

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE R. BROWN

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. McCOMB

August 6, 1969

M: Let me identify the tape first of all. This is an interview with Mr. George R. Brown. I am in the Lamar Hotel, in Suite 8F. The date is August 6, 1969. It is 9:20 in the morning. My name is David McComb.

First of all, to get some information about you and your background, where were you born and when?

B: I was born in Belton, Texas, May 12, 1898.

M: And where did you get your college education?

B: I studied pre-med at Rice University for 2 years, went into the Marine Corps, came back from World War I and went to Colorado School of Mines--took my degree in geology and engineering. Went to work for Anaconda Copper Company--

M: Where was this?

B: In Butte, Montana. As a young geologist was in a mine cave, severely crushed, came back to Texas for my health in 1922.

M: You say crushed, does this mean you broke some ribs or what?

B: Fractured my skull, broke my arm, broke some ribs.

M: This was a cave-in? So then you came to Texas? And when did you start in the construction business?

B: I came back for my health. My brother Herman asked me if I--in the conversation it developed that he had received a contract for a lot of bridges from the flood of 1921. He had to do a lot of blasting under water to get the piers down, and I told him we'd been doing

that in Montana. He talked me into extending my leave of absence another six months and going to work on one of these bridges, which I did. When my leave was up by that time I was interested in pursuing the construction, so we decided I would resign from Anaconda Copper, and continue to work on these bridge projects that he had in Williamson County.

M: What was the name of the construction company?

B: Brown and Root.

M: Where does Mr. Root come in?

B: He was the brother-in-law of Herman. He was a farmer who lived in Williamson County and he joined the partnership with Herman in 1919. He was really just a financier--never did have any actual management interest in the company. When he died in 1928, I bought his interest from his heirs. He was a bachelor. Then rather than change the name to Brown Brothers, we thought Brown and Root was as good a name, and we kept the name Brown and Root.

M: Then the depression hit in the early '30's, late '20's, was that hard on the construction business?

B: Yes, very severe on the construction business.

M: How did you survive the depression then?

B: Well, we had a good backer named R. M. Farar Union (?) National Bank. In 1928 and in 1929, he told me the depression was going to come. And he told us to get liquid. We had a lot of 8 percent paper, paving paper we'd taken for work all over Texas. He said, "You'd better sell that paper."

I said, "Well, I'd take a 10 percent discount."

He said, "I don't give a damn how many discounts you take."

Go and sell it."

So we did. Went to Chicago and sold it just about three months before the crash. So when it hit we had money in the bank and we survived and could keep the key men on the payroll which most contractors could not.

M: What was this man's name again?

B: R. M. Farar.

M: F A R R A R?

B: Yes.

M: Then, during the depression was your business mainly in Texas?

B: Yes.

M: Road contracts--

B: There weren't many contracts. What there was was pretty skimpy.

M: Was it during this time that you met Alvin Wirtz of Austin?

B: We'd met him, I think, before that time--in late '20's.

M: Was he a business associate or what was his relationship?

B: No, he was a lawyer from Seguin, and, I think, a State Senator at the time we met him. We became good friends.

M: When did you first meet Lyndon Johnson?

B: I can't pinpoint it exactly but it was sometime after he was elected Congressman.

M: Did you meet him as a Congressman or did you meet him through Alvin Wirtz, or do you recall exactly how that happened?

B: I don't remember, really. Alvin was a friend of his and a friend of mine. Whether I met him through him, I don't remember. I went to see him in Washington and asked a favor of him.

M: Do you remember what the favor was?

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B: Yes. We had obtained a contract for the Marshall Ford Dam, first five basins, first unit, and the appropriation was used up. We needed to get another appropriation or we'd have to close the job down. This was a rather unique dam to begin with. It was on the Colorado River, and the Reclamation Department was overseeing it yet they had no land in Texas. So there was a hiatus in the law, just whether they had a right to be in Texas or not. If the Reclamation Department couldn't claim the land, the United States government had no land in Texas. The first part of it was let to us just pure and simple because it was badly needed and Alvin Wirtz and other people in Texas prevailed on Ickes to let this contract. So we had been in his district, and we asked him if he'd get this appropriation made.

M: Did he do that?

B: Yes, he did.

M: And the appropriation came through?

B: Yes. He made that one and made another one--took about three different bites in it and we finally got it completed in--oh, I think in about four years, 1940. We got the contract in '36 or '37.

M: Was this one of those dams of the Lower Colorado River--

B: Marshall Ford, so called Marshall Ford Dam, now its called the Mansfield Dam, I think.

M: Was that the biggest contract that you'd had up to that point?

B: Yes, it was.

M: To go back a little bit. Did Alvin Wirtz help you in getting that contract?

B: No. No. We just bid on it, we were low bidders.

M: I see.

B: Nobody helped us.

M: So then you met Lyndon Johnson and he helped you out on the appropriations. Then Lyndon Johnson ran for the Senate, the first time in 1941. Did you help him in that campaign?

B: Yes.

M: What did you do?

B: I did everything I could do to help him get elected.

M: Does this mean that you were raising money for him?

B: I didn't raise any money for him. I spent money of my own, but I didn't raise any.

M: You contacted friends and asked them to work for him.

B: Went to rallies and helped get people to speak for him. Where we had any work going, any organization going, we got them working.

M: Did Johnson seem to appreciate all of your efforts?

B: I'm sure he did.

M: Then, of course, he lost that election.

B: He got counted out of it, he didn't lose it honestly, I think.

M: I would assume, of course, that both you and Lyndon Johnson were disappointed in the results.

B: Yes.

M: Then in the future campaigns, did you also help Lyndon Johnson again?

B: Yes, in '48.

M: In much the same way?

B: In the same way.

M: You spent money on him--

B: Organized everybody we could to get a segment--all through the business segment, labor segment, to be for him. The different so-called precinct workers.

M: Did the oil people of Texas fairly well support Johnson?

B: I don't remember whether they did or not. I know some of them did. I don't know how many of them didn't. I don't remember.

M: Now during all this time when Lyndon Johnson is a Congressman and a Senator, finally, your friendship with Johnson must have grown and developed. Is this true?

B: Yes, we had two things very much in common that we used as main topics of our conversation, from the very beginning when I first talked to him in Washington. He had no real reason to help me or to help Brown and Root. My brother Herman had voted for him when he ran for Congressman. I didn't live there in Austin, his district-- I lived in Houston, but it was a thing which would be good for the district which he represented. The payroll and the improvements and so that's the real basis he helped us on. It wasn't because he had any love for me or my brother. But in having a common interest well, I got to know him.

M: I see. And that common interest then was helping the people in his district?

B: Helping his district.

M: I see. Was there any other point of interest between you?

B: Yes, education. I'd always been in agreement about having mass education in the United States all the way through college. I always thought there ought to be some way any boy who wanted to go to college could go!

He had the same idea. He wanted to do it a different way. The only argument we ever had on this subject was how to do--the mechanics rather than the fact that it could be done. Herman's wife, Margaret, was very much interested in education. She'd been a teacher before she married Herman, and so my wife was interested in education and the five of us would have--sometimes Mrs. Johnson was there--and the six of us would have hours and hours of more or less seminars of what we thought ought to be done to save America and save the young people of America. This was in the late '30's and mid-'30's, when it was very much the question of how to do it.

You remember his first responsibility in Texas with the government was as head of the NYA, the National Youth Administration. So he was interested in young people, and we were interested in young people. At that time I was fairly young--10 years older than he was--but I was still young and wanting to do the same things that I wanted to do when I was 18 years old, 19 years old.

So we had that in common, and that's where our friendship really cemented. He was very much an admirer of Alvin Wirtz, and I was too, and the three of us would meet when he'd come home from Congress and talk about the needs of the world, especially the United States and what to do to improve it. We had these academic talks and discussions for hours on end.

M: What was the main point of difference between you and Johnson on education ideas?

B: The mechanics was the only difference. How would we finance it. How would we get these boys in school.

M: Do you remember what Johnson's ideas were on that?

B: Pretty much what he finally--kind of an aid to them. He wanted them to do some work to pay it back, those who could. I was a little more radical than he was. I wanted him to endow each boy when he was born where if he wanted to go to college he could. Just like he could go to high school, if he wanted to go.

M: When you would get together with Johnson and Wirtz and others, where would you generally meet? Would this be--

B: Oh, numerous places, most often in my brother's home in Austin, at our office, or Alvin's office, or Johnson's office.

M: Wherever was convenient. Did you ever meet at your ranch? I believe you had one in Falfurrias, or somewhere near there?

B: No that was years later. That was after World War II. This was all in the '30's and '40's.

M: Would you meet at your ranches later on then?

B: Well, in the '40's we met back at his place in Johnson City or we'd meet over in the place we'd bought over in Bracketville--Fort Clark --but that was way along in the late '40's and the '50's.

M: Did you find Lyndon Johnson to be an intelligent man?

B: Yes, I consider him very intelligent. I think he's kind of a human dynamo that's always wanting to run. He needs a governor all the time to keep him from overdoing it.

M: He had a great deal of personal, physical energy then?

B: That's right. And he's a great fellow to try to win his arguments. If he couldn't win it one way he'd go back and try to win it another way.

M: Was he an easy man to talk to? I mean, when you'd want to talk him you could call him on the phone in Washington or something like that?



- B: Oh, yes, we're close enough I could talk to him the same as I could my brother.
- M: But, of course, he wouldn't always agree with you.
- B: Oh no. We had many arguments, many arguments.
- M: Did he have a sense of humor?
- B: Yes, I considered he had a sense of humor. He had it different from a lot of people, but he had a good sense of humor. If he thought he was losing an argument with you he'd always get off on some joke to try to get off the subject then come back and hit you again on another side. He didn't like to lose an argument.
- M: Did you personally like this man? Did he appeal to you as an individual?
- B: I personally liked him because he really worked. That's what appealed to me more than anything. He wanted to do things for the betterment of mankind and we had that in common. For that reason I did like him, did like to be around him. He was fine, because he always had new ideas. He was a man full of ideas. A lot of them were impractical I thought, and that's where we got into most of our arguments.
- M: Did you get to know Mrs. Johnson, his mother, too?
- B: Yes, knew his mother very well. She was a great person. She was the one I think [who] was really responsible for Lyndon's going as far as he went, because she gave him these ideas that he held onto all through his life.
- M: Where'd you meet Lyndon Johnson's mother?
- B: In Austin. She used to live with him.
- M: How did you find Mrs. Johnson? Was she helpful to her husband?

B: Oh yes, she's first-rate in every way.

M: Do you have any opinion on how she played her role as First Lady?

B: I thought she was great, myself. I might have been prejudiced. I think everybody who knew Lady Bird admired her. I don't know anybody who knew her that had a bad word for her, whether they're Democrats or whether they were Republicans. It didn't matter, they liked her, because she was out-giving and wholesome and thoroughly honest with you in her relations and conversation. [There] was nothing hypocritical about it in any way.

M: Now to correct a misconception seemingly held by the public, I mentioned earlier that Brown and Root apparently had grown to great extent by government contracts. You mentioned that this was not true. What's the basis for the great growth of Brown and Root then?

B: During the depression years we had government work but as soon as the depression was over and the War was over we were a comparatively small company. In the '40's and the '50's and the '60's has been our big growth. In the last 25 years we've gone from a very small company doing 2 or 3 or 5 million dollars worth of work a year to a company

doing 5 and 600 million dollars of work a year. And 85 to 90 percent of this 7 to 800 million dollars of work came from the private section, not from the public section.

M: And this, of course, is all over the world?

B: Yes.

M: Was there any point in time where Brown and Root sort of took off, where it made the transition from a small company to a large company?

B: We had several plateaus, of course. The first plateau [was] when the depression was over and we had enough liquidity and the only contractor in Texas that had enough cash to build this Marshall Ford Dam. So we got into a higher plateau there than we were. Then from that we got the work in Corpus Christi. That put us on another plateau, higher than the one than we had at Marshall Ford. Then we built all these ships for the navy--355 of them. That was another plateau. After the War we had these engineers whom we'd accumulated building ships and designing all the inside of the ships. We put them to work on chemical plants and industrial plants of all kinds, power plants, and became a very large integrated engineering-construction concern --which we are now. We're one of the biggest involved in the construction-engineering business in the United States and overseas.

M: Did Lyndon Johnson have anything to do with your contract for the Corpus Christi?

B: Yes, he was helpful. I think he was on the military committee in the House. I think he spoke a good word for us to Admiral Ben Morrell who was then Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks who had the responsibility for letting this contract.

M: Did Franklin D. Roosevelt have anything to do with this?

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- B: Not that I know of--any more than he would any other contract that was let through the government.
- M: Then did Brown and Root get this contract on the basis of the lowest bid?
- B: It was a fee contract. We got in on the basis that we could and would perform it quicker and cheaper than anyone set of contractors. I don't know how many were applying for the work, but we had a joint venture made up of W. S. Bellows and Company, Brown and Root, and a group of contractors--which included the one Henry Kaiser was in on the West Coast.
- M: During the war you built all of these ships down here on the Houston ship channel. Again you had to have a contract to do that, I assume. Did Lyndon Johnson have anything to do with that?
- B: Not a thing in the world, not a thing in the world. The late Albert Thomas--who was a friend of mine and went to school with me at Rice University, told Admiral Sam Robertson, who was in charge of the Bureau of Ships for the Navy, that he thought that we were a real asset to the Navy if he needed us down here.

I got a call one day saying that they had awarded four pursuit crafts (submarine chasers) to a firm here in Houston and they were about a year behind. This was in 1940--late '40 or early '41. Would I come up to Washington and talk to him about it? I went up there and they had let a contract on a fixed price basis to a local shipbuilder who wasn't able to perform. They didn't want to cancel him out, didn't want to hurt him. They wanted to know if we would take the contract if they would get him to assign it to us. And after much conversation with my brother and L. T. Bolin and others--we'd never

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built a ship in our life--we knew what the contract price was, so we decided that we could do it. We didn't have a shipyard, but decided to undertake the contract. Then we bid on four more--on a fixed price basis and were low bidder on those. Then that went into late '41. Pearl Harbor occurred, and they decided we were good shipbuilders and they gave us the bulk of these new ships on a fee basis.

M: Well, it would seem that the Navy had anticipated future trouble. Didn't they start building the Corpus Christi station before the war?

B: Yes, in 1940, a year before this.

Roosevelt was convinced when Hitler overran France in early 1940 that he would try to invade us through Mexico. FDR thought there ought to be a naval training station built in Texas at once. We had a reputation at that time of doing things on or before time, of moving and moving fast, which was one of our plusses to Admiral Morrell. Morrell used to come and tell us that President Roosevelt thought if we didn't get this thing built real quickly we'd get caught short. But we put everything we had to it and built it in about a third less time than he and the Navy thought we could do it in.

M: Do you suppose that Lyndon Johnson put in a good word for you to the President, FDR, on that?

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- B: No. I don't think FDR even knew we were living. This was done pure and simply by the Navy Department, in both instances. I've been in the Marines: I have a lot in common with them, talk their language. I convinced them that we were the ones to do it--purely on the reputation we had. We had to get everybody down here to say we were everything we said we were--bankers, people we worked for down here like the oil companies who wrote the Navy Department that we do what we say we would. We never undertook anything we didn't finish. Those are the kind of things that got the job for us.
- M: After the war, I believe it's correct, that you and your brother formed Texas Eastern Transmission Company?
- B: That's right.
- M: And bought the Big Inch and Little Inch?
- B: That's correct.
- M: Did Lyndon Johnson have anything to do with that?
- B: No. We had to bid on it.
- M: You put in a bid?
- B: Yes. You put in a bid, and you're the high bidder and they award it to you.
- M: Right. And what about the Manned Spacecraft Center? Didn't Brown and Root hold the major contract on that?
- B: No, we designed the Manned Spacecraft--engineer and architecture. We didn't build any of it but we designed it.
- M: There's been a lot written about that, and how it came about--
- B: I don't know what you've been reading. You're right, there's been a lot written. The facts are pretty plain, I think, how it came to

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be here. Again, Albert Thomas played a major part in that. He told me if we could get some 1,000 acres of land there we could put this Manned Space Center here. We had to come up with something. Everybody wanted it, and he couldn't get it for Houston or Harris County unless we got some land.

So knowing about this big ranch the Humble Oil Company had, I went to the head of the Humble Company and he agreed to give a thousand acres. Albert asked me to get Rice University to do it because he wanted to get Rice involved. So the Humble Company promised to give it to Rice University if they'd use it for the Manned Space Center. They in turn gave it to the government. Then after they got the 1,000 acres, the Manned Space Center came down, and looked at it and said, "That isn't enough, you need 600 acres more!"

I went back to the Humble Company and they said, "We're not going to give you any more land. We've given you all we can. You'll be wanting the whole ranch."

So I argued with them and finally said, "Rice will buy it from you" and then Rice [University] did buy it from them. So that's what set the deal and Manned Space Center was put in Houston.

M: So then the government really got, what, 1,600 acres?

B: Sixteen hundred acres.

M: Lyndon Johnson at the time was Vice President?

B: Yes, that's right.

- M: Did he have anything to do with all of this?
- B: I'm sure he did. He was Vice President; anything that had to do with Texas, he was for it. You know that. Johnson was involved with the space effort while in the Senate! Albert and Lyndon worked as a team.
- M: Here again--you may well be able to correct some of the criticism that's been directed on this--I have read it hinted that Lyndon Johnson got the Manned Spacecraft Center in a deal with Kennedy--a political deal--in reward for Lyndon Johnson running as Vice President. Is there any truth in that?
- B: I don't think there is one iota of truth in it. Lyndon Johnson on the overall picture was the father, you might say, of the space idea--of putting the man on the moon.
- M: How about the Project Mohole. Did Lyndon Johnson have anything to do with that?
- B: Not a thing. He didn't even know we had this contract!
- M: Again, this was a situation where you put in the low bid?
- B: Well, again, it wasn't low bidder. You were picked by your qualifications because it was a fee job. They thought they had enough information that they could let a contract



to drill a hole. That's what they let to Brown and Root to drill this hole. We got into it, and we found out we needed a lot of research and development before you could possibly attempt to drill a hole, because there are so many unknowns in the type of materials, 15 thousand feet of water that you had to have your pipe suspended in before you ever got to the bottom of the ocean. So we had to go to work and do all this research and development. That's where the Congress got lost in what was going on, because the overruns came from the research and development, not from the contractors. We never did get to drill the hole because we were still working on the research and development--just like they did on going to the moon, like they did on any other things that's completely unknown. We had to do every frontier you can think of in the way of materials—what kind and how to use them had to be developed.

Out of this, much knowledge was developed, which oil companies can use in drilling wells out in the Gulf of Mexico, the Persian Gulf, or anywhere else. But it was developed by Mohole Project sponsored by Brown and Root.

M: Do you think it's still feasible to drill such a hole?

B: Oh yes, and it should be done.

M: What's to be gained by such knowledge?

B: I think there are a world of things to be gained. The most basic thing to be gained is to see what's under the crust. I think it's kind of like what's to be gained by going to the moon. That moon dust didn't bring anything, but all the different research and development that had to be done to get a man on the moon advanced us terrifically in every sphere you can think of.

And the same thing--to have materials that will stand the heat and the strength to go down 35-40 thousand feet below--into the Mohole segment, below the crust, it would bring all kinds of knowledge to us. Not only the geological knowledge of what makes the earth--as they want to know what makes up the moon. All this knowledge, as you know, in itself,--you can't put a dollar sign on it. But in the actual fall-out, that's where the pay off comes and when the benefits come.

M: Were there any other contracts that came from the government that Lyndon Johnson played any great role in that you recall?

B: The only contract he ever played any role in was the Corpus Christi Naval Station.

M: Now, there's a rather famous incident--(machine turned off a moment)  
Let me ask you about this rather famous incident when Lyndon Johnson had his heart attack at your ranch in Virginia. Let me ask you about the ranch first. Why did you acquire a place in Virginia? Did you just like the country, or would it bring you near Washington?

B: Back in those days, you traveled by DC-3's. If you got hung up in New York or Washington on Friday and you had to be back there on Monday, well, it didn't pay to ride a DC-3 ten hours to get back to Houston and ride 10 hours back. There was nothing to do. We bought this farm during the Eisenhower Administration. We had some friends up there and we felt we needed to get outside of Washington, and have a place to go on weekends. So we just put our man, Oltorf, in Washington out looking for one. He found this one and we bought it.

M: This is in Middleburg?

B: Middleburg. Bought it sight unseen over the telephone.

M: And it turned out to meet your specifications?

B: Oltorf looked at it, gave us all the details about it. It wasn't a ranch it was a farm--about 450 acres.

M: Senator Johnson came down there frequently?

B: When I got caught there on weekends, frequently?

M: Spend the weekend, relax? Did you hunt down there, or what did you do for recreation?

B: Just get out in the country, walk, go swimming in the swimming pool, maybe, mainly just be in the country to get away from the city.

M: And it was in 1955 that he had this heart attack there. Do you remember that incident?

B: Yes.

M: Can you tell me what happened?

B: Well, I had a group of people down there who were going to play bridge that weekend.

M: Who all was there, do you recall?

B: Senator Clint Anderson and his wife and two other couples, whom I've forgotten now.

M: Lady Bird was not there?

B: She was not there. She couldn't come as the children had something to do, had to be at a party or something, and she had to be with them. So he said he'd come down and have lunch with us and go back that afternoon. Well, we were going to have lunch about 12:30 or 1:00 o'clock. He got there about 1:30.

He said, "The reason I was late, I lost my temper with the reporters. They tried to put words in my mouth, tried to make me say something

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I didn't want to say, and I lost my temper. I feel like I need some soda, do you have any cooking soda?"

I said, "Well I've got anti-acid."

He said, "Well give me some. My stomach's upset."

We had three floors and I took him down to the first floor where there was nobody there but President Johnson and me. We were sitting on the sofa and he said, "Well, that didn't do me any good; get me a drink of whiskey." I got him a drink of whiskey. By that time I began to get suspicious that maybe it was something besides upset stomach. Then I got Clint down, who had had a heart attack himself previous to that.

M: Did you suspect heart trouble at this point?

B: Yes. So Clint came down and looked at him and he said, "George, I think he's having a heart attack. Get a doctor." So I got a doctor for him. I myself had a heart ailment and I had pills I'd been carrying, and I asked him if he wanted some of that. He said, "I'll take anything, I've got a terrible pain." The doctor got there, and he said he ought to be taken to the hospital as quickly as possible to get him under the oxygen.

M: Did you have trouble finding a doctor?

B: No, we got him pretty quickly, but it took him 15-20 minutes to get there.

M: Was this your personal doctor?

B: In Middleburg. He went with him in the ambulance, got an ambulance right away.

M: What's his name, do you know?

B: Oh, I can't recall it right now.

Frank Oltorf was there, and Frank Oltorf and the doctor went with President Johnson to the hospital in Washington.

M: Did Johnson resist?

B: No. He knew he was sick.

M: Feeling bad, huh?

B: He knew he was sick. There was no problem there at all. I had called Lady Bird and told her. I had all these guests there, I didn't go in with him.

M: And you called Lady Bird--

B: And told her that he was going to the hospital, and I thought she'd better meet him there.

M: Did she take this all rather calmly?

B: Yes, oh yes. She said, "I'll be there."

M: And then--did he go into Bethesda, the Navy Hospital?

B: Yes. And he'd only been there just about 30 minutes when he went into shock. Of course, that's why the local doctor wanted to get him there before that--to get him under an oxygen tent. They saved his life by 30 minutes because of this young doctor who took him up there.

M: Did you see Johnson after that?

B: Oh yes.

M: I mean when he was recovering?

B: When he was recovering, yes.

M: Do you recall that he talked about it at all?

B: No. He joked about it was all. [He] said I was a pretty poor doctor because I couldn't make the analysis of what was wrong with him. It took me too long.

M: And did he recover fairly quickly?

B: Oh no, he was in the hospital, I think, six to eight weeks--a long time--like any of those people who have thrombosis. Apparently he's just as good now as he ever was. Time has proven that.

M: Did you happen to work for Johnson in the 1960 campaign?

B: Yes, sure.

M: Did you want him to run for the presidency?

B: I wanted him to run for President, yes.

M: Were you disappointed when he took the Vice President's position?

B: Yes.

M: Did you think that that was an unwise move?

B: I didn't think it was unwise. I just thought it was wasting his time. I thought he had more capability than to be wasting his time as Vice President when he could be Senate Majority Leader. I knew he'd be awfully restless as Vice President. But he wanted to take it, so I supported him.

M: Did he ever talk to you about why he took the Vice Presidential position?

B: Oh yes, he talked to all his friends. He had to say why he did.

M: What was his reason then?

B: It was the second biggest job in the political arena. He'd been Congressman; he'd been a Senator; he'd be a Vice President, and someday

he might be President. He was going up the ladder, and he said, "If you were in your business you wouldn't miss the opportunity to take a promotion. This is a promotion, so I thought I ought to take it."

M: So you went ahead and supported the Johnson-Kennedy ticket, is that right.

B: That's right.

M: Again, was your support the same way of contributions of money and talking to your friends and that sort of thing?

B: That's right.

M: Did you do this same kind of campaign work again in 1964 for Johnson?

B: Yes.

M: Did you have any contact with Johnson shortly after the assassination of Kennedy?

B: Yes, I think I did.

M: Do you remember anything that was said during that period?

B: Well, everyone was so shocked there wasn't much to say. This was in November. I went up to spend a day with him at his Ranch, after Christmas. He was showing doubt about some of the things he ought to do or ought not to do. And we argued and talked for hours on the problems he had of the day--which as you know he always liked to throw his problems out to his friends and ask for advice and then not take any advice you give him. But he does get a sounding board to base some of his opinions on and judgment on what he's going to do and that's his technique. We did that for several hours.

M: In sessions like that, could you argue with him?

B: Oh certainly.

M: You could disagree with him?

B: Oh yeah.

M: He wouldn't get mad?

B: Oh, he might get mad but it would be in a friendly way, of course-- nothing vicious about it.

M: I've heard that Johnson is an impatient man, and that he does get angry on occasion, is that correct?

B: Yes. Well he's just a human dynamo. He's just running at top speed all the time. His mind is running; his body's running; he's just wanting to do things.

M: Did you have much contact with Johnson while he was President?

B: I wouldn't see him 1/10 as much of the time as when he was Vice President, because he had things to do and I didn't want to take up his time. No reason for me to see him.

M: Did you ever visit him in the White House?

B: Oh, yes.

M: On those occasions, was it just a social contact, or--

B: Mostly yes, same old thing, same old technique approach; ask my advice on something, hear what I thought and why I thought it.

M: Do you remember any particular topic that he asked you?

B: No, they were just all something imminent right then that he had to make a decision on.

M: Have you had any contact with Johnson since his retirement from the Presidency?

B: Yes.

M: Has he reflected at all about the job of President?



B: How do you mean--reflected?

M: Well, talked to you about what he has been through and what--

B: No, he didn't do it that way at all. He's a man who lives in the future. He doesn't live much in the past. All he's talking about is how he's going to get his School of Public Affairs going and how he's going to get his Library going and what he's going to do there. He very seldom talks about the past--never been one to talk about the past. When he got defeated for Senate in '41, he knew good and well that they stole the election from him, he didn't want to talk about. If you want to do things, you can't talk about the past. You've got to think about the future and that's the way he was.

M: It seems that a man who has all the responsibilities of a President, then all of a sudden not to have those responsibilities, and being a man of great energy, he'd have trouble slowing down.

B: Well, I don't think there's any doubt that he is having trouble. I took him off on a fishing trip and he was just like a caged lion. He couldn't slow down. I've been to see him once since then and he was like a caged lion and I'm going to go up to see him again this week. But as some of his friends in New York told me, he's like a deep sea diver, he's been down pretty deep and it's going to take him a long time to decompress. Well, it is. It'll take him a long time. He's almost back to atmospheric pressure.

M: Let me give you an open question to cover anything that may have been missed. Is there any comment you wish to make about your relationship with Lyndon Johnson, or any incident that comes to mind you wish to record that in my ignorance I haven't asked you about?

B: I don't know of any comments. I think we're pretty lucky to have

Johnson, both during the Eisenhower Administration as Minority Leader and Majority Leader, and as Vice President and as President. I think he's a great public servant. I think he served well, and I think he was well prepared, tried to learn his lessons, tried to do the things he felt were the right things. I think he's one of the greatest public servants I've ever known. I think history will prove that later, in spite of what some of these unfriendly people think.

The democratic processes that we have to go through--I think that when a man gets the responsibility of being a Senator or Majority Leader or President of the United States, he naturally puts forth I think automatically the best that's in him. He gives the best he's got, no matter who he is. I think Johnson did it, and I think Nixon will do it, and I think Eisenhower did it. I think they all put the best they had. Now where that best comes to in your level of brain power and judgment may not be equal, but they all had the same amount of effort put back of them.

I think that Johnson's a great fellow who liked and loved his friends, and he does that, he likes to be around people he can trust and know they haven't any ulterior motives, that they're going to do something or get something out of him. Like we all do--we all like to be around those kind of people. He's human in that respect. He's so tireless, such a hard worker that he tires you out. You can't take too much of Johnson. He gets you tired, just being in the same room with him following his thoughts and keeping up with his thoughts. I can do it for a few hours and then I have to get up and get out and do something else. And he's going to have a hard time adjusting,

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in my opinion. And what he's talking about now [is] teaching in a school. I think it's going to be pretty dull compared to what he's been doing. He may be able to adjust himself.

But having been a President of the United States, there's so many things he can't do. He can't come back into business. He can't get back into politics. He can't get back into a lot of things he would like to get into because of the very fact he is a former President. So he's got a hard row but I think he'll come out on top when he gets through.

M: Well, I thank you for your time, I thank you for the interview.

B: You're welcome.

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Gift of personal statement  
by George R. Brown

to the  
Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C.397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, George R. Brown, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed:

George R. Brown  
George R. Brown

Date:

July 5, 1972

Accepted:

Harry J. Middleton - for  
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