." But you don't know how much of it was in jest, you don't know how much of it was based on his feelings when he got up that morning.

G: Do you think he might have done this to encourage you, or try to get some encouragement from you for himself?

B: I think he was trying to [do] both, to encourage us to find more ways of getting him some prominence in a campaign that had a short-haired

guy who didn't have a gray hair in his head and who had charisma. He was the old pro set aside to fill an office so that the South and the West would vote with Kennedy. The Baptist element came in there, too; the church element came in there, too. But then once Kennedy was elected he had been sort of set aside in this vice presidential post, and he wanted by gosh to take part in the government. Now that's what brought the Bashir Ahmad thing about, the camel driver; which also brought about his intense drive for EEO signings and whatnot. While it wasn't apparent at the time, EEO brought a tremendous support for him and his administration from the black leaders; they remembered the way he'd thrown himself and all his staff members in there to get all these firms functioning as equal employment firms.

G: It seems that after his heart attack in 1955, and particularly during the vice presidential years, he seemed to have almost a different lifestyle than the early Lyndon Johnson. He travelled a lot, and he seemed to engage in more leisure, more of the lifestyle of someone who was affluent and enjoying almost a jet set rather than the driving politician of the earlier days. Is this an exaggeration?

B: He learned to mix a little relaxation in with his work. But one of the greatest visual memories of my life, I can still shut my eyes and see it, [is of] him paddling up and down that pool out there at 4040 on a raft and Juanita walking back and forth taking dictation. While he got his recreation Juanita got a walk in the sun.

G: Well--

B: You have got a lot of notes to transcribe.

G: Let's talk about his staff while he was vice president. Walter Jenkins, I suppose, was the key man.

B: Yes, he was.

G: What role did Jenkins play here?

B: Walter was the center of all operations in the office. He ran the office; he saw to the mail; he took all the telephone calls for the Vice President. He was the contact point for the vice president. People who knew Johnson realized that if they were talking to Walter that he would give Johnson an almost verbatim report of their conversation. If you had something you just wanted to talk to Mr.Johnson about and didn't want Walter to know about it, you told Walter, and either you'd get a call from Lyndon, "What is it you want?" or "Come on over here and tell me." I've seen this happen, that he wanted to tell <u>you</u> something. He'd send Mary Margaret, who had a desk in the office, out on a mission just to keep it between the [two of you].

G: Is that right?

B: Now this is another thing: if he figured it was an off-color joke, he wouldn't tell it in front of Mary Margaret. He wouldn't tell it in front of any of the girls. He wouldn't tell it in front of Bird. He'd wait and get the opportunity. There were certain old expressions that the Washington press corps tried to hang on him, about his crudity, but, I've been raised with them. I've heard my grandfather, who was one of the first cattle brand inspectors of the state of Texas, say, "That son-of-a-bitch hasn't got sense enough to pour piss

out of a boot." The idea of these as Johnson's expressions [is wrong]. Hell, I have heard them all my life.

G: They weren't necessarily statements of his own coining.

B: No, many were, I think. I hadn't heard them before. But many of them [weren't]. You know, "Let's get down to the nut cutting." That's an expression on every ranch.

G: Did Walter Jenkins have a role in the legislative program?

B: Never. No, no. Walter was the office manager. He gathered information. He was a very good secretary. He devised his own method of shorthand, which Mildred could read and I think Juanita could read, too. They could go back and read his notes if he wasn't around to read them. He'd call and say, "Go in there and see what it says on the pad." He'd tell Mr. Johnson that so-and-so had called, "Raymond Buck called from Fort Worth," for example, "and said--" and he couldn't recall just exactly how Raymond had put it. So they would read the notes to Walter. But at the end of the day, always, Walter had this twenty or thirty, forty or fifty or sixty pages on a yellow scratch pad in his shorthand, what they said, what he said, what they said, what he said.

G: That's something.

B: He was a meticulous individual and great in his field, and he also could do better with his mind than I can do with that calculator over there on running figures through it.

G: How about speech writing?

B: George, Walter, me and anybody else Lyndon Johnson [asked]--Bill White, the little Jew from the Manchester Guardian. I can't recall his name. But he was liable to ask anybody to write him a speech: "That's a good subject. Write me a speech on that." Well, they'd write a speech. He'd accumulate seven or eight drafts on the same subject. He'd say, "These are all terrific. Give me a speech of twenty-five hundred words that says everything that these say."

G: Can you recall the circumstances of writing the Gettysburg Address?

B: Oh, I think, as I say, Buzz wrote the first draft, and it was good but it was longer than hell.

G: I believe that was July, 1963. Is that right?

B: Probably. Or 1962. It was 1962. At any rate, then Johnson looked it over and said that he wanted it cut. He didn't want a speech any longer than Lincoln had made. So everybody took a hand at cutting and whacking and getting it down to what it was. I think Reedy took two or three times at it, and I took two or three, and Buzz took two or three. Then Buzz and George and I sat down and all three of us worked it, and then I think Buzz wrote the final clean draft from that.

G: Then would LBJ make his own embellishments in the end, or would he pretty much go with what you gave him?

B: Oh, you'd give it to him, and he'd make his own. He'd tell you at the start what he wanted to say. He'd say, "I'm going to make a speech," or, "I've got to make a speech at so-and-so and I want to say this and this and this and this. Go write it for me." He'd

give you an outline. Then he wanted you to work up an outline like you were working an English theme. It was still the school teacher in him. Oh hell, I could write my speech and then turn around and write my outline after that, but this is the way he worked. Yes, and you'd give it to him. I know he brought one up from the White House, the Kennedy speech, and it had marked up in the corner, "fourteenth draft, Bundy." I don't know whether he was digging me or George and Buzz or what, but he said, "Goddamn, look at that, fourteenth draft and you'all never give me over five." (Laughter). "You'all never give me over five." I still don't know whether that was the fourteenth draft by Bundy, or whether it meant the fourteenth draft and Bundy was particularly responsible for that draft.

G: Or maybe his copy of it.

B: Yes.

G: In regard to civil rights, did he ever talk with you about a change of heart that he had experienced, moving from the southern senators to the proponents of civil rights legislation?

B: No.

G: Did he ever reflect on what his personal odyssey here was?

B: No. I can tell you one thing. He got some statistics on the number of Negro high school graduates, the Negro college graduates, and then it amplified the college graduates three years later, five years later, ten years later. Not a one of them was working in their field. I mean it would be .00001 per cent of those that held a

BE in electrical engineering working as an electrical engineer; they'd be working as an electrician. This he decided was a tremendous waste of manpower, that we were just throwing aside, through prejudice, one of our great assets, that is, brainpower. Here were these educated people ready to move out into the world, and the white world wouldn't let them, closed down on them, blocked the door. He reflected on that. I heard him in conversations with small groups or chambers of commerce. I always thought he was his very best when he'd get about a hundred or two hundred men. He would get wound up, and he was a salesman at that time. But I think this did more if he ever changed his opinion.

I don't know at the start if he was just going along with the guys because this was the thing to do. I've often reflected that maybe that's what he did. Because going back to talking to Dorothy Nichols about when she was his pupil down at Cotulla--and I think Dorothy was one of the few white children in the school. At least 80 per cent of them or 90 per cent of them were chicanos, or Mexican-American or Spanish Americans or whatever they wanted to be called these days. But I have often wondered, and I don't think that Lyndon Johnson ever changed his opinion. I think that when he first went up there you went along to get along--or maybe he'd never given it a thought, really, that this great difference existed. It was as it always had been. The blacks were black and they did certain things, and the whites progressed to greater things because they

were white. Someplace along in there the change began and continued and, maybe, it was inhanced during his equal opportunity days, maybe it was before that, or maybe it was these statistics that he got hold of. I don't know where the statistics came from, but they were impressive.

G: That's an interesting point. Did you have an opportunity to observe his relationship with Richard Russell in these days?

B: Yes and no. I think I told Joe the story about Jack Daniels. One day he came out to 4040 with the President. I'd gotten home, I don't know how come I beat him home but I did, and he walked in the house and said, "Is there any Jack Daniels in the house?" I said, "No sir!" Because that's my favorite whiskey. I had a half bottle up in my room, but I wouldn't tell him that. He said, "Get some. Go down to the package store and get some. Dick Russell's coming out here." So I rushed down there and got two cases of Black Label, and I came back up and got one in the basement and a couple of bottles under the bar. The Senator came and told the butler--I can't think of who it was.

G: Gene Williams?

B: Gene. Gene brought him in, and I told the Senator that the Vice President was upstairs changing clothes but would be down shortly, could I mix him a drink. He said, "Do you have any Jack Daniels?" I said, "Yes, sir." While I was mixing the drink I said, "Senator, how is it you're from Georgia and you drink Tennessee whiskey?" He said, "Charles, I'll say that Georgia has some of the greatest bottlers in the world, but unfortunately they all use the brands

Mason or Kerr." Well, Mason and Kerr were fruit jars, and this is what all the Kentucky moonshine came in so he couldn't drink that because that was untaxed stuff. (Laughter) This is why he drank Tennessee whiskey. That story doesn't go over with people of your generation, but with people of my generation they know what you meant because you got Somervell County corn in a Mason jar. Or if you were down in Nacogdoches that's what you got it in.

G: Did he treat Russell with a good deal of deference?

B: Yes, he was very respectful to Russell and recognized Russell's power and political sagacity, I would say.

G: Did you ever hear him characterize Russell?

B: No. But I heard his jubilation when Russell decided to join the last two or three days of the campaign.

G: Campaign of 1960? What did he say?

B: He just said, "Dick Russell is coming; our troubles are over." Those are not his exact words, but that is the way I would characterize his [attitude]. You know, "It's all going our way now, Dick Russell's coming." Because Russell had held himself out of the race up to that point. And watching Russell and the way the crowds turned out in Houston I was inclined to agree.

G: Do you think he considered Russell a mentor in the Senate years?

B: I do. Not as much as he did Rayburn, but he certainly did pay him the same respect. I don't think he went to him with as many things, and I think he felt that he had more access to Rayburn than he did to Russell, that Russell, while a great teacher, wasn't his kindergarten teacher as Rayburn had been.

G: Both these people, Rayburn and Russell, were reserved, it seems to me, and rather redoubtable. I just wondered, when one thinks of Lyndon Johnson as being a great kidder, a man that really gets close to people, was it difficult for him to establish a--?

B: The associations I saw was that Mr. Johnson treated them both as people he deeply respected, people who were his elders. They weren't his peers. They were his elders, and he gave them that respect that he would give his own father or his Uncle Clarence.

G: He perhaps wouldn't be as lighthearted or wouldn't joke as much?

B: No, he was different the times I saw him with them. Of course, remembering from when he was with Mr. Rayburn, now, Mr. Rayburn was beginning to be ill with his cancer. So if he had wanted to I don't think he would have been playing games with [him].

G: I was wondering if you saw signs of how Mr. Rayburn's forthcoming death touched LBJ?

B: I think I told Joe [B. Frantz] he would say--we came down here a couple of times--"Now I'm not going to Texas this weekend. I'm just not going." I said, "Yes, sir." So I made plans with my wife for the weekend. I guess it was Thursday afternoon: "I don't know whether I shouldn't go down and see how Mr. Rayburn is doing or not." Friday morning it was: "Get us a plane down to Texas to see." Then going back up there [it was]: "Now, we're not going down there next weekend." Well, I just put a big X by that side that it was wishful thinking. He was going to go down there every weekend.

G: Was it hard for him to make these trips?

B: And it was hard for him to go back. Every death was hard on him. You could see it in him for two or three days. He was more somber. His general attitude was one of a man grief stricken. Deaths hurt him, and especially those who were people close to him. Even at times like that he'd have more of that tendency to tell that story about his father wanting to go back to the Pedernales where people thought about you when you were sick and cared when you died--cared for you when you were sick and thought about you after you died. I haven't gotten his phraseology on it, but that story would pop out in his speeches. He'd somehow work it around to where he'd tell that story to his audience. I think all the speeches he made when Mr. Rayburn was so sick he always had that story in there someplace. Sometime during the trip, say in a press conference or something, he'd use that story to illustrate a point. It was in his mind.

G: I've heard that he didn't like to go to funerals.

B: No.

G: And also that he didn't like to be alone, that he always liked to have people around him, or at least somebody with him?

B: Especially when he was down there at the Ranch in his retirement years, he was even more so that way. Now, getting back earlier, when he was senator he'd get up early in the morning and he'd sneak out real quiet so nobody would hear him. He'd go out and get in his car, and he'd drive all over the place.

G: Would he?

B: By himself. I think that fear of being alone was the fear of having an attack with nobody around. Because one night down there after retirement he asked me, "Charlie, Bird's staying in town and there's nobody in this house with me. Will you spend the night?" I said, "I was planning on going back tonight. I'll call Alice and tell her." He said, "If you would I'd like it." So I spent the night there at the Ranch with him and ate breakfast with him the next morning and then drove on up here. But he just wanted somebody in the house, I think. While he knew he had that communications device right there, it just gave him a feeling, a little more security that somebody was in the house with him.

G: Some have also suggested that he liked gadgets.

B: Oh, he loved gadgets.

G: Electric things, the car that could go into water at the Ranch, things of this nature.

B: Any new gadget. Amon Carter had the same thing. I know when he came back from overseas in 1945 the only thing new out was a new pen that would write under water; it was the heaviest fountain pen you ever saw in your life. It was the first ball point. But he was buying those and giving them away by the hundreds. I found out Lyndon Johnson was doing the same thing. (Laughter) I mean just to illustrate another common point with him.

G: Was it hard to argue with him?

B: With Lyndon? No, no.

G: You were not afraid to tell him no.

B: No. You sometimes realized that you were spitting into the wind when you did, but he still knew how you felt about it. If you wanted to let him know how you felt about it, you told him. There were some people who didn't. But I think that my first association with him as a reporter before going to work for him, had given me probably a different platform to make my pitch from.

G: He perhaps treated you with more respect than he would have if you had always--

B: I don't know. I know people that worked on his staff that would just stand up and tell him they didn't think he was right. Well, they might not say, "You're not right," but they'd say, "Here's another way to look at it" and bring their points out. Or you'd catch him in a crowd and make your points, and he wouldn't tell you to shut up, he'd listen.

G: I was wondering if he would argue for the sake of arguing.

B: He would. He would.

G: Just his debater's instinct?

B: He would. He could teach it round or square whichever way, or he could argue either side of the damned thing. I'll give you an example, and if this story was in the previous tapes, stop me. Jesse Kellam came up, this is when Medicare came in, and met him out at the house at 4040, The Elms. I wanted to call it Casa Blanca, but nobody would go with me on it. (Laughter) He brought up all the figures and had worked up a presentation on what Medicare would cost

KTBC Company. This was in the bedroom upstairs, Jesse and Mr. Johnson and me. I was just along listening. I didn't know why I was there, but Lyndon told me to come on in.

When Jesse got through with his whole presentation, why Lyndon said, "Jesse, that's right. It's going to cost us money." He said, "You've got that girl working for you who types all your contracts. She's the sole supporter of her mother and daddy. Okay, say they're in a car wreck and she's out there typing on that and she knows her hospitalization is not going to cover it, their hospitalization is not going to cover the hospital bill. She's got her mind on that and not on her contract, and she's more prone to make an error. Now if she knows that Medicare is taking care of all those hospital expenses, she's going to have her mind on that contract. Jesse, I'm for Medicare." I boiled it down. And Jesse just folded up his presentation, put it in his briefcase and said, "I'm catching the seven o'clock plane to Texas."

G: That's fascinating. How did you deal with his temper?

B: His temper? Well, it was according to what it was. I know I went in the office one day, and he was just mad as hell at somebody who'd just gone out. I don't know who it was because I came in the side door and they went out through the office. He just let me have it for fifteen minutes. He cussed me for something that I didn't even know about. But it didn't take but about ten words for me to figure out he wasn't talking to me, he was just blowing his steam. After he

got all through, this was my first experience with it, I matter of factly told him why I'd come in there and we got right on it. He was all over it.

G: Could he turn if off?

B: Yes. He was still mad, but what I had come to see him about was something he had sent me out to find out about.

G: Do you think these releases were voluntary, perhaps.

B: I think they saved his blood pressure. I don't know whether it was voluntarily or not, but it was a mechanism, I think, that enabled him to live as long as he did. Because I know the frustrations, what I think I know were the frustrations in the presidency, would have caused him to blow a top.

I don't know whether I told this story or not, but one day later he'd blown up like that again, and we had to go down to a meeting with Walter Reuther and his union people. We came out of the office, and as we did, he noticed one of the buttons on his coat sleeve was dangling. Stu Knight and Rufe Youngblood and me were in the elevator and he had just blown his stack at all of us, that we were late. "He had to go down there to this goddamned thing and didn't want to go, and to go late was the worst thing that ever was." He'd held us up. But at any rate he looked down and he saw this button loose, and he said, "Has anybody got a needle? I'm about to lose a button." I turned around and said, "Here, take one of yours out of my back." I could see Rufe and Stu's faces, and I thought they were going to

die. And he busted out laughing. (Laughter). But he did have a sense of humor, and he could take it when it was a--

Now one facet of humor he didn't have, and I can understand why, is go to the Gridiron and listen to those inane jokes constantly just poured on you about yourself when you're president or vice president and have to laugh heartily at it. The Texas Gridiron has one here in Ft. Worth. I was a former president of it, and I tried to get him to come down. Another guy was mayor of the city and president of the gridiron at the same time, Willard Barr. He tried to get him to [come]; he wouldn't come down. I asked him one day when we were on the plane or in the car or something, "You have a good sense of humor, why is it [you won't come]?" He said, "I just don't like to go and listen to these people make fun of the one or two or five mistakes that I made during the year that didn't turn out right although I meant well on them, when they could be talking about the hundred and fifty other things that I did right. But they don't mention them, they just talk about these five things."

I got to thinking about it, and by gosh, I think he was right. So when I came back to Ft. Worth I got out of the gridiron cast because of that. I take tickets now or act as the mid-show master of ceremonies when we're presenting awards, but I won't take part in that throat cutting. And some of it is throat cutting. We have portrayed Dolph Briscoe for two years now as "Janie runs Austin."

It's funny but it's sick humor, that's what I'm saying.

G: He perhaps always had problems with the press. What do you think were the sources of this difficulty here?

B: To use one of his own quotes that he took from a book, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Remember, he was editor of the paper at San Marcos. Somehow or another during those six months or nine months or whatever it was that he was editor of the paper, he decided, or it had magnified in his own mind, that he was a competent newspaper editor and he was a competent newspaperman. He could have been, but he would vacillate. He'd tell reporters things in bull sessions that I thought, goddamn, I wouldn't tell them in a thousand years.

G: What, for example?

B: Say during the campaign he'd talk about things that were going on in Washington. After he was vice president we had a press conference on Cuba, and one of the reporters asked a question about this bomber that was reportedly on the skids out at Convair. He said no, they were going to get the contract. He intimated that Convair was going to get the contract. I mean, these are the kind of things that I wouldn't have told them. I would advise him not to tell things that I wouldn't have told them. After he'd made this statement at the press conference Seth Kantor picked it up. Seth was the one that asked the question, and he picked it up and he wrote a story. Then he wanted me to chew Seth out for saying what Seth had said, and Seth had said it correctly.

But he did expect the reporters to be their own monitors of their news. I think reporters do tend that way, but I don't know that they've got all the yes's and no's that are in his mind to govern them. He thought that they should be able to read his mind and know which statements were off the record and which ones were on. I think that reporters will tend to keep something off the record or call back and say, "Was that on the record?" I know I've done it and I had Washington reporters do it. In other words, you look at that statement and say, "Goddamn, the man's going to crucify himself." So you call back and ask him or his staff, "Was that on the record or not?" But I think he vacillated between too little and too much all the time.

There were some reporters I do think he trusted. I always thought he trusted Bill White, and I don't think Bill ever did him wrong. He got damn mad at some over some little insignificant things and cost himself some very good friendships. Like Shaffer of Newsweek, who, just trying to set the atmosphere, said, "Johnson gazing through the mesquite trees on the lawn of his place." Well, Shaffer, a New York native, didn't know a mesquite tree from an elm or a hackberry or a live oak. Johnson blew up and went into a tirade and called Shaffer and told him he didn't have a goddamn mesquite tree on his goddamn place. Shaffer was so astounded by it that he thereafter was Johnson's enemy. He was a sensitive person, and the rest of the piece was perfect.

G: I think it has also been suggested that he might have tried too hard to influence reporters, to win them over.

B: He did. I had a reporter on my staff before I went to Washington, and I told Mr. Johnson about him. He would go to lunch with the city councilmen or the city judges or somebody. He'd enjoy all their hospitality, and he'd come back and he would write the meanest goddamn story about them he could write. I'd ask him about why he wrote that deliberately mean story. I might edit it or put it in the desk drawer or throw it back and say, "Not now" on it. His answer was "You've just got to show these sons-of-bitches every once in a while that you're not bought." But I think you can show them you're not bought by just not writing anything as well as you can by [this tactic].

G: Do you think also he might have been dissatisfied with their portrayal of him as a practical politician or manipulator rather than a statesman who did not make the deals that he did?

B: I think your question is your own answer there.

G: What I'm really asking is, did he--

B: Let me answer it this way. He wanted to be the very best, and he wanted you, his worker, to be the very best that you could be. I recall one instance he took Gene Williams down in the basement at 4040 and showed him how to shine a pair a shoes, because Lyndon Johnson when he was a bootblack in Johnson City one summer really learned how to shine a pair of shoes, and thereafter, by God, he was the best at shining shoes there was, which included spitting on the

cap of each shoe and then rubbing it after you'd finished shining it. That gave it a little extra gloss, he said. I have tried it. I couldn't see where it gave it a bit of extra gloss. All you had to do was rub that wet off.

G: But was he inclined to see himself as a statesman, a man above the political infighting, more than someone who was a great operator in the Capital?

B: He never, I think, thought of himself as an infighter. I think he thought of himself as a man with a goal, maybe an operator.

G: But was he pleased with this image, do you think?

B: Yes, I think he was pleased with this image. He was the greatest at that. Then when he became president he didn't want to be any more; he wanted to be the greatest president, and this was another thing.

He was talking after retirement about Nixon. He never talked about Nixon or John Connally or anybody else unless you asked him a question, and I tried never to ask the question unless it was just the two of us or, say, my wife or Bird or somebody like that, that you know, he felt free enough to talk in front of. I asked him about Nixon, and he said, "Well, Charlie"--hell, I don't know whether I asked the question or Alice asked it, but we'd been talking about it on the way down--" when you get to be president you've got no place to go. There's no other job to aspire to, so what you aspire to do is make the very best record you can. That's the only thing you've got

to leave behind. "This is what I tried to do," he said. "This is what Jack Kennedy was trying to do; this is what Roosevelt was trying to do." Then Truman. He went back down the list to Theodore Roosevelt, and he came back and then he said, "And this is what Nixon's trying to do. He's trying to make the very best record he can."

Of course this was before Watergate, and I think Nixon as president was trying. Somehow or other I think that man is psycho. Maybe there's another name for it, but I think he could separate himself entirely as Nixon the politician from Nixon the president and statesman. And I don't think they can be separated. But yes. I think Mr. Johnson wanted to be President Lyndon B. Johnson, the statesman, when he was president, and also the human president, the man who did his most for the people.

G: Did you try to get him to be more realistic in regard to his relations with the press?

B: Yes. But again, he had a set pattern of dealing with them, and I don't think anything on God's green earth could have changed it. I also think that the fact that Mrs. Johnson was a journalism graduate had something to do with his thinking, and her interpretations gained in the classroom differ from the actual practices in the field. I don't recall three incidents in twenty-six years of reporting stories I was involved with along with other reporters where off-the-record was violated. I mean, where I was personally concerned. But when that off-the-record is violated, boy, everybody hits it. When one

paper breaks it, then the next edition you can count on everybody being there. You say, "Well, that son-of-a-bitch, he let the cat out of the bag so we might as well go with him." One of those occasions it was an honest mistake; the other two weren't. But not a one of them involved Lyndon Johnson, not did any of them really involve a state or a national government figure. But that's off the subject, too. What I'm trying to say is that I don't think it was anything to be paranoid about. It might happen to you two or three times in your career, and I think normally if it did happen to a public figure that the reporter would come back and be honest about it.

G: Do you think that some of his problems might have stemmed from the press using Jack Kennedy as a standard, as a focus, rather than Lyndon Johnson, and more or less expecting the latter to conform to Kennedy's standards, whether it be humor or speech?

B: I think so. I think a lot of it was. This is something that I worked against, and I think Liz did, too. See George [Reedy] had been with Lyndon since Lyndon was a senator. George came out of Wisconsin, and one of his professors in college was Paul Douglas. George's great grandfather didn't die till George knew him, and he had run a stop on the underground railroad. Between Douglas and his own family he had a very liberal view, and I wouldn't say that George was universally liked by his fellow reporters when he went to work for Johnson. Some of this had carried through. It wasn't intentional on George's part. I mean, he hadn't alienated them, but people just flat

didn't like the Yankee bastard, especially reporters from the Atlanta Constitution, reporters from Texas. Even his accent was wrong. So I think this was a detriment. When George said, "You hear me, you'all come!" it was ludicrous. (Laughter)

But what I'm trying to drive at is that I think that part of Lyndon's press trouble stemmed from that, and it certainly wasn't Lyndon's problem or trouble or responsibility or fault. I don't know whether George ever realized it or not. But it was something that was there, and you could see it. I was there for two years, but goddamn, I never could figure out what to do about it. Now Jack Bell hated George Reedy's guts. Why I don't know. Oh, I know, George worked for the United Press, and Jack worked for the AP. It was just an old rivalry. And boy, I know if I were in one of those jobs I certainly wouldn't take a guy off one of the major wire services unless I confirmed he was well liked by everybody. Now I'm not saying that people in one wire service hate another wire service, that's not true, but sometimes there's a reporter just individually you just don't like. Just like you going to work for some organization and there's somebody in the organization you just don't like. You don't know why you don't like him, but you just don't like him. And as the years progress you like him even less! It might be a guy in a class with you or something else.

G: Reedy performed an array of functions, I suppose, serving as a think tank, a one man research [team].

B: Well, yes and no. It was where you were standing when Lyndon Johnson

had the idea. If you happened to be the first staff man he thought of, or he saw after he thought of it, you did it. I know several times I'd be working on a speech, and he'd think of something and the next thing would be that I was on a plane to Las Vegas or Hot Springs or Texas. In fact one night there was a meeting of the Texas Society, a big meeting, the dance. He came to the dance and danced with Alice and said, "Where's Charlie?" She said, "You ought to know. You sent him to Texas at five o'clock this afternoon." (Laughter)

G: Was this during the White House?

B: No, this was when he was vice president.

G: That is funny.

B: I told him my middle son was graduating from Baylor dental school and I'd like to come to the graduation. It was going to be on Sunday, baccalaureate and commencement both on Sunday. "Okay." I came down here, went to graduation, went to baccalaureate and went to graduation, spent the night with my brother-in-law over in Dallas. The next morning we were up at six-thirty eating breadfast and the phone rang. The White House operator said, "The President would like to speak to Mr. Boatner." My brother-in-law was visibily shaken. I took the phone and his voice said, "How long does it take to graduate a boy as a dentist, anyway? I need you up here!" I said, "Well, he graduated yesterday. I'm catching the eight o'clock plane today." He said, "Why didn't you catch one last night?" and hung up. (Laughter)

G: You think he was mad, or was he just kidding or joking?

B: This was Johnson.

G: Yes, but was he just [kidding]?

B: Oh, he was just kidding on that part of it, but he wanted me back up there. And by the time I got there he had two other people doing what he had called me about.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview III]

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