

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE CHRISTIAN (Tape #5)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

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C: I'm not sure I'm the best source for that kind of thing.

F: The only thing I was thinking about on the VIP's was what you did in the way of the joint communiques, you know, when they had met and agreed on something.

C: When we had a foreign visitor coming, usually of course, it was the chief of state or the head of state or foreign minister.

F: You yourself didn't make yourself any extraordinary preparation?

C: Yes, some. I tried to prepare the press by getting as much material as we could on the visitor, because most of President Johnson's visitors were people not very well known in Washington. Only occasionally you got a Peron or a Harold Wilson.

F: Particularly with all these emerging nations.

C: Yes. And he had a great many. There was barely a two week period that went by that we didn't have someone from Africa, generally, some from Asia, and a few of course from Europe. But if it was an especially critical visit--like the Thais, for example, came over, it seemed to me, rather frequently. At least every seven or eight months it seemed we had someone from Thailand here. That usually involved fairly careful preparation simply because their visit pertained a good bit to U.S. military support and this sort of thing. It was always touchy with countries like Korea, for example. Because our relations with Korea were always a little bit strained over how much we were willing to commit to them, or what we wanted out of them in exchange for the commitments that they wanted. They always

seemed to be in holy terror that there was going to be another war just any minute. The DMZ was going to be violated and that we'd always be prepared to pitch in and help them of course, which we were.

The press always, probably, got a slightly general view of what the visits were and sometimes were never told, of course, of some of the meatier transactions that took place. But most of the foreign visitors came primarily to establish a better relationship with President Johnson, and many of them came with the idea of getting some aid for some purpose. So, frequently it was a case of them wanting to express themselves as being friends and wanting some help. We usually tried to get up ahead of time what sort of American involvement there was in a country, if there was any at all--if so, what was it, what type of aid was the US giving them, and the monetary levels, and that sort of thing. We tried to get all that information together for the press ahead of time.

If the man had a press spokesman occasionally--very occasionally--that man might come over ahead of time, particularly from Germany of a country of that significance, and we would have the opportunity to work out between ourselves a little advance work--the same as we advanced President Johnson's visits overseas. Sometimes they did a little advance work too.

More often than not we were given the information that the man was coming. Then as the time neared for the visit we would schedule special briefings with the press, have some expert on that country to give them the background on the visit and on the man, and generally prepare them for the visit.

The first involvement of the press and the press secretary with

the visitor would be the arrival. If there was a formal arrival on the south lawn, we were involved in setting up the TV and making sure the arrangements were right, taking the press out--just the usual routine of covering the ceremony. Frequently, the President would allow pictures in his office of the group. It developed into a more or less routine type fashion and didn't amount to a great deal.

Afterwards I was usually just given a communique that was prepared either beforehand or during the course of the meeting. The staffs of the visitor sometimes met at the same time the President was meeting privately [with the visitor].

F: Did anybody ever balk on you?

C: Oh, no, not really.

F: And mess up your script?

C: I don't recall any great problem on that. The only problem we ever had--I think one time possibly the press secretary of the Prime Minister of Australia probably inadvertently went a couple of steps beyond the communique by using a colorful expression. I can't remember the context of it now, but he said something about a lot of "huffing and puffing" or something. It gave a little flavor to it.

F: It hadn't been written in.

C: Yes. But that was fairly uncommon and didn't cause any particular problem. Then, when we planned joint briefings, it was usually with the Germans or the British or some one of that type power. No problems arose on them. We'd decided beforehand what we were going to say, and we stayed pretty much with it.

One time, I think it was on our famous Canadian trip to Montreal,

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we put out not a communique but a report on the visit that was within guidelines that we had agreed to. The Canadians went considerably beyond that in their report on what had happened and what the Prime Minister had told the President and this sort of thing. That created a problem because the American press couldn't understand why we weren't as candid with them as the Canadians were. But that was the only incident I remember.

F: Everything went wrong with the Canadian trip.

C: Everything else was wrong with the trip, anyway. It was such a messed up thing anyway that it didn't matter.

F: Did other major countries advance as carefully as we did?

C: No. Nobody travels like the President of the United States. We shocked some countries we went into with the type of entourage and advance preparation that we had to have. It's just one of those things. The American President is the most precious commodity in the world, I guess, and he's treated as such. It is, in a way, rather embarrassing to travel to another country under that type circumstances. It's almost like the king of the world moving in on some inferior country. Many of them just don't understand it.

I think the first one I encountered was New Zealand. They just couldn't believe that all of that was necessary. But they didn't realize that when the American President travels, he travels with dozens and dozens of press. The British might have three or four press people, and the Canadians will have a few, and the Mexicans will have a few, the Australians might have one or two or none, but nobody else does. You just don't have the attention focused on these other people.

And the Russians--when Kosygin came to this country, he didn't bring a bevy of reporters with him. He had one TASS man, and that was it.

F: He was good enough for all of them. Did he bring an equivalent of you that you had to work with?

C: No, there is no equivalent apparently in the Soviet Union. There isn't any spokesman as such. There was a gentleman I worked with. He was, I believe, a TASS man.

F: Was he pretty good to work with?

C: Oh, yes.

F: No particular problems at all?

C: No, they're very easy about the situation. They figured they were in hostile country and acted accordingly.

F: Were there any advantages when you came to the ranch--in San Antonio over Austin, or vice versa?

C: Austin or San Antonio?

F: Yes.

C: Not really. I think some of the press were more comfortable in San Antonio, and some were more comfortable in Austin. We tried to strike a balance. To keep them as happy as we could. The facilities in San Antonio were a little better than they were here.

F: There was street talk that one reason you shifted at one time from Austin to San Antonio was to keep the outside reporters from smelling out the Yarborough-Connally feud, to keep that played down so that they wouldn't be so handy to Austin. Is there anything in that?

C: I think there's some substance to the fact that San Antonio was less of a bed of rumor.

F: Austin's a little bit like Washington.

C: I don't think it had so much to do with the Connally-Yarborough thing as it just did that the press here in Austin has its own ideas about President Johnson and other things and that cross-breeding of the Austin press and the White House press sometimes produced some stories and things that weren't particularly liked around the White House. And I'm sure there is some substance to that. The President never told me specifically to keep the press out of Austin, but I had the impression that he preferred for them to be in San Antonio at certain points, and yet he changed his mind later on. He wasn't that tough about it. The press had the idea he wanted to keep them out of Austin for some specific reason. Later on he brought them back to Austin.

F: Is there any great problem when you come in for a prolonged stay with the press just getting restless and getting into things that--

C: Yes. We tried to keep them busy in the sense that they were bored, and President Johnson was not the type fellow that wanted to go to some nice resort. There wasn't much for them to do. When he came away to rest it was to Texas almost all the time, and they got tired of coming to the same place. They liked it well enough under the circumstances. On occasion we overworked them here, and they complained about that. Sometimes we underworked them and they complained about that.

They had to justify being here. They had a very practical problem. It was that they felt that they were separated by seventy miles from the President, which they certainly were, and that we didn't give them enough information on the President's activities to justify their being here. Of course, our attitude was he was at the

ranch, if there was anything important he was doing we'd darned sure tell them, but we weren't just going to manufacture a bunch of stuff to pretend that he was out there making great decisions when he wasn't.

F: Did anyone ever demand facilities that were closer, like Johnson City or Fredericksburg?

C: Oh, frequently. I think some of them would have liked to have been closer to the ranch. I remember one time we talked about putting them in Fredericksburg, and they didn't cotton to that idea very much.

F: I couldn't see--

C: They complained enough about Austin. They'd say, "Well, let's go down to the barber shop and watch the haircuts," or, "Let's go out and watch them paint the stripe on the street." They ran out of things to do here. They were fish out of water. Some of the press are prima donnaish and didn't mix too well with some of the folks down here. A lot of them did. A lot of them made lasting friendships with people in Texas, and they still come down frequently to renew those friendships. But some of them didn't mix too well.

F: I've picked up a few that I stay in touch with.

Let's shift off that a little bit. Were you privy to the sort of increasing delicacy of the relationship between Senator Richard Russell and the President?

C: Yes.

F: Do you want to expatiate a little?

C: I probably don't know as much about it as someone else might, like Tom Johnson. But it started as a slight bit of flack over a judgeship. As I recall, President Johnson left the impression,

anyway, on Senator Russell that he was trying to get something out of him in exchange for a judgeship in Georgia. Now whether the Justice Department was really the guilty party in as far as the putting the hammer on Senator Russell or whether the White House was, has always been fuzzy in my mind as to who did what to whom. But whatever it was Senator Russell didn't like the move at all and apparently thought that he was a good enough friend of President Johnson's that when he asked for something he ought to get it. And it went from there.

I think it affected the Fortas appointment to some extent. Senator Russell finally opposed Fortas. President Johnson had a very clear impression, as did others of us, that Senator Russell was going to help him on the project, and he didn't do it for some reason or another.

I think this feeling between them was a very real thing. It was on Senator Russell's part. It wasn't on President Johnson's part. He never lost his respect for him or affection for him. But I think Senator Russell did get his feelings pretty badly hurt over this judgeship matter and thought that the President was sort of trading--

F: They never got it straightened out as far as you know?

D: They got it straightened it out to the extent that before President Johnson left office he was certainly on reasonably good terms with Senator Russell. He talked to him about Viet Nam problems and other things on a straight man-to-man basis like he always had. But I got the feeling that certainly they weren't as close as they had been at one time in their careers. But the details on the judgeship,

I don't recall the particulars of it, somebody else might.

F: You saw this from both sides, and I heard rumors all over. How heavy a hand did President Johnson lay on Texas politics? Was he interested in what the legislature was doing, I mean, other than he's interested in all fifty?

C: You mean at that time?

F: Yes. When you were with the governor or when you were with the President.

C: He paid only passing attention to what was happening down here. If it was something that affected him either directly or politically in some way, he might be concerned with it. But ordinarily he paid no attention to it at all.

F: I'm trying to get something straightened out. I've heard that as last as his vice presidency he would call individual legislators and question their vote on certain issues, why they had voted a certain way. Did you see any evidence of that?

C: I've never heard of him doing that. I know that there was some legislation he darned sure was interested in when Price Daniel was governor on election laws. And he did talk back and forth, usually through emissaries, to people like Senator Dorsey Hardeman, people who were in the legislature at the time, trying to work on certain matters. I worked in the Capitol from 1949 on, and a good bit of that time was in the governor's office, and I never heard of him being interested in anything except this one piece of election law that he was concerned with. I don't remember another single instance where he was concerned with something the legislature was doing.

Now if it was something that had to do with redistricting, for

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example, he was interested in the tenth district. If he had still been in office, for example, during this last session when we got into his hassle over Williamson County staying in the Tenth District, he would have been very much interested in saving Williamson County for that district because that's his old congressional district and he had an interested in those people and who represented them.

I can remember one time during the Connally administration we darned sure were aware that he would like for Blanco County, for example, to stay in Jake Pickle's district. You get a certain awareness of what he liked and what he didn't like, and you tried to help him if you could.

But as far as having any daily interest or anything, he never did--at least in the time I worked for him. The only time he ever paid any attention to the legislature is when he heard about some senator who made a speech about the LBJ Park--critical of the park or something--and of course he jumped to that. But as far as their usual routine, he didn't pay any attention to them. On the political scene, he had friends down here that I'm sure he helped in one way or another from time to time. As far as meddling in local races and things of that nature, he did very, very little.

F: Did you get the feeling that Jake was his hand-picked candidate to succeed Homer Thornberry?

C: Hand-picked?

F: Yes.

C: I doubt that. Here again, at that time when Jake decided to run I was actually working for Jake over at the TEC doing a project for them.

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F: Of course, there was that question of whether it would be Charlie Herring or Jake.

C: Jake was interested in running. He'd always been interested in running. He was ripe to run, and he darn sure checked with everybody before he got interested but I think the volition was Pickle's. He became sort of an agreed candidate, but if he hadn't had the interest he never would have been in that position to do it. And a lot of folks, including me, were interested in getting a congressman that we thought represented everybody and could do a good sound job. So, sure, lots of folks were interested in Pickle getting it. Later on Connally turned me loose to help Pickle in his race. We weren't above trying to get our friends elected to office. I'm sure President Johnson, who I guess at that time was Vice President--must have been, must have been '63 when Jake ran in the special election--

F: Yes, it was.

C: --he had an interest in that election just like everybody else did in that part of the Democratic party. Actually, I think President Johnson's role in Texas politics has been considerably overplayed. He gets credit for lots of things he doesn't do. I'll give you this to look at when you go back, and that's typical of the kind of thing. Everybody thinks there's a conspiracy going of some kind and that his fine hand is in all of these things--and that his fine hand, since he's out of office, was in Bentsen's running for the Senate. There never was so much bunk in all the--he didn't want Bentsen to run for the Senate. And yet he gets credit for it.

F: What did he want to do--stave off an intraparty fight?

C: Well, he didn't think Bentsen had a chance of winning; told him so:

didn't want him to run; made no effort to help him at all in the primary; stayed totally neutral; and just barely helped in the general election against Bush. And yet he gets the full credit or blame --depending on whether its friend or enemy--for manipulating the Texas U.S. Senate election last year. He had no more part in manipulating that election than my daughter did--less, probably!

F: I started to ask what part did your daughter have.

C: Anybody intimately involved in political life here in Texas knows what he does and what he doesn't do. And I'm reasonably intimately involved in politics in Texas, and I've seen darned little of his tracks anywhere.

F: Like the eternal chancellorship of the University that he's always gunning for.

C: Oh, yes, he's angling to be chancellor of the University of Texas! People put motives behind things President Johnson does. They always have. They're not going to stop now. And here in Austin they particularly like to see the little connection--like a group of us got together to try to save the Driskill Hotel over here. Well, the first question that comes up from anybody, particularly in the press, is, "Is President Johnson behind this?"--because they look at the names and numbers. They see Max Brooks, Bill Heath, George Christian. They see all these people that they can identify of being somehow connected with President Johnson. Well, half the people in Austin have been connected with President Johnson at one time or another. Whenever they do something it appears that maybe he's involved in it. Heck, his attitude toward saving the Driskill was that it was a money loser. His only knowledge of it was that. "If George Brown

couldn't make money out of it, how do you all expect to make money out of it?"

F: I tried another tack of working on Mrs. Johnson through her historic and beauty interests and got virtually nowhere with it. So I personally was quite aware of that.

Back to the LBJ State Park. Did he have much role in that beyond just being constantly embarrassed? Let's put it another way. Why weren't the donors ever made public?

C: They are. They're in the book out there right now.

F: But at the time that it was a real issue?

C: I think the primary reason is that he had gotten some of the money from people who did not want it known they'd given him any money for it, and they were substantial donations. A substantial portion of the initial money came from three or four people, and they were not in the mood to let it appear that they were suddenly going in and setting up something for him. It was politically difficult. You know, it was perfectly legitimate, but it might not look that way to somebody. It would look like some kind of political payoff of some kind. He, pretty much himself, although others were involved in it, decided that "We just can't do it. We just can't release it." Well, John Ben Shepperd said it was going to be released down here, which caused a problem.

F: Did he clear that with Governor Connally or the President?

C: Apparently not. He didn't clear it with Governor Connally. I don't think Governor Connally cared one way or the other. But President Johnson didn't want it released, and when the thing was finished and he was out of office, he released the names, and they're up there

as public record. But at the time he just didn't want to do it.

And rightly or wrongly--I don't know, maybe it was wrong, but at the time it appeared the right thing to do.

F: I've often wondered why it was such an issue.

C: What? The names?

F: Yes. Or the non-names.

C: Because I think two or three newspapers made it an issue. The whole project took on--

F: I never could quite see what was sinister.

C: Well, it looked like a sinister plot to steal somebody's property across the road there. You know there's one family--I've forgotten what their names were, Queen or something, that's not the name--but they were holding out. They didn't want to sell, and I believe they went through condemnation proceedings. It just looked like this powerful takeover of these poor private folks' property. I don't know the background of all of that. But the Dallas News and one or two other papers got interested in their plight and they made a big deal out of it. Frankly, we never could see, "What is the big deal," you know!

The whole intent and purpose is to set up a lovely state park that protects that property which the man, as he said publicly, is going to turn over to the government. It's going to become a public facility. It's a historic park. He ain't going to get anything out of it. I guess he gets some tax advantage out of it when he finally does it, but it's all going to the public. So it's the public against one little landowner up there who wants to put a beer joint in there or something. So what's the great storm about!

It's not the first time it has happened. But because it was him, and because of our general propensity for secrecy and not explaining ourselves well and everything else, because we're the world's worst--I say the Johnson administration was the world's worst at explaining itself adequately to the public for some reason. I think we tried like hell, but I don't think we ever got the point across on a lot of things. I think that that created a furor over it. I don't think the public was up in arms. I think some couple of the papers were, and it became kind of a little titillating thing to talk about. The LBJ Park became some kind of ogre or something to some people, particularly the anti-Johnson people. But if anybody goes up there now and sees what they've made out of it--. But if anybody that can look down the road ten or fifteen years can say, "Now this is going to be a park--a historical--"

F: That's a hard thing to sell though.

C: You can't sell that because people are too busy worrying about what the man is now, whether they hate him or don't like him or something else. The fact that he was President and the fact that ten or fifteen years from now every presidential home everywhere is going to be some kind of national shrine. These are our leaders. He's going to be buried there.

F: This would come when I used to try to sell to the faculty on the library. Good Lord, we'd bust a gut to get Martin Van Buren's library!

C: Yes--or Millard Fillmore! Anything, you know, but not now because you've got your political prejudices too involved in everything. Well, Harry Truman in '52--and I imagine nobody gave a good damn

whether his home in Independence was ever anything or not. They're going to wish now they'd done a little more with some of his stuff.

But that's all I know about that.

F: Did you have any particular problems, taboos, or so forth, as far as working with the President's family, and I'm thinking now of the brother, the sisters, the sort of satellites. I'm not talking about Luci and Lynda.

C: I never had any connection with them at all.

F: They weren't of press concern, really.

C: Oh, Sam Houston was.

F: But he was largely quiescent while you were in there, wasn't he?

C: Yes. Sam had gotten his leg broken or something. He came in and out a time or two while I was there, and I know him. He's a friend of mine and everything, but nobody particularly in the White House had anything to do with him.

F: Did the President ever fiercely, as far as you know, try to get Yarborough and Connally to hold hands outside that Hubert Humphrey rally? I mean, was this a thing that concerned him?

C: It didn't burn him up. I mean it didn't consume him. But the thing that concerned him during the '68 campaign was that Humphrey wouldn't carry Texas. He really wanted Humphrey to carry Texas, and whatever it took to carry Texas that's what he was interested in. The fact that Connally and Yarborough were feuding--this feud's not going to be solved by Lyndon Johnson or anybody else, and as far as I know he never made any great overt attempt to resolve any differences between the two men because it was useless. The differences were there. He had some of the same differences with Senator Yarborough

himself. There was a lot of to-do about Johnson's going to solve all these intra-party fights in Texas, and all that. Sure, he liked to hold them to a minimum if it interrupted his situation.

F: At least keep them quiet.

C: He damned sure didn't want them always at each other's throats. But I think in the final analysis, in the '68 election--I know this, I don't have to guess. Connally made up his own mind what he wanted to do in the '68 election. It wasn't anything that Johnson did. Connally made up his own mind to help in that election. He thought he'd gotten a big run-around at the convention, that he'd been doublecrossed--and he had--on his face. They told him one thing and did something else, and he's not the kind of fellow that likes that. And he came home from the convention apparently feeling pretty bitter about it. He thought the whole thing was just a farce. But in the final analysis he made up his own mind to help the party, and he did it to some extent--not to any great extent. He wasn't out on the stump all the time, but he did make whatever appearances he did on that. And I don't think that Johnson had a great deal to do with knitting the thing together. He had something to do with it, but he wasn't the deciding force in doing it.

F: Did the President ever express himself to you about Ralph Yarborough, either as a senator or as a man?

C: Not any more than he talked about anybody else. He had opinions good and bad about a lot of people, friends and enemies. If he didn't like what somebody was doing, he was likely to tell it to a member of his staff, you know. I never heard him criticize Yarborough for anything in particular.

- F: He didn't criticize Yarborough as much as Yarborough criticized him?
- C: I think their troubles had occurred pretty much before I got there. The only relationships I ever saw with Johnson and Yarborough were all pretty cordial. They obviously weren't bosom friends. But I think Yarborough voted with him on dang near everything.
- F: Did you get the feeling that John Connally felt he had in a sense been gutted when Johnson endorsed Yarborough in '64 and left Joe Kilgore waiting in the wings?
- C: Connally didn't like it that's for darned sure.
- F: You mean you're inclined to believe that this was real, that Kilgore was slated to be the opponent in '64?
- C: I think Kilgore would have run if Johnson had not been against him. If Johnson had been even neutral, I think Kilgore probably would have run. Something else might have kept him from running, but I think someone would have run in '64--Kilgore, Bentsen, or somebody.
- F: So far as you know, did Johnson ever suggest to Connally that he might like him to sack the governorship and come back to Washington to help in any capacity?
- C: Whether he ever offered him anything or not I don't know. I know he thought about it from time to time. He would have liked to have had Connally at his warm side the whole time.
- F: Do you think in a cabinet position or some sort of state--?
- C: In some role. Connally was, I think, always top man on the ladder with Johnson on almost anything as far as respect, love, and everything else. I don't know whether he ever offered him anything or not. I know that he thought about it. Wanted him in Washington. might have felt that he was doing more service right where he was. And they,

like any strong men, had disagreements and pretty strong ones. Connally wasn't overly enthusiastic on a lot of things Johnson did. It wasn't just '64.

F: This is way ahead of the story, but did you ever hear any comment out of the President when Connally joined Nixon's cabinet?

C: No, I never talked to him at all about that.

F: On the cabinet, did you have any particular vantage point on the McNamara resignation as Secretary of Defense and becoming the president of the World Bank?

C: Yes, I was there during the period.

F: Tell me about that. Had relations deteriorated?

C: Yes, they had. I think as it finally developed it was as much McNamara's doing as it was Johnson's
[phone interruption]

F: You said that you thought McNamara had as much to do with it as Johnson.

C: I think McNamara had reached the point in 1967 that he did not want to be Secretary of Defense in the situation as it existed. I think he felt the war wasn't going the way he wanted it to. There was a growing difference of opinion on things within the administration in the inner councils with Rusk and McNamara and the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I think McNamara grew more and more uncomfortable in that role. He was tired, obviously tired. He was emotionally wrought up, and I think he was looking for a change. He wanted something. When he told the President about the World Bank the President did not discourage him on the thing. He would have, I guess, blocked it or steered him away from it or something, but he didn't discourage him on it. It kind of went from there.

And I think in the final analysis the President actually sort of helped speed the thing up to get the change over with and get it done.

There never was any open break between them. As a matter of fact, he brought McNamara back from time to time when things were really critical, and he talked to McNamara about them.

F: He continued to value his advice.

C: He valued his advice. There wasn't any rupture at all on the thing. There might have been had he stayed. I don't know. But McNamara was ready to go, and I think President Johnson was ready for him to go. He really, I think, felt that there ought to be a change in the Pentagon, that McNamara was tired.

And in some ways I really believe that the President was concerned about McNamara as much as anything else. The President had a pretty close relationship with Rusk, McNamara, and some other people in government, and he's not an insensitive man. He could darned sure smell when there are problems. I think that it was a combination of concern for McNamara, desire for a change, and the availability of the place for McNamara in something where he could continue to be of tremendous service. It just all kind of worked out as things sometimes do. It wasn't a case of the President just drop-kicking him out of office. It wasn't a case of McNamara just throwing in the sponge. But it worked to everybody's advantage. I think they've all understood it, and I don't think anybody was fooling anybody else. McNamara knew good and well that the time was right. And while at some points sometimes I would imagine even today McNamara might wish that he had stayed on through--or at the time I imagine he had fleeting thoughts

like anybody else that maybe he wasn't doing the right thing. But at the time that it was all developing I know that at that point McNamara thought that that was what he ought to do for whatever reasons. He wanted to get on out.

F: You had that emotional farewell. Was that emotion felt on both sides, or was this McNamara?

G: Oh, the President felt it. But McNamara was an emotional man. A lot of people have the impression he was just a computer or something, but he really wasn't. He was a computer--I mean, he was a fellow--

F: He had a mind there.

C: He had a computer mind and a maybe overly human heart, but that emotional departure was not the first emotional outburst he had had. He had another one I think down at the dedication of the aircraft carrier Kennedy. That was a very emotional time.

F: Were you there?

C: Yes. It affected McNamara greatly. But when a person serves very closely with a President--no matter who it is, particularly in a job like that--and when he held Kennedy obviously in such affection, was one of Kennedy's closest confidants, that carrier dedication was an emotional experience for the average man. I mean, for a man of average emotions it would have been a very emotional thing.

Leaving the cabinet after seven years--and he even felt an attachment to Johnson too. Certainly he didn't have the relationship with Johnson that he had with Kennedy, but he had a close relationship with him. They were more than just President and cabinet officer. They were also friends. And it was a tough experience, to say after seven years, "So long." But in the context of times it also added

a little bit, I think, to the feeling that a lot of people had that he was darned bone-weary with what he was doing, and things were pressing on him pretty hard, and it was time to get on out of there.

I can remember a time or two when President Johnson was talking about James Forrestal in that same job. He wasn't drawing any great parallels, but he had lived through that episode when he was in the Congress. Johnson can read men pretty well, and he read that it was time for a change there.

F: Did he ever really consider anybody besides Clark Clifford as far as you know?

C: Yes. He considered several people. I think Clifford was always his first choice. But, as he sometimes did, I think he dropped in two or three other folks to consider just to--

F: Give you a few yardsticks to--

C: Give you a few things to measure by. And I think Paul Nitze wanted it. And I think he gave him some consideration but decided against it.

F: Did he and Clifford continue warm relationships despite the fact that Clifford took a much more dovish view?

C: No, not as close, I wouldn't think--but nearly so. Once Clifford was actually in his cabinet and working with him day-to-day, their relationship changed a little. As long as Clifford was an outside man coming in, you know, he had a slightly different--

F: It makes a difference when you are responsible for that department and talking officially.

C: That's right. They remained close friends, and I guess still are. But their differences became rather pronounced toward the end of the administration. And that can't help but affect your personal

relations.

F: By and large, in that sort of situation, did Johnson raise his voice when you differed with him, or did he just give you that quiet cold treatment?

C: Sometimes he didn't say anything. You know, in a meeting or something, and he tried to get everybody to speak his mind. I never saw him cut anybody down, particularly in a large group. He wouldn't embarrass someone by just saying, "That's stupid," or something like that.

F: He wouldn't set out to make me feel small in front of a colleague.

C: No, he wouldn't do that. In a group of one or two people he might do it. He would sometimes be irritated or something in a meeting, when you got the impression that he was sore at either somebody or a group of people, but it wasn't any table-pounding kind of thing. I never saw him do that in my life.

F: How deep was his division with Willard Wirtz?

C: It got pretty deep and then it shallowed up some.

F: Was Wirtz in the McNamara class of also being worn down?

C: No, I don't think so. Wirtz knew what he wanted to do, and he wanted to do it. Sometimes Johnson didn't agree with what he wanted to do. He got miffed at Wirtz's open position against the war. Wirtz went out of his way to make the break. I mean, he wanted it clearly known that he was differing on the war, and that's his perfect right. I mean, I don't question it. But it did make Johnson unhappy. Then when they did have their confrontation over changing the Manpower Development program, their points of disagreement were bad enough to where it was at the point of resignation by Wirtz. He didn't do it, didn't resign. Later on they really did reestablish

their relationship somewhat, although not totally.

And his relationship with Stuart Udall I think just never did bounce back. They had their flap toward the end of the administration.

F: They didn't have time to patch it up.

C: They didn't have time to patch it up. But generally speaking he had pretty good relationships with most of his cabinet. You can't get nine cabinet people had have them all pulling in one direction all the time. Johnson hated to have disagreements within his official family. He didn't like that. He liked to present the picture of unity and that everything was going along smoothly and nicely, and sometimes it didn't. And there were feuds between White House staff people and cabinet officers which didn't help matter some.

But the age-old trouble in government--and I'm sure Nixon has it just about as bad as anybody--is who is next to the throne, who is in the palace guard. And a White House staff member has a heck of a leg up on a cabinet officer in a particular area of responsibility. Joe Califano was there every day badgering the President on the domestic programs, whereas Bob Weaver and Willard Wirtz and Orville Freeman and others were not in there every day on him.

F: A cabinet officer has to call over for an appointment or run into him in the corridor.

C: That's right, and a staff man gets to talk to him all day long about one thing or another. So the staff man tends to crowd him out. Just like Kissinger is looked to instead of Rogers and so forth. There's nothing new in that. And some of the cabinet in the Johnson Administration felt the same sort of left-out attitude, I guess. That some of Nixon's people [are feeling].

F: Was there a resentment among the other members of the staff against Marvin [Watson]?

C: Yes. It was a tough relationship. Marvin had a tough job. Marvin had to carry out what the President wanted him to on running the White House, and sometimes this stepped on toes. And he carried them out to the letter. It was difficult for him to distinguish between what the President wanted and what the President might have temporarily wanted.

F: Was the President was just thinking out loud, or was he actually talking?

C: What are you going to do! When the man says, "Do it. I want to see it done. I want you to report back to me in two hours that it has been done," Marvin did it. He knows how to follow orders. In following them he caused some irritations in the White House, and he took the rap for some things that weren't particularly his doing. He took it gladly.

F: That didn't bother him?

C: Didn't bother him. I guess it bothered him, but he understands the chain of authority and he was willing to do it. There was some animosity in the White House among, not just Marvin and somebody, but there were animosities all the time going on. Marvin sort of was the lightning rod because he was the man next to the President, and he was the fellow that was charged with the responsibility of carrying out the stuff that really affected a guy's way of operating. Like he'd take the newspapers away from you or deprive you of the right to ride a White House car, or all the little amenities that he had control of. This kind of touched the wrong nerve some time. Guys

didn't like to be told they couldn't get the New York Times or something. There's no telling how much money Marvin saved by some of his stuff, but still--and he wasn't doing it because he wanted to do it. He didn't prune some guy off the car list because he wanted to do it although he got the blame sometimes and had to shoulder it. He ran a very difficult operation. I got sore at him. Everybody did at one time or another if he wouldn't do something the way you wanted it done but he couldn't always do it the way somebody wanted it done. Maybe sometimes he wasn't as tactful as he could have been, although some of the stuff there wasn't any way. I think he did a darned good job for the President. He took a lot of raps, and he still bears bruises from some of the people he worked with. But so do others. He's not the only one.

F: Is it true that he did control appointments with the President to the extent that more liberally minded people could not get in to see the President where as the more conservatively minded could?

C: I doubt that.

F: You've heard the charge undoubtedly.

C: Yes, but the President saw a list of everybody that wanted to see him, and he picked who he wanted to see.

F: But if I couldn't, then I could blame Marvin.

C: But Marvin could take the rap, and Marvin took the rap. If some cabinet officer wanted to see him and the President didn't want to see the cabinet officer, Marvin would have to make up some excuse as to why the fellow couldn't get in. Marvin did not take it upon himself to do things that the President didn't want done. It's just as simple as that. The President ran the White House through

Marvin. But on some of the things Marvin got the blame for, he was doing nothing but carrying out his job.

F: Did you have anyone in the White House staff who belonged to that kind of professional conniver type that is always trying to get somebody out for the sheer pleasure of seeing them go?

C: Oh no, but there were feuds in there all the time for one reason or another. Bob Kintner had his feuds with Moyers--with, I guess, Califano too. Usually the trouble started when you had crossed authority.

F: Which you often have.

C: Which you often have, and it wasn't ever clear as to who was supposed to be doing what sometimes. The President had a nice habit of giving six different people authority to do a certain think like, "Write me a speech," or "Edit a speech," or something. You never knew who else was working on something, and it created problems. Then also the strong people in the White House--by that I mean the people who built up their own loyal staffs, who tried to be public officials in their own rights rather than just flunkies for the President. who had ambitions of one kind or another--these guys attracted more opposition and quarreling from other staff members than the guys who just kind of minded their own business and didn't butt in on anybody else's business. The guys who were out doing things, manipulating around and everything, naturally were going to draw more fire. Bill Moyers was always the most controversial guy in the White House because a lot of the other staff--

F: He was all over town among other things.

C: Well, a lot of the other staff thought that he wanted to be just

junior president, you know, and wanted to run them or something. Well, you know, you'd spend a good bit of time just trying to millify around to keep things going. But also he was involved in a lot of things. He was interested in a lot of things. He was interested in the domestic programs and in foreign policy. So he crossed into other people's areas, and he was controversial. Marvin was controversial because he touched everybody's life in the White House. Kintner moved in in different areas, had to kind of create his own niche when the President brought him in, and when that happened he caused some animosity. Califano was a controversial member of the White House staff because he always was churning something. He was right in the middle of everything except the foreign policy thing, and so other staff members kind of looked at him as being--I don't know how to describe it, but he was just--

F: At times he must have been in a way a nuisance.

C: Well, he was one of the smartest guys around, but also a very ambitious fellow. And he was young, so some of the older ones resented him a little. It wasn't bad. But that type of staffer --Califano and Moyers--is going to draw more fire than, say, a Doug Cater or any number of others that were there--Barefoot Sanders. Mike Manatos, other folks who would--

F: That stick to business.

C: That try to stick to business. Frankly, I think I ranked in that second category. I tried to stay out of other people's business. So I kind of was accepted by everybody. I don't think I had anybody out after me was an axe anyway. I might have had some secret enemies or something.

F: Did the President pay any attention to that sort of thing? Did he ever give you those old football coach talks about "We're a team"?

C: Heck, no. He played people against each other.

F: He liked to knock a few heads.

C: Yes. He didn't mind getting people pitted against each other. I think he kind of used that as a way of keeping things going sometimes. I guess he cared if somebody wouldn't work with somebody else, but as long as both of them did their jobs he didn't care if they had fist fights or not.

F: As far as you know was there any tale-bearing by one against another to the President?

C: Oh, yes.

F: Did he pay any attention to it?

C: I guess sometimes he did and sometimes he didn't. I'm sure he was well aware of some of the problems. But a lot of those old different grudges, here and there, they're still evident. It wasn't any light thing on some of it.

F: For instance?

C: I think Horace Busby, for example, has still got a lack of friendship I would say with some of the folks, particularly with Bill I would guess. And George Reedy--I think the same thing. He and Bill Moyers were at about as cross purposes you could get.

F: I can't think of two more unlike people.

C: Reedy wasn't there when I first came, and Moyers was still there. I never did see it, but afterwards I know that they still worked on each other some. Then Marvin and Moyers, I guess that was the one that going pretty good when I was there. Rostow never had any real

run-ins with the rest of the staff, although some of them shot holes in him, or tried to.

F: For a big talker he stayed, in a sense, to himself, didn't he?

C: He minded his own business. That was the key to his success in working with the staff. He set up his staff. He and I worked very closely on things, but he wasn't always second-guessing what I did or something. If I goofed one, he didn't tell me I was an idiot or something. He'd try to help and was always available if I needed help--that type of staff member--even though a lot of them disagreed with things he was doing and griped and everything.

Still, from a press officer's standpoint to have a guy like Rostow running one of the major functions and Califano running another was darned helpful, because they were always available to you. They always wanted to help. There wasn't any throat cutting as far as you were--me, really, the only one I can speak for. I didn't seek confrontations with them. I sought help from them. And I enjoyed working with them. I enjoyed working with Harry McPherson and the legislative people and everybody.

I just think in a situation in an area for potential power struggles like that is, the individual staff member who did his dangest to try to work with the other guys got along pretty well. It's when they got to knifing at each other and talking and telling the President tales and stuff of that nature that they wound up in feuds. And yet even when they were feuding, they generally worked together pretty good.

F: The work got done.

C: The work got done. Just because Marvin and Bill disagreed, maybe

even said mean things about each other--

F: That would have been a good Baptist feud.

C: When it was taking the President on a trip or something, the decisions that were made were decisions to try to make things right for him. And there wasn't any disagreement. So it was not the easiest place in the world to work, but under the circumstances I think the White House staff under Johnson got along darned well. With one or two exceptions and one or two brawls that they had, it worked out pretty well.

F: Did the President pay any attention at all to what you went to socially, what you should go to socially? I know primarily with him you're supposed to work and not go entertain yourself every evening, but did he to some extent say that you ought be at certain things?

C: No. At different times he encouraged me to entertain the press at home or something, but other than that, no, he didn't. He wanted his legislative boys to stay close to the congressmen as much as they could, but he didn't tell somebody to go to an embassy or something like that. He just expected certain things Rostow would try to do, or I would, somebody would, just to make a showing somewhere.

F: Thank you, George.

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By George Christian

to the

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