

INTERVIEWEE: CLARK CLIFFORD (Tape 4)

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

August 7, 1969

F: This is interview number 4 with Mr. Clark Clifford in his office in Washington, D. C., on August 7, 1969; the interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Mr. Clifford, let's go back to politics (the last two interviews you talked about Viet Nam) and talk a bit about the time from when Mr. Johnson became President in November, 1963, and how this affected your relationship with him. I know you were brought back in a much closer connection, and so I think we'll pick it up at that point. You're picking him up now with not quite a year before convention time and campaigning again; you've got all that great outbreak of legislation of 1964 that comes on, preparing, of course, for the election in the fall of that year.

C: As I stated, I think, in a previous interview, while President Johnson and I had been friends for a substantial number of years going back to the middle forties when I had come into government in the Truman Administration, we had not been particularly close. The relationship was friendly. As I formerly said also, I think it went through a period of erosion because of some problems that arose over my close friendship with Senator Symington and some factors that entered into that.

F: It's tough to have to choose between friends, isn't it?

C: To some extent, but it wasn't quite that clear. It never reached that real issue and certainly it never led to any difficulty between President Johnson and me, then Senator Johnson, but I think I was conscious of some lessening of the friendly relationship that we had had.

F: While we're talking about Senator Symington, I have rather gathered from my researches that the Senator had a strong feeling that John F. Kennedy would name him to be his vice presidential running mate and that in effect his family went to bed the night after Kennedy was nominated thinking that in the morning the family would have to decide if the father would go on as a Senator or would become a vice presidential candidate. Can you elaborate on that?

C: That's a fascinating vignette. I was a supporter of Senator Symington in the period prior to the Los Angeles convention and at the Los Angeles convention, and approximately ten days before that convention Senator John F. Kennedy called me and asked me to come and have breakfast with him at his home in Georgetown, at which time we discussed in detail the 1960 convention, what was likely to transpire. And he wondered whether or not we hadn't recognized the fact that Senator Symington could not make it, and if we did recognize the fact that Senator Symington could not make it, would we then be willing to throw our support to Senator Kennedy? I said it was very clear in my mind that Senator

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Symington wished to make the race in Los Angeles, that there was some possibility that Senator Kennedy and others would deadlock on the first ballot and for some ballots thereafter, and Senator Symington's chance, it seemed quite clear to me, was as a compromise candidate, because in testing out the supporters of the other candidates, we'd found generally that if their candidate could not make it their first choice was Senator Symington.

At that particular breakfast that I had with him, he said he'd been thinking a lot about the matter and he was prepared to say to me that Senator Symington was clearly his first choice for the vice presidential spot on the Democratic ticket, and I asked him if I was at liberty to tell Senator Symington that and he said yes, that I was. And he told why he thought he was the best qualified to be the number 2 man on the ticket, I augmented those arguments with some others, which he seemed to accept, I felt as we concluded that breakfast meeting that he was informing me that Senator Symington was going to be his choice for the number 2 spot. At the very end he commented again on the fact that he hoped that he could have our support, and I informed him again that I was sure that Senator Symington was going to want it to go to a ballot. He wanted Senator Symington to withdraw prior to the first ballot and throw his support to him.

When we reached Los Angeles I saw him prior to the convention that night--circumstances weren't particularly good but in the brief chat that I had with him nothing was said by him to me that would lead me to change my mind regarding what he had told me at the breakfast, so that night that the President was to be nominated--that is, our candidate for President--and I think after--no, it was after Senator Kennedy was nominated--I went back to the hotel and I then met with Senator and Mrs. Symington and their two sons and their sons' wives and Mrs. Clifford, and we discussed this subject on a very intimate basis. Some members of his family were in favor of his taking the second spot, some were unalterably opposed.

F: What was the Senator doing, just letting you--

C: Letting the rest of us talk it out. Occasionally coming in with a question.

F: He was sitting as judge, in other words.

C: Or an observer. That's right, he was sitting as judge, while the lawyers debated the matter. I made a strong pitch in favor of his accepting it. When it was all over and he and I had a private chat, he said he wanted to think a little more about it, but I got the impression from him that if it were to be offered as we rather assumed it would be, that my expectation was that he would accept it.

F: For the same reasons that Mr. Johnson eventually did accept, because this was a good ticket, and what the party needed?

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C: I would say--

F: This is objective, I know.

C: Yes. I would say generally he liked Senator Kennedy, they had a pleasant relationship, he felt that he could augment Senator Kennedy's strength in the middle west, with farm groups, with labor, et al.; that it would make a good ticket, that it was entirely possible that the vice presidency would be more important under a man like Senator Kennedy, an activist, instead of President Eisenhower, who did not make very much out of the job. I might say that there was no real thought being given to the possibility of any succession, because Senator Kennedy was such a young man and a vigorous, virile man, who gave the impression of abundant lasting health, so that I don't remember that subject coming up.

I went to bed that night feeling that Senator Symington was very likely to be the number 2 man on the ticket. The next morning rather early I had a call from Senator Kennedy. I met him in a secret room that he had at the hotel, and he informed me of what generally had taken place during the night and that he had been persuaded, I think almost forced, to make a different decision, and that he recognized the understanding that we had had, but the support of persons whom he needed was necessary, and they had applied the screw during the night and he felt that this was the way he had to go. It was flat, unequivocal, and he said, "That's the way it's going to go. It's going to be Senator Johnson." That was sometime the next morning. I returned to Senator Symington and informed him of that. I think he felt some sense of disappointment, but not too acute, because of the strong difference of opinion that existed in his family.

F: By now probably the only reason he wanted it was because he'd thought, "Well, it's going to be offered," I think.

C: Perhaps so.

F: Do you have any idea where the pressure came from?

C: Senator Kennedy said that it came from a group of Southern Senators and Congressmen.

F: It wasn't Johnson-led?

C: It was not led by Senator Johnson. The fact is, it was my understanding that perhaps two of Senator Johnson's closest friends, Bob Kerr and Mr. Sam, were really quite cold on the idea. I know that Senator Kerr was because he told me so. He said, "I think this is a real mistake. I think he ought not to do it." And I learned that was something of the same attitude of Mr. Sam, with reference to it. So if there were to be any effort in behalf of Senator Johnson, one or very likely both of those men would have been in it, but they opposed it. It was Southern Senators who felt that if Senator Kennedy was to be elected,

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he had to get support from the South. And I think they persuaded him that it was absolutely essential that he carry Texas, and that he wasn't going to carry Texas without Senator Johnson. Now the names of the persons involved he did not mention, but in my own mind I think I reached some conclusion as perhaps who they were when he said, "Southern leaders of our party in the Congress."

F: You can make some educated guesses.

C: I would think so. That's how it seemed to me, and as a matter of fact, although I felt a sense of disappointment of my not being about to carry through for Senator Symington, I might say even at the time I recognized the very strong possibility that this was a wise course, and I remember discussing that with Senator Symington at the time. Well, so much for that.

F: Yes. Well, as we come on down toward 1964, then the decision to go to Atlantic City, as I understand, had been made while Kennedy was still President.

C: I do not recall it that early, because of course President Kennedy was assassinated in November of '63, and I was not familiar with the fact that any decision had been made by that time. I was not seeing very much of Vice President Johnson. I wouldn't see him except possibly at some reception, or something of that kind. It was after he became President that he called and I went over and had a very long talk with him, and he indicated that now that he had that particular position he would like to draw on the experience that I'd had in the five years that I had served in the White House in the Truman Administration. And I of course said I would be happy to be of any assistance that I could be to him, for he was facing a lot of really rough problems at the time.

F: Did you consider becoming a White House Assistant?

C: No, nothing was mentioned at that time about that at all. It was just that he indicated that he would want me to come in from time to time so that he might talk about matters. I would be an outside adviser and counselor. And that's the way it developed and it started slowly into '63. As we got into '64 I began to go over more often. I began to find out after awhile that Abe Fortas and I were being called on together. The President might talk with us during the day, or we might go over in the evening and have long talks and exchange ideas.

F: The three of you, or did you tend to meet individually with the President?

C: Sometimes I would meet individually and sometimes the three of us. There was no particular pattern. It was just in whatever mood he was in. Or it might be the kind of problem in which he thought our joint advice might be helpful. When it might be a problem relating more particularly to the White House or the White House Staff function

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or some particular experience that I might have had, that would not have involved Justice Fortas.

F: He didn't utilize you and the Justice as opposing adversaries, to give him different viewpoints so that he could sort of pick--

C: I don't recall that as a practiced policy. Sometimes we might have different views but it would just come out in the course of discussion. At no time do I ever recall his saying, "Now here's an important issue and Abe I want you to take the affirmative and Clark I want you to take the negative, and get ready and be prepared to debate it." That was not our function.

F: Had you known Mr. Fortas fairly well?

C: Known him well and favorably for a long time.

F: Incidentally I see him next week for the first time.

C: Good, good.

F: Did you talk domestic matters, or did you talk the whole wide world?

C: I would say at that stage it was mostly domestic matters; in '64 Viet Nam had not become such a consuming problem as it did later on. It was an inherited problem as you know, and there wasn't much of a build-up in '64; that came later in 1965. So I would say mostly it was domestic matters at that stage, and then as we got on into '64 and got toward the early spring then our meetings presented a stronger political caste to them, and he would talk to me on some occasions, and I am sure he saw Justice Fortas alone on some other times, more often than he saw me, and he would talk with us together.

F: Did he talk with you about the possible political effect the--I'm thinking about the election effects of various pieces of legislation that he was trying to put through at this time?

C: Only in a general way, as I recall it. It seems to me that in the spring of '64 a substantial number of times that I was called over it had to do with the problems that came up regarding the campaign. How we were to handle this phase of it, who was likely to be the Republican nominee, and how would that affect our strategy, what our course of action would be if it were Goldwater, what it would be if it were Rockefeller, et al.; he was going through this preliminary phase.

F: Did he show any preference in Republican candidates?

C: Not that I recall.

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- F: Were he and Senator Goldwater on fairly good personal terms?
- C: I thought so. I thought having served in the Senate together, it seemed to me that they were. Of course obviously that deteriorated in the campaign, as it always does when you get into the heat of a campaign. Then as we came along to the spring then he began to talk privately with me or with Abe and me about the selection of vice president. And I believe at that stage earlier--early in the year--I think in his mind Senator Humphrey and Senator Eugene McCarthy were running fairly closely together. One interesting vignette is that I believe, I cannot be sure, but I believe that Mrs. Johnson leaned toward Senator McCarthy. She thought that he might bring something more. She liked Senator Humphrey very much, but I think I detected some attitude on her part that indicated she thought Senator McCarthy might bring something more important to the ticket.
- F: Was Senator McCarthy's religion discussed as a political factor?
- C: I don't remember specifically, I'm sure that it--
- F: There was no strong feeling that having disposed of a Catholic President that you had to get a Catholic Vice President?
- C: No, there was no strong feeling. I have no doubt at all, though, and I have some dim recollection that the fact that he was a Catholic certainly would not hurt. Catholics in this country had lost a Catholic president, and it was possible that Senator McCarthy might supply something in that regard.
- F: As far as you know, did he ever talk with Senator McCarthy on this?
- C: Not that I know. It seemed to me that in the early part of the year, the early spring of '64, that Senator McCarthy was there more. I'd not remembered seeing him much before, but it seemed to me in the winter and spring of '64 that I saw him over there more, for dinner and possibly for other things, which indicated to me that he was being placed under a little more closer scrutiny.
- As time went on, however, through the spring, I believe I sensed a shift to Senator Humphrey. I did not say; it wasn't my business to say who my preference was. My own personal preference was Senator Humphrey, but that doesn't do any good just to say that to the President. What you want to do is help him to reason it out logically, and respond to questions he might have in which he seeks the assistance of others.
- F: President Johnson never approached a problem like that by asking you directly, "Now whom do you prefer?" He asked you "Why you would prefer, what would be the strong points of Mr. Humphrey, or what would be against him?"

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- C: It was almost invariably the indirect approach. He'd be discussing a certain phase of the campaign and in that regard how might the men compare, what were their views, and I've no doubt that over a period of time he was aware of my attitude on it, but I don't recall a specific question and answer being asked and given.
- F: Were you aware with any justification of any vice presidential ambitions that Robert Kennedy might have?
- C: Oh, yes, oh, sure, there was a lot of talk about it, and earlier in '64 there was so much talk about it that the President visited with me about it at one time. And I remember specifically we were alone and were in his office and it was at that time that I think for the first time he and I discussed how he would face up to the recurring suggestion that Senator Robert Kennedy should be on the second place on the ticket. I might say I thought that suggestion had absolutely no merit at all. I thought if by any chance it were to result in that manner, it would be a complete shambles because the relationship between a President and his Vice President is tenuous at best. It's a very difficult relationship.
- F: There is nothing worse than taking a high-powered man and putting him in a definitely subordinate position.
- C: Well, the question to be, that, gee, all you'd have to do would be to look at Vice President Robert Kennedy and know what was on his mind, and the relationship between the two was not good anyway. I think President Johnson made every effort after the assassination of President Kennedy to get along with the Kennedy family, and in almost every instance his overtures were rejected, and rejected in a manner that was thoroughly offensive and insulting. I might say that as I watched that period and went through it and knew quite a lot about it, I thought the attitude of Senator Robert Kennedy and the other members of the Kennedy family was inexcusable, and I think President Johnson tried to the best of his ability to work out some basis to get along with him. He was gracious and courteous and handled it in statesmanlike fashion and they repulsed him at every turn.
- F: Was this a matter--we're indulging in amateur psychiatry here--but a matter of the Kennedys feeling that their position had been usurped by Mr. Johnson, or was this a basic enmity? The politics didn't differ that much. If anything, I think President Johnson acted as a catalyst for Mr. Kennedy.
- C: It was some of both in my opinion. All I can do now is express my own private opinion. I have no way of proving it. But first, the Kennedy family considered President Johnson an interloper. President John F. Kennedy had been elected to the spot; they saw themselves in the position which they liked a great deal for a full eight years, by which time maybe some other member of the family would be ready to receive the mantle as it was passed on, so they just had stars in their eyes about the future and they loved the light and all that went with it. And then suddenly their hopes were all dashed and they looked upon

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President Johnson as, as you suggest, a usurper of the job that really belonged to them. Their attitude was exceedingly immature and one of the more unattractive chapters in the life of that particular family. In addition to that, I think there had not been very good feelings between Senator Robert Kennedy and Vice President Johnson. I believe that it became clear after awhile from written reports that Robert Kennedy, who was then Attorney General, had vigorously opposed Senator Johnson's selection for the number 2 spot and I think Senator John Kennedy had to overrule Robert Kennedy at that stage and go on his own. The two men are very unlike; there's just hardly any basis on which Lyndon Baines Johnson and Robert F. Kennedy could ever have gotten along. Under the circumstances that basic relationship was exacerbated at every turn.

F: Did they to your knowledge ever make a conscious, ostensible effort to patch up their differences?

C: Oh, I'm not conscious of it. Maybe some things were done that pointed in that direction. But getting back to the point at which we'd reached before we went down a side street, I remember discussing with President Johnson what was to be done about the growing amount of comment regarding Robert Kennedy for the number 2 spot. And I think maybe he and I discussed for the first time the possibility of his taking a position that after careful consideration he had reached the conclusion that no member of his cabinet was going to be considered for the spot, that they had their own duties and their own responsibilities and it is my recollection that I prepared a suggested statement for him in that regard.

F: Do you think this idea originated with the President?

C: I don't know whether it originated with the President. I have something of the feel that it originated in a conversation which he and I had together. I cannot be sure, because he may have discussed it with others and I wouldn't have known that. But I have something of the feeling that it originated in a conversation between him and me. I don't mean by that, that I suggested it. I think we discussed how the matter was to be handled, and in the course of the discussion this idea began to come into focus and at the end of our talk he suggested that I might get up a memorandum that he could look at while he was considering the possibility of taking this course of action. I came back to my office, here where I'm seated now, and got up the memorandum and phoned it back to his secretary and he considered it and made some changes and amendments and in a very short time issued it. By short time I mean a day, or two or three days. And that caused a lot of comment, but it was a very important statement at the time.

F: Outside of Robert Kennedy, was there anyone else in the cabinet that he really felt was likely to be a vice presidential possibility?

C: Yes, Robert McNamara. He thought very highly of Secretary McNamara, and I think it was entirely possible that he might have wanted to consider him as a possibility but under



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all the circumstances this seemed like the wiser course of action, to put a stop to this Robert Kennedy talk and to do it in such a manner that it was not picking out one man, but making him one of eleven, I believe it was then, and eliminating all of them. There was some minor conversation at the time that possibly Orville Freeman, the Secretary of Agriculture, might come from the right part of the country--

F: Another Minnesotan.

C: That's right. And from a farm state and so forth. Also, I have some recollection that maybe the President felt, although he had the highest regard for Secretary McNamara that perhaps his place was Secretary of Defense and not as vice presidential nominee on the Democratic ticket, you see. I think he was a registered Republican.

F: It's also difficult seeing Mr. McNamara hitting the campaign hustings, isn't it?

C: Pretty tough.

F: One remarkable thing to me, and I'd like your comment on it, the President of course has the resignation of practically everyone connected with him on his desk when he becomes President. Now the remarkable thing is that he kept so many of the Kennedy people on, including Robert Kennedy. Did he ever talk to you about his reasons for not installing his own team sooner?

C: I'm not sure that he ever specifically-

F: Of course, some stayed to the end and gave just yeoman service-

C: That's right. I'm not sure he ever specifically put it in that way. I became generally familiar with his attitude in that regard, and I think his retention of these men were based on a number of factors. One, they were experienced and they were doing the job. When you come in as President under those circumstances, it happened so suddenly and so quickly, you want to keep the team together. You can't organize a team in a matter of days or weeks or even months. It takes quite a long time to do it, so I think he wanted them to stay just from the standpoint of getting the work done. Second, it was very clear that after President Kennedy's assassination, President Kennedy's popularity grew all the time, he was revered in a manner after his death that perhaps didn't exist before his death and he had become a martyr President, and I think the President felt that it was advisable to keep that team together because it helped the President hold the support of the old Kennedy team and the Kennedy supporters, with which I agreed fully; that was the smart thing to do.

Third, as time went on, it was very obvious that some of them weren't ever going to be digested into the new Administration. They couldn't get over it. There was Kenneth

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O'Donnell, Ted Sorensen, Arthur Schlesinger, those fellows that were very close to President Kennedy and could not make the adjustment. On the other hand there were some who made the adjustment very well, like McGeorge Bundy and like Larry O'Brien; they rendered fine service thereafter. But I think the President got through that period surprisingly well. He told them he wanted them to stay, he went out of his way to be agreeable with them, and reasonable and moderate in his treatment of them, he gave them every opportunity to stay and to continue to render a service. A good many of them, as I've mentioned, really didn't have any interest in that.

F: Did he ever consider, to your knowledge, asking for Bobby's resignation, or did he just sit and hope for it?

C: I think he was uncomfortable with Robert Kennedy as Attorney General, and yet I think that he saw clearly the explosion that would take place if he asked for his resignation. It could be a clear and perhaps irreparable break with the whole Kennedy team, and they did have an excellent team, all through the country. They'd organized it very well.

F: They had the better team really.

C: They had one of the best teams I ever saw. The way they penetrated the state organizations and every state in the union was a very interesting political experience as evidenced by their presence at the Los Angeles convention. They had done an excellent job, and they had strong Kennedy supporters in every state. President Johnson properly did not wish to alienate this group, and the quickest way to do it would have been to have gotten into an all-out public quarrel with the heir-apparent of the Kennedy mantle, who was then Robert Kennedy. I think the President felt that he had to go on with that situation for as long as Robert chose to go with it, and he left it up to Robert.

F: To your knowledge, did Robert ever use his position as a sort of a club against the President; if you don't take certain attitudes I will resign and you will have a problem.

C: I'm not conscious of that. I just know that it was a very uneasy relationship.

F: As time developed, did any sort of a schism ever evolve in which you had the Johnson appointees within the official family set off against the hold-over Kennedy appointees, or did you avoid factions and cliques within the family?

C: I did not see that develop. As the Kennedy appointees went out they didn't go out en masse, they went out at staggered periods.

F: Some like Rusk, Udall, Freeman stayed on for the whole period.

C: I'm talking more, for instance, about the White House. I think O'Donnell was one of the

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first to leave, well the President replaced him. After Sorensen left, Schlesinger left, he replaced them one by one--

F: They sort of drifted out.

C: Right. And the incoming team came in gradually and worked along very well with the old White House staffers who had been there from the Kennedy Administration. As far as the Cabinet is concerned, he kept the entire Cabinet and developed a very close relationship with the senior advisers, Secretary Rusk and McNamara and so forth. It always happens that changes of personnel and responsibility take place in the history of our country. This transition I believe had less difficulty and less irritation with it perhaps than almost any other one I can recall. President Johnson was determined to make it work, and when he's determined, he makes it work!

F: Yes, it's irresistible.

All right, we've disposed of Robert, either overtly or covertly, as the vice presidential candidate. We still have the problem of "who is." We know who is not going to be now. The summer is going on. When do you think the President made up his mind?

C: As I look back on it now, and I think as I look back on it then, I believe he had made up his mind some weeks before the convention. By making up his mind, I think he had become about 90 percent certain--

F: Almost persuaded.

C: Yes, I think he was quite certain that it was going to be Senator Humphrey. I think he was just postponing the final decision to wait and see if any unusual development might take place. He would learn a good deal from what went on as far as the Republicans were concerned, and so forth. It's my feeling--thought--that weeks or even months before the convention, I think he had fairly well decided it was to be Senator Humphrey. Someone said to me some time ago, "That can't be true because just a day or two or three before the convention, why there was a lot of publicity over the fact that he was considering Senator Dodd of Connecticut."

F: Yes, he had Dodd along on the plane to Atlantic City.

C: Now, I have my own theory about that. He never told me that, and I could be wrong. But my own theory of that is that he and Senator Dodd had been friends, Senator Dodd was facing a really quite difficult campaign in that election year, '64, in Connecticut, and I believe the President figured that this would be an enormous boost to Senator Dodd's chances in Connecticut. Because I suppose every paper in the country, certainly every paper in Connecticut, carried a headline that President Johnson had summoned Senator

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Dodd to the White House, and the speculation was that he was considering Senator Dodd as possible vice presidential timber.

F: It also had the advantage that in a state which reads New York papers, that the New York papers would give it exposure.

C: Oh, they gave it exposure all over the country because that was a big question then. This was very dramatic--calling him down--and I'm not sure that he flew to the convention with him; maybe he did. I know that Justice Fortas and Mrs. Johnson and I did. We went by helicopter from the White House over to a plane, flew to Atlantic City, and then were met by another helicopter, it seems to me, and taken to the President's residence. Senator Dodd may have been along; I just don't remember.

But from little scraps and bits and pieces of conversations, I reached the conclusion in my own mind that this was an extraordinarily adroit handling of a matter that (a) was of enormous benefit to Senator Dodd, and (b) put everybody a little off balance regarding just where the President's mind was settling.

F: Yes, keep the issue alive.

C: Keep the issue alive so that there was something still to be decided at the convention.

F: Was Adlai Stevenson ever considered?

C: No. I never can recall one single instance that indicated that any consideration was being given to that at all. It may have happened when I wasn't there, but it sure never happened when I was there.

F: Your campaign is going along fairly well, Mr. Goldwater is helping you--did you have to make any alterations in strategy during the campaign?

C: No, I think not of a major nature. Senator Goldwater gave us so many glorious opportunities that from time to time I think we had to stop doing what we were doing in order to take advantage of the fact that he'd pulled his trousers down, bent over, and handed us the paddle. He came along with wonderful suggestions, like all of New England, for instance, really didn't belong to this country. You could separate it from the country without any real loss. I remember we worked up a television bit that showed all of New England being broken away from the rest of the country and floating out to sea. Then he went down to some senior citizens' locale in Florida and made a strong speech against the expansion of social security, and continued to give wonderful opportunities of that kind. Then he, of course, had a number of things to say about the war that gave us excellent opportunity.

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- F: Did you travel with the President during his campaigning?
- C: I did not.
- F: You stayed here?
- C: I stayed here and was available for conferences with the people who were working here. We had a small group, maybe three or four of five, that he would have come in and visit with him; I remember it was Fortas and James Rowe, Larry O'Brien and I--we'd come in and--
- F: Tommy Corcoran?
- C: No, I never remember his being there. Rowe would represent all his views anyway, because they're law partners.
- F: The issue was brought up of Mr. Johnson's having become a millionaire while a public servant only. Did this present much of a problem? I know Life ran an article detailing his worth, and there were all kinds of accusations--how did this man who had never made more than X thousand a year become wealthy?
- C: I remember it coming up, and I was not involved in that. The President worked with Abe Fortas on that, and it seemed to me that at one stage, I'm not too clear on this, but--
- F: I'll ask him [Fortas] about that.
- C: By all means ask him, because the President used Justice Fortas a lot as his personal lawyer, and Abe Fortas was very familiar with his private affairs. I have some faint recollection that during the campaign, they together worked up some kind of a statement perhaps that the President gave.
- F: You inherited a hangover of the Bobby Baker disclosures which was used to show the breakdown of the moral fiber under the Democrats and so on. Were you involved in any of the measures to counter that?
- C: Certainly not in any specific manner. It would come up for general discussion as other issues came up during the campaign. But there again, Abe Fortas was much more familiar with that, because when Bobby Baker first got into difficulty he employed Abe Fortas, and Abe Fortas acted as his lawyer until Vice President Johnson succeeded to the presidency. Then Abe Fortas resigned from that employment, and Edward Bennett Williams took it over.
- F: Late in the campaign, in October of course we had the Walter Jenkins incident and you

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were involved in that.

C: I was involved in that briefly.

F: Do you want to tell us about that?

C: I was in my office one morning, it could not have been more than nine or nine-thirty; Abe Fortas called and said that Walter Jenkins had come by to see him, that he was in terrible shape, and that Abe wanted to talk with me about it. He thought it was entirely possible that there was something that would have to be done and done right away. And he said he was going to--

F: No hint on the telephone of what it was?

C: Certainly not specifically, but that he would have the chance to tell me. So he came by in a car, picked me up in front of my building on Connecticut Avenue, and we drove slowly while he discussed the whole matter with me. He had felt that what we ought to do was to get to the press at once with the suggestion that they not run any story about Walter Jenkins until they had more facts.

F: At this stage the President does not know it?

C: The President doesn't know a thing about it.

F: Is there any awareness at all of Walter's previous arrest?

C: None on my part and none on Abe's part. None on anybody's part that I know of. Because nobody apparently knew about that. So we drove along slowly and discussed it and decided that it would be a good idea to go to the editor of the Evening Star, the paper that had the story. We went down, spent maybe an hour talking with him about it; we knew nothing about any previous experience, nobody else did. We said that we thought this charge ought to be run down with great care, he was in a strategic position, he had a wife and I think five children, and it just could be the destruction of that family. They listened to us--

F: How did the Evening Star get the information?

C: All I know is that I think one of their reporters had picked it up from a police blotter.

F: So you knew that they knew it and Walter knew that they knew it?

C: Oh, sure. He knew that they knew it. You see, a phone call had come in from a reporter on the Star, I think to Mrs. Johnson's press secretary--

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F: Liz Carpenter?

C: Liz Carpenter. And she passed it, I think, right on--I think maybe to Walter, and then I think Walter came to Abe. So we spent time with the Star, we then went to the News, we then went to the Post; and our position was that the printing of a story without knowing the facts could destroy this man and his family, and he has been a loyal worker for twenty-five years, and we can't believe it's true. Some time during the day we went back to Abe's house where Walter was, and we both talked with him; he was--

F: Was Walter pretty distraught?

C: He was terribly agitated, terribly! We decided what he needed was a doctor more than anything, so during the course of the day we got a doctor for him, and the doctor, seeing the condition he was in, put him in the hospital. It was maybe later that day, toward dark I think, that maybe somebody in making a further search of the records came across a prior instance of a very similar nature in which I think he'd posted bond and then forfeited the bond. Well, that changed the whole complexion. Then the papers were full of it. That evening I think we both got on the phone at the White House and talked with the President--I have some recollection he was in New York--

F: He'd been campaigning that day in New Jersey and had gone from Bergen County over to the Waldorf Astoria for some kind of big campaign affair.

C: I think that's where he was when we talked with him. We explained the whole thing in detail, and that's that whole story.

F: Did this change your campaign strategy in any way?

C: No.

F: What was the President's reaction?

C: One of complete disbelief. He'd known this man, as I say, I think for twenty-five years; couldn't believe it--

F: As near selfless as anyone I think you'd run into.

C: As anybody has ever been. He worked like a dog, was devoted to President Johnson, perhaps more than any other man. The President couldn't really believe it, but by that time he had this additional prior difficulty, so it had to be faced up to. And the President's attitude was, "Well, these things happen, it came at an unfortunate time; we've got to just go ahead and do our job." And it really created practically no impact on the campaign. It wasn't the President's fault; it was a terribly unfortunate instance; demonstrated some

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curious mental quirk perhaps on the part of an otherwise outstanding public servant. Senator Goldwater did not pick it up. And in two or three days, the matter was gone and I'm not sure I ever saw it referred to again in the campaign.

F: So it never really was a vital factor as far as the campaign was concerned?

C: I think it proved to be no factor at all. Now, some other cheap people used it and said, "This is the kind of gang we've got in the White House in Washington." But that disappeared. I think they weren't getting anywhere with it. The Administration had been meticulously clean; there had not been any suggestion of scandal of any kind.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the Johnson Administration was the complete absence of any charges of financial impropriety, using a position for private gain, and so forth; it was remarkably free from that. President Truman had had his problems with fur coats and deep freezers, and President Eisenhower had his problems with vicuna coats. But you notice President Johnson didn't have those problems.

F: The percentage is almost with an Administration. It has to have at least one or two major scandals just because of the number of people involved.

C: That's right, and he just didn't have any; in his entire five years he didn't have any.

F: Was it after the election that the President, at least the New York Times, said that you considered being Attorney General at that time?

C: No, the President talked to me some about it in a general way, and I was convinced that it wasn't the place for me to serve. My interests lay in an entirely different area; my interests lay in the field of foreign policy and national security--it had in the Truman Administration. I had given a great deal of time and effort to it then.

It was after the President had his gall bladder operation that he spoke to me specifically about it, and I think at that time he was giving it very serious consideration.

F: He never really put any pressure on you to take it?

C: Well, that's a comparative expression. I think that he was giving it very serious consideration. And at that time I felt just as I had before, that it was not the place for me to serve; I thought that there were others who could do it well, there were others who would have a great deal more interest in it than I; I had no interest in the position at all. It wasn't where I wanted to serve him. It involved matters that were completely outside of the range of my interests. I do remember at that time discussing with him the fact as to where my interests did lie, and so we had that kind of understanding. And I think to a certain extent because of the fact that we had an understanding, or at least he knew how I



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felt in another area, that maybe he didn't push me as hard as he otherwise might have.

F: From my knowledge of you from the outside, I think you would have wasted your talents in that position. I think you could have done it, but I would tend to agree with you, which is neither here nor there.

What was the role of John Bailey during this period of 1964-65? Was he as ignored as generally--?

C: He went ahead and ran the committee. I hardly remember seeing him at all.

F: We won't argue the point whether the party machinery deteriorated somewhat over the five years of the Johnson Administration--I think that's generally accepted--but I would be interested in your ideas of why.

C: Basically, I believe that President Johnson did not attach any real significance to the Democratic National Committee. I believe that his background on the Hill had a good deal to do with that. I recall after the election in '56 when President Eisenhower defeated Adlai Stevenson again, that there was some question about whether the Democratic National Committee with a group of senior advisers would set policy or whether the party's leaders on the Hill would set policy. It was very clear, I think, to Senator Johnson and Speaker Rayburn that the responsibility lay upon the Hill. I think I remember President Johnson saying that he couldn't ever remember a time when he thought that the Democratic National Committee in his opinion had ever won an election. He said that some time maybe they contributed to the losing of an election. So that generally speaking, he just didn't think that they amounted to very much. After the '64 election, I believe they did begin to wither on the vine. I suppose that he'd agree to that also because he didn't think that they were a very important adjunct.

Now, as he was planning the campaign for 1968--this might be toward the end of '67 and very early '68 because there was a good deal of planning going on--I didn't see much of a place for the Democratic National Committee. He was calling on outsiders like Arthur Krim and Jim Rowe, Larry O'Brien, fellows of that kind, who were really going to be the men who ran the campaign.

F: He and Bailey never were antagonistic; he just didn't use him?

C: I don't ever remember him being critical of Bailey. It's just that their paths didn't cross very much, and he just didn't intend to make any real use of the Democratic National Committee. It was something that existed, and I think his attitude was, "Well, I guess that it has to be, but I don't have to spend much time with it."

F: Moving ahead toward '68, did you get any insights as to whether he was satisfied with Mr.

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Humphrey's performance and wanted him to go on as his vice presidential candidate?

- C: I was never in any doubt but what the ticket would be the same in '68 as it had been in '64. I don't believe that any Vice President that we've ever had has fully satisfied the President. I know, for instance, you can remember back in the eight years that President Eisenhower served, that there was a very real question from time to time as to what that relationship was. When '56 came, it looked for awhile that he was going to dump Vice President Nixon. In this instance I think that there were times when the relationship was less close than it was at other times, but as the campaign came on, or as it neared, I was sure in my own mind that the President was going to decide to have Vice President Humphrey go again with him to the post.
- F: How early did the President begin to give out little hints that he might not be a candidate in '68?
- C: I think I can go back to the fall of '67, and I have a recollection at one time then--it was on his plane, we were going or coming back from some place, oh, I think it was the return, I was going to say, from Southeast Asia, I don't know just when that was. But one time in the summer or fall of '67, he made a comment to me about it, and I attached no significance to it at all. It would be at the end of a hard day, and he'd say something--
- F: He's a good man on talking on several sides of an issue.
- C: Sure. Well, he might say, "Good Lord Almighty! Why anybody would want to go on with this terrible job, everybody just beating me over the head. Thank Heavens, I'll be through soon." And you'd kind of laugh and say, "Yes, that's right. Sure, except you won't." And then he'd kind of look at you and smile a little. Then the next day, he'd have a good night's rest and something would happen that would go right and he'd be right on top of the job again. I think there were two previous instances in which he made some mention of it to me, and I just discarded it from my mind. It came to me as a complete and total surprise on Sunday evening, March 31.
- F: Were you listening?
- C: No, I was at--it happened in this manner. We'd worked on the speech for days, and he called and said, "Why don't you bring your wife Marnie down about half an hour or forty-five minutes before the program, and come on over to the house, and we'll visit together, and then I'll go over and put on the speech." So I think we got there maybe forty-five minutes before the speech was to go on; I remember Mr. and Mrs. Walt Rostow were there; and my wife and I were there; and I think that's about all, maybe Busby was there. We sat around and talked and about twenty minutes before--he was in his bedroom, the sergeant came out and said he wanted to see me in his bedroom. And I went in and he handed me the last two or three paragraphs of the speech and said, "I'd like you to read

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them."

And I read them and you could have knocked my eyes off with a stick. I said, "You've made up your mind?" He said, "I've made up my mind." And I said, "You're actually going to do it?" He said, "I'm actually going to do it." I said, "All right, it's your decision, then it becomes my decision." I said, "You're sure you've thought it out?" He said, "I've thought out every phase." So I said, "Well, my God, I've got to tell Marnie; I can't let her hear it over the TV." He said, "That's all right." So I went out. I remember Mrs. Clifford and Mrs. Rostow were sitting together on the sofa. And I went out--

F: This was upstairs in the--?

C: Upstairs on the second floor at the west end of the hall. They were sitting there, and I went up and told both of them together what he was going to do, and they looked like they had seen a ghost. Neither one of them could believe it. They were absolutely and completely destroyed!

Then I went down with him to his office while he made the speech. And then we came back, and a group of people--maybe twenty-five or thirty, mostly people around that worked for him there in the White House, and some others that had been invited in, were all there for, it seems to me we had a drink and a little supper, and boy, it was like a wake! Nobody wanted him to do it; everybody was shocked and surprised!

The very next day, I know, Arthur Krim was to have a meeting of fifty or seventy-five potentially large contributors. He was saying, "What am I going to do? Should I have the meeting?" I mean, it came as a complete surprise to him, too. It's the best kept secret I think I've ever seen.

F: Did you get any glimpses at all just prior to this how strongly he felt about Senator McCarthy's moves?

C: No, not specifically, but I think he just lost all confidence in Senator McCarthy, as a great many thoughtful people did. He just didn't know from day to day or even hour to hour what Senator McCarthy was going to do next, and I think the President just thought that he was succeeding in his approach toward problems and really totally irresponsible.

F: Did you get the feeling, I'm being fairly personal today, but did you get the feeling once March 31 was over that the President became more or less effective because he didn't have the burden of running again?

C: Oh, I think that there are two sides to that coin. As far as Viet Nam was concerned, I think he became infinitely more effective.

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F: Was he more malleable?

C: No, that isn't quite the point. Had he all through the spring and summer of 1968 been a candidate, then every move he made with reference to Viet Nam would have been termed political. If he had tried to take some step that might diminish the impact of Viet Nam or do anything that might try to grind down the intensity of the war, the charge would have been made, "Well, it's just for politics." He was relieved of all of that by the announcement of March 31, so he was much more effective as far as foreign policy was concerned and particularly Viet Nam in my opinion.

Now, domestically, obviously his power and influence was very substantially reduced because he was to go out on January 20 and everybody then knew it, and that changes the whole climate as far as the Hill is concerned, as far as appointments are concerned, as was learned in the whole Fortas instance and all; [when] the President doesn't have the leverage of [a] substantial period of time ahead of him, the whole climate changes in Washington.

F: You can oppose with impunity, and it's your nature I think to oppose.

C: Oh, sure. He has lost his major leverage.

F: Did he talk with you at all about the elevation of Justice Fortas to the Chief Justice post?

C: Yes.

F: Can you tell us about that?

C: Well, it's really quite private, I thought that it was an excellent move; I have the greatest regard for the ability and leadership that Justice Fortas could have given the court. Personally, I thought it was a mistake to tie that appointment up with the other appointment--

F: Thornberry.

C: Of the Thornberry appointment. I knew Homer Thornberry and liked him, but the fact that he was an old friend of the President's and came from Texas, I thought would cause a very real problem in the Senate. I remember saying at the time that I thought perhaps the greatest assistance that he could render with reference to making Justice Fortas Chief Justice would have been to pick out a prominent greatly respected Republican lawyer for the other opening and present those as a package to the Senate rather than the package he presented. But he was very fond of Homer Thornberry, he thought very highly of him, and this was what he wanted; and, by God, he was going to see it through this way.

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- F: When this began to break down and it was apparent that the Senate wasn't going to confirm Justice Fortas and that Thornberry was going to get drowned in the wake, did he talk with you about that?
- C: No. I think he knew how I'd felt about it before, and there really wasn't anything very much left to say on that.
- F: Back on strict politics--campaigning--were you in on the decision to put the '68 convention in Chicago?
- C: I have a recollection that it came up one time with a group of us, and it is my recollection that as he asked us around the table how we felt about it, I voted for Chicago. I believe as it proved it wasn't particularly good judgment, certainly on my part, in casting my vote for Chicago. I thought it was rather bizarre for the Democrats to go to Miami Beach; that was a good place for the Republicans to go, a lot of rich fat cats, but no place I thought for the Democrats to go. I thought the Midwest was a better place for it. The alternatives were Florida, Texas, and Chicago. I thought Texas was a hopeless suggestion-
- F: Yes, wrong year for that.
- C: Oh, terrible.
- F: Unless both parties went.
- C: Right. And we already knew the Republicans were going to Miami. So it was between Miami and Chicago; those were really the only two candidates. There was a lot of pressure from Miami, particularly from the television companies, you know, because it's so much cheaper for them. However, I cast my vote for Chicago. I thought it was more representative; it was much easier for delegates to reach; it's a long haul from Tacoma, Washington, to Miami, Florida, for instance; and I thought it was more representative. We could not foresee; certainly I did not have the prescience to foresee what was going to happen in Chicago. Now, maybe we should have, but we just didn't.
- F: Did the President ever express to you his hopes of who would succeed him as the Democratic nominee once he was out of the race?
- C: He very much kept his own council in that regard, very, very much.
- F: So far as you know, did he lay a heavy hand on the convention in Chicago?
- C: I don't think he laid any hand on it at all.
- F: This charge was always being made, that everywhere you feel Lyndon Johnson's almost

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oppressive presence in this convention.

C: I don't think he laid any hand on at all. He didn't even go.

F: No, I know he didn't go.

C: I know, and they wanted him to go. Again, I remember I thought that it was a wise idea for him to go; I thought that he could--he was in position as the then-President, head of the party, I thought he had a certain responsibility to go; and I thought he could make the kind of speech that would be enormously valuable to the country and all, but he just wanted to stay entirely away from it. I am not conscious that he laid any heavy hand on the convention; I don't think he laid any hand on it at all.

F: It was an open convention as far as he was concerned?

C: I thought it was. I just think he decided to stay out of it entirely.

F: Once Humphrey is nominated and is a candidate, again one of the charges that you hear is that deep down Mr. Johnson thought it would be a good time to teach the party a lesson, and that maybe he was a little pleased at Mr. Nixon's election and would not raise a hand to help Mr. Humphrey.

C: I have never known the straight of this. He never saw fit to discuss it with me; I don't know what went on between him and Vice President Humphrey--

F: You don't know whether he was ever invited to participate in the campaigning and failed to, or whether he ever volunteered to and was not accepted?

C: I don't know that.

F: Do you know anything about the circumstances when they did make their big thrust down at the Astrodome in Houston?

C: I don't know that either. The fact is, and I merely cite this generally, I believe that as the year '68 went on, I think I was conscious of some erosion of our relationship. I felt very strongly about Viet Nam, and I think I was something of an irritant to him in '68 with reference to Viet Nam. I did it with a clear conscience because I thought it was not only in the country's interest, but I think it was in his interest. And I'm greatly comforted by some of the decisions that he did make, the cutting back of the bombing in March, and the decision not to send more troops; and finally on October 31, the cessation of the bombing completely. I believe that that has added greatly to his stature and position. If all of that had had to be done by President Nixon, it would have been a real calamity. But I believe because I did push hard through that year, I think I felt our relationship lessening some.

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F: One more question and we'll shut this off for the day. Was he aware that Mr. McNamara was going to resign; was he trying to find Mr. McNamara a way out that would not look as if there were a rift between the two?

C: I've never known the complete story on that. He told me that in 1967 at some stage he and Secretary McNamara had discussed the situation. By that time Secretary McNamara had been in seven years in this killing job. And they had had a discussion about Secretary McNamara moving to the World Bank, and Secretary McNamara had evidenced a very real interest in it. And then apparently they had a second conversation in which the President asked him if he was still interested in it, and McNamara said he was.

Then the President went ahead pretty much on his own, based upon that understanding, and the machinery developed and finally came to a climax; and the opening came and he said, "Okay, it's McNamara, because I've had this previous understanding with him." I think there were some who felt that McNamara was surprised to some extent, maybe he felt that they should have talked about it again. But I think the President was very clear that they had had an understanding, and I believe generally Mr. McNamara was. Part of that as I sense it, my attitude is only general, I think that President Johnson was concerned about Mr. McNamara's lessening support of the war, particularly statements that Secretary McNamara had made with reference to the effectiveness and efficacy of our bombing in North Viet Nam. And I think the President wanted a stronger supporter of his policy. There is something curious in the fact that, and even rather sardonic, that he reached out for me, because I was a supporter of his policy. Because he felt, "Well, we'll have a good firm supporter there in Defense," and then in a matter of weeks, I began to change my views.

F: How early did he start talking with you about taking over?

C: Maybe December--I would say some time in December of '67. I have some recollection that when he and his family came out on Christmas to our house to help celebrate Christmas Day that we had some talks about it. Then I think the name went up in January. I would think along in maybe--it could have been as early as November, but some time toward the end of the year he began to talk with me about it.

F: How do you account for this fact, now that foreign policy is such a terrifically sensitive issue, that you encountered no more opposition from your confirmation than you did? I would have thought that at that stage of the game it would have been almost impossible to confirm anyone.

C: I had really not been in any controversial position with reference to it, and it had not reached the point then that it later reached. This was before Tet fortunately, and I'd not written about it or spoken about it, which oftentimes gives enemies ammunition. I got a good long three-hour grilling or so, but fortunately I got a unanimous vote from the

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committee, and got a unanimous vote from the Senate itself; there wasn't a dissenting vote. But it was not the sharp issue then nor the violent issue then, it seems to me, that it became after Tet. Tet's really what threw the gasoline on the fire.

F: Tet was a searing experience.

C: Oh, boy, that was--

F: It must have been for you as a newcomer to the department.

C: It really was. Let's see, I had my hearing some time, I think--my name went up in January, and I had my hearing either in January or February. Tet didn't come until the end of February, the last two or three days of February and the first few days of March.

F: One other personal note (I keep saying "one other"), when the President went out of office you sort of helped see him off that last day before he took off for Texas. Tell us a little bit about this. I thought it was a particularly appealing gesture on your part--more than a gesture.

C: I think it must have been November--Mrs. Clifford either spoke to Mrs. Johnson or wrote a letter to her. Mrs. Clifford and I had talked about it, and I said that I thought it would be nice if we were the ones to give that final luncheon for President and Mrs. Johnson. So I asked Mrs. Clifford to speak to Mrs. Johnson; Mrs. Johnson said she would check with the President; she checked with the President; they said they would be delighted if we gave the luncheon. I had remembered that a luncheon was appropriate that day because when the swearing-in ceremony up at the Capitol is over, there is a luncheon held for the new President, but for some reason or another the outgoing President is not invited.

F: He's just cast loose on the town.

C: That's right. He is thrown overboard. So I'd remembered that from the Truman days. So the President and Mrs. Johnson got up the list of those that they wanted present at that time. In the main it was old friends that they'd worked with and been close to, many of them he'd worked, with in the House, some from the Senate, then those who were close to him during the time he was in the White House--I think there were forty or fifty there for the luncheon. He drove right from the swearing-in ceremony out to our house, his daughters were there, and the babies were there--the children were there, and we had somebody in to look after the children. And it was one of the most heart-warming experiences I had ever had, and I think it was to him. He was no longer President, but for some reason or another it had gotten into the paper that he was to come out there for luncheon, and I estimate 500 people gathered around our house.

F: And it was a raw day.



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- C: It was raw and cold and a fine mist of rain; it was really rough. And they stood out there for hours, all on the front lawn; climbed up trees and all. And when he arrived he just had to go through this mass of humanity. They had banners, "We Love You, President Johnson!" It had an enormous impact on all of us and particularly on him because every President thinks, "Oh, well, they've just come out to see a President." These people didn't come out to see a President; they came out to see Lyndon B. Johnson.
- F: And this was totally unorganized and spontaneous?
- C: Absolutely and completely. The fact is, the job they did on our lawn our shrubbery shouldn't happen to a dog.
- F: It wasn't the expense of the luncheon, it was fixing the place up afterwards then?
- C: Yes, but we did it very gladly, because it was the greatest outpouring of affection that I've seen in a long time. And I think they all attributed it to that. Ever so often he would leave and go out on the front porch, and they would cheer and yell and whistle, and then he'd hold up little Lyn and one thing and another like that.
- F: They stayed right through the whole luncheon and--?
- C: They stayed there through the whole time so they'd be there when he left. Then a group of his Cabinet and other friends saw him off out at Andrews airport.
- F: Was it a little moisty there at your house, moisty-eyed, I mean?
- C: Very, very. You bet. Because people had been awfully close to him, and everybody there had had personal experiences and gone through a good many difficulties and all. You could just sense the depth of the affection that was felt for him. These were the people who loved him the most.
- F: Thank you, Mr. Clifford.

(End of tape 4)

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By Clark M. Clifford

to the

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