INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 30, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: DONALD C. COOK

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

PLACE: Mr. Cook's Office, 2 Broadway, New York.

Tape 1 of 1

B: Sir, if we may begin at the beginning, I know that you first went to work for Mr. Johnson in 1943. Did you have any acquaintance with him before then?

C: No, that was the first time that I had met him.

B: What were the circumstances of your accepting that job, sir? That was as Special Counsel to the Special Investigating Subcommittee of the House Committee on Naval Affairs.

C: That is correct. Congressman Johnson, I believe, had friends in various agencies in the government, and the best information I have is that he made inquiries at some of the agencies for the purpose of getting recommendations for someone to serve as counsel of the subcommittee of which he had then been named chairman I think he sought recommendations over at the Securities and Exchange Commission, where I was then employed, and I was recommended to him.

B: Do you know who made that recommendation?

C: I believe the recommendation was made by the then-Chairman of the Commission, who was named Ganson Purcell.

B: I ask because I've seen indication in writing, in Evans and Novak's book on President Johnson, that then-Justice Douglas might have had something to do with it.

C: Well, I understood that there were discussions between Justice Douglas and Ganson Purcell. The extent of those discussions, I am not acquainted with.

B: Did you have any hesitation about taking a leave from the SEC to join this project?

C: No. Actually, I thought that this project was one of the most meritorious ones that was then going forward in the government, and I was very anxious to be able to be of some help.

B: Do you recall your first meeting with Mr. Johnson? Did he outline for you what he expected the subcommittee to do?

C: Yes. I recall the first meeting very well. After the recommendation had been made to him, I was asked to go to Washington and meet with him in his office. I assume so that he would have an opportunity to form an opinion of me and as to whether, in his judgment, I would be suitable to fill the post that was available. I went to Washington, met in his office in the old House Office Building, and had a very thorough discussion with respect to the activity that was going to be carried on.

B: Did he outline any particular areas of investigation?

C: No particular areas. He indicated generally, as I recall, that he was vitally interested in seeing that the war effort be carried on in the most efficient, the most expeditious way, to the end

that hostilities could be brought to a conclusion at the earliest possible time.

B: Were you given pretty much of a free hand in directing the affairs of the committee? Which is another way to ask: how active was Mr. Johnson with the committee?

C: I don't believe that any chairman of any congressional committee would give to anyone else a free hand in carrying on the affairs of that committee, and that of course was true with respect to the affairs of this committee. The committee was under the control of its chairman, as you might expect, although in carrying on the work of the committee, the chairman always sought to have that work reflect the desires of all the members of the committee.

This is not an easy thing to accomplish, as you might well imagine, because members of Congress are all men with their own separate personalities, their own peculiar sets of problems. They are independent powers. He was able, however, to, I think, obtain a consensus of the views of the members in a way that I had not theretofore ever seen.

B: Even during the 1940s, as a congressman, that technique was in operation?

C: That is correct. Now, I think he did expect that his counsel would come forward with ideas as to areas which needed some inquiry, just as he came forward, and the other congressmen, members of the committee, came forward with those ideas. I think that he

expected that the committee itself would sort out those suggestions and would come to a conclusion as to which ideas ought to be implemented. And once that conclusion had been reached, he expected that the counsel, together with the staff, would lay out the inquiry and carry it forward to a point where enough data had been collected and presented to the committee so that the committee could then pass judgment on the kind of report it desired to make and give to the full committee, and indeed to the various elements of the defense establishment, this being prior to unification, as well as to the President.

B: Did you see anything of the relationship between Congressman Johnson and Mr. [Carl] Vinson, the chairman of the parent committee?

C: Yes I did. I saw that at rather close range.

B: It's often been described as a kind of protege-type relationship. Is that right?

C: Well, I don't think that quite covers it. I think it was a unique relationship in that Congressman Vinson was a good deal older than Congressman Johnson, and yet, their dealings, it seemed to me, were more on the basis of equality minus only some small quantum that would perhaps reflect the difference in age and the difference in position within the full Naval Affairs Committee and in the Congress. I had the feeling that there was a great deal of mutual trust and confidence between these two men, that each recognized the other as having tremendous abilities, being rather unusual--in each of them, and that the question of one being the

patron and the other being the protege really wasn't much involved.

B: Was the relationship between Mr. Johnson and Speaker Sam Rayburn also obvious at the time?

C: Yes, it was.

B: Was this a similar kind of relationship?

C: Yes, but I believe that for quite a number of reasons, perhaps the relationship with Speaker Rayburn could have leaned a little more in the direction of a protege relationship. This undoubtedly is the result of the Texas background and probably a result of the fact that Mr. Rayburn undoubtedly was the most distinguished and most powerful man in the full Congress.

B: Did Mr. Johnson, in those days, form any general opinions about professional military officers or the military in general?

C: Yes, I think he had formed a set of opinions, and I say opinions, not biases. To the best of my recollection, I think he had a very high regard for them and for military men on a professional basis. I think that he had some doubts about them on a business and administrative basis, and I believe that he felt that it was highly desirable that the military establishment be amenable to the civil authorities.

B: Either congressional or administrative?

C: Either congressional or administrative. I think he felt that unless there were civilian control, the military establishment might tend to proliferate and might tend to seek funds and get funds in amounts that are not warranted by the requirements of

the national defense.

B: At the same time your committee was working, a similar, if perhaps slightly broader in scope, committee in the Senate, headed by Senator Truman, was at work and seemed to have gotten most of the publicity. Do you suppose that rankled Mr. Johnson any?

C: No, I don't think so. Actually, if I remember correctly, my contacts with the Congressman and my work with the committee came at a time when the work of the Truman Committee was beginning to taper off and diminish.

B: Later in the war years--you were with the committee from '43 to '45, I believe. The work of your committee is in the congressional records, of course, but do you recall any areas that you informally discussed investigating and decided not to? I realize that's a long time ago.

C: I recall an area later than the period about which we are now speaking--namely, when I did some work with the then-Senator Johnson. But during this period, we pursued all of the areas that we desired to pursue without any problems either within the committee or from the Executive branch of the government, including both the President and the Defense Department itself.

B: Is there anything else about the work with the Naval Affairs Committee that stands out in your mind, sir, or that should be on this kind of record?

C: Well, I think one of the most important things that the Naval Affairs

Committee did was to get into the investigation of a certain contract that had been entered into between the Navy and Standard Oil of California with regard to the exploitation of the Elk Hill[?] Naval Petroleum Reserve. As a result of the investigation that was made by the committee of which then-Congressman Johnson was chairman, that contract was later rescinded, there was new legislation passed by the Congress, and new arrangements were entered into. And I think that as a result of those new arrangements, a good deal of savings or diminution of adverse effects resulted from the point of view of the government.

B: Any problems involved in that in a congressman from an oil-producing state getting involved with a major oil company?

C: Yes, I suppose that's why it made such a very great impression on me. The Congressman was from a state that had a very big stake in oil, and yet when he had the choice to make--namely between an oil company orientation and being a true patriot in every sense of the word--he made what I regarded, of course, as the right choice. And it involved no hesitation on his part so far as I'm aware.

B: Sir, to move on in time, after 1945 you were in various government jobs and private law practice up until you rejoined then-Senator Johnson in 1950. In the interval was there any contacts between you and him?

C: Yes, there were some, although, when I was out of the government they, as you might expect, tended to become attenuated.

B: I was just going to ask if perhaps he called upon you for advice in connection with, oh, say, some of the debates over the military establishment in the late forties, the unification, apportionment of resources?

C: Well, the thing that I remember most clearly that I worked with him on, consulted with him about, was when there was a contest with respect to his election as Senator from Texas, and there were certain proceedings before the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections which needed to be gone through before he was confirmed in his right to take his seat. I was then in private practice, and, among other things, I undertook a study of all of the legal precedents involving just what the authority of the Senate was in connection with the termination of the right of an elected Senator to take his seat.

B: Was there any real doubt that the Senate might not allow Mr. Johnson to take his seat?

C: There wasn't in my mind.

B: But there was serious talk within the Senate?

C: Well, I wouldn't put it that way. I think I would say this: that I think that questions of this kind that tend to have almost exclusively political overtones, and that when you're in a political framework, it's very difficult to tell just what the outcome will be. And I think that in a political framework, particularly when you have one branch of the government determining the qualifications

of its own members, the legal precedents tend sometimes not to be determinative.

B: How did you get called in on that duty, sir?

C: Well, I suppose because I was there in Washington and handy and because I was, I suppose, too, a known quantity to the Senator.

B: Did he seem worried about the possibility of being allowed to take his seat or unduly sensitive about his narrow margin?

C: Well, I think he was sensitive about his narrow margin. I don't think he was worried about his right to take his seat. My own view was that after there had been the litigation carried to the Supreme Court in which the Senator was completely upheld and vindicated, there was no doubt as to the outcome. I do think, however, that he was always a very careful man about important matters, and although he wasn't worried, he was definitely concerned to see that the matter that he had affecting himself in such an extremely important way was carefully handled, was treated in the best possible way.

B: Were you working with anyone else, sir? For example, I know Abe Fortas was working.

C: Yes, I had some discussions with Abe at that time.

B: I believe Mr. Fortas was primarily handling the actual litigations at that time?

C: That is correct.

B: Then, sir, in 1950, you were once again asked to join Mr. Johnson's staff. At this time you were--let me put this in here for the

record--you were back with the SEC and were asked to come and be Chief Counsel of the Preparedness Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

C: Yes, that's correct.

B: Do you recall the circumstances of getting this job, sir?

C: Well, I think they were essentially the same as the earlier situation. I was there in Washington; I was in the government, therefore, potentially available; I had done this kind of work in the past, and therefore was familiar to some extent with both affairs on the Hill and with the defense establishment, and I had some kind of a demonstrated record in the field, a record which was there for anyone to see and evaluate. If they thought well of it, presumably I would be regarded as someone who had a certain amount of competence to do the same type of work again.

B: Did you have any sort of hesitation, sir? I ask because at the time you were, I believe, Vice Chairman of the SEC, a very high ranking position.

C: No, I had no hesitation whatsoever, and again, because I felt that the work that the Senator was going to carry on was of the greatest importance in the national interest, and while I felt that the other work that I was doing was important also, I think that it was appropriate that that work should yield for this.

B: You didn't have to be subjected to Mr. Johnson's rather well-known persuasive techniques then?

C: Well, he's always persuasive, and he's a very strong personality, as you know, and when he decides that he wants to accomplish something, he's rather vigorous in setting about to accomplish it. I never had the feeling at any time that he engaged in any arm-twisting or put any special or undue pressure on me. I had the feeling that he simply made known what it was that he wanted and expressed certain hopes as to how it could be accomplished, and that was really enough.

B: Again, when you were signed on with the committee, were you given any broad, general outlines of the scope of your work?

C: No, I think that this was quite an easy operation to begin, primarily because of the background with all of the various subcommittees of which the then-Congressman Johnson had been chairman. So that, if I could put it this way, he knew where all the keys were on the piano from the congressional committee point of view, and I think I knew where the keys were on the piano from the point of view of the counsel and the point of view of the staff. So it was easy to walk in the office, hang up your hat, and begin work without any lost motion.

B: This is ten years, now, after the last time you were closely involved with Mr. Johnson. Did you notice any differences in the man, ten years older and now a Senator instead of a Congressman?

C: Well, not differences particularly. Despite the passage of ten very hard, vigorous years--in which I know he was working night and day, Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, nothing stood in

the way of things that he felt he had to do and needed to be done--he still had the same energy; he was just as vigorous, just as dynamic, just as sharp, just as thoughtful.

B: Was he sometimes a difficult man to work for?

C: Oh, yes. Of course. But then, all of us are. That's, I think, because people who accomplish things have certain rapid insights and certain internal dynamism that perhaps tend to make them somewhat abrasive when they are in contact with slower and less dynamic and less well-informed people.

B: Does someone working for him closely have to deliberately steel themselves to avoid being swept up in all that energy?

C: Yes. I think, if I can use another analogy, it's of the utmost importance to be on the same wavelength with him.

B: Could you elaborate on that or explain that?

C: Well, I think that anyone who would be working for the Senator, either on his payroll or not on his payroll, but working with him, if he's going to be productive and have a harmonious relationship, he's got to have generally the same kinds of concepts with respect to objectives and with respect to working hours and working situations. A nine to five employee ought to work elsewhere.

B: You mentioned earlier that, in connection with this group, there were some areas considered for investigation, but not actually investigated.

C: Yes. What I had in mind was this: in laying out an investigation

of any agency, you can start with the certain proposition that if you were inside the agency, you would know precisely what was wrong with it, what had been wrong with it, and what ought to be done to try and correct it. When you are outside the agency, it's an entirely different thing. How do you learn, or how can you visualize what the things are that need to be aired and need to be corrected? Well, part of this is intuition; part of this is experience; part of it is information that comes from people within the agency who are dissatisfied with the way things are going; some of it gets into the public domain as a result of vigorous newsmen; some of it is a result of lawsuits. But you can certainly feel sure that the sum total of what comes to you that way is much less than the sum total of that which exists.

It occurred to me, therefore, that what we ought to do is ask the Defense Department to give us access to all of the results of the activities of the Inspector General. The theory being perfectly obvious--that if a matter were serious enough to be referred to the Inspector General's office for investigation, it ought to be of some interest to the committee. The Defense Department refused to do this, standing upon what I thought was a misapplication of a legal principle--namely, the separation of powers. This was not pressed, and therefore, I think the committee was prevented from getting in a very short period of time, in a very easy and handy way, a good deal of information

about the Defense Departmentto which it was entitled.

B: Did Mr. Johnson concur in the idea in trying to get this information?

C: He concurred in the idea of trying to get it, but I think finally became reconciled to the fact that we would have to dig it out the hard way.

B: He didn't press, in other words?

C: Well, I don't know that I would want to say that. I don't think that I would be able to go any farther than to say that for the reasons indicated, we abandoned the effort.

B: Was there anything else that you wanted to do and didn't get to do?

C: No, there was never any other area that we wanted to, as a counsel and staff, look into that we were prevented from looking into.

B: I think it's fair to say that one of the general criticisms that that committee had was to say that the Administration was trying to have both guns and butter to the detriment of the effort.

C: Yes, that's true.

B: It's an interesting kind of thing in view of the fact that several years later in Mr. Johnson's Presidency, he will be criticized for the same thing in relation to Vietnam.

C: Yes, I found that to be a strange paradox, and I think his position in the earlier years was a better one than his position in the later years.

B: You mean that you believe that the criticism applies in both cases?

C: Not in both cases. Well, perhaps I misunderstand you. If what you are saying is that in both periods it was a mistake to try and have guns and butter, I quite agree with that. In the earlier period, the then-Congressman Johnson and later the then-Senator Johnson, took the very strong position that guns and butter just were not possible under the circumstances. Later, during his Presidency, he took the position that they were possible, and I believe that his earlier position was valid and his later position was invalid.

B: In the fifties, did Senator Johnson really understand the rather complex economics behind that kind of criticism? I ask because it would be easy to say you can't have both guns and butter as just a kind of slogan.

C: Slogans have a very common use in political circles--sometimes a valid use, sometimes an entirely invalid use. I don't think that he was really a sloganeer. I think that he used these generalizations not because they sounded attractive, but he used them only when he believed there was a real factual predicate for the use of the generalization. As to his knowledge of economics, I think I would say this: he was not trained in economics. I don't think he would know John Stuart Mill from Ricardo or from Keynes or from whoever. I really think this was a positive advantage, rather than a detriment. I happen to have been trained in theoretical economics myself, and,

frankly, was in school during the Great Depression, and found such a vast difference between what was going on in the real world and what was being taught in the colleges and universities in the economics field that, although I thought the learning in the field had a certain amount of usefulness, I didn't elevate it to a particularly high position.

Mr. Johnson had a very, very keen mind. He was of a very practical turn. He knew what made business go. He knew what helped it; he knew what would hurt it; he knew what the end product of an economic machine really ought to be, and he knew the limits of what an economy at any particular time could deliver.

At the time he spoke of the inability to have both guns and butter at the same time, he was speaking against the background of having been responsible for the making of a series of reports with respect to, among other things, the productive power of the country with regard to various raw materials of vital importance both to civilian economy and to the national defense. One very important one was synthetic rubber; another one was the metal nickel, and so on. So that when he spoke, he spoke with a factual knowledge. It was not necessary for him to come to this kind of conclusion, which I felt was a very sound conclusion, to know anything about either the old classical economists or the contemporary economists. Had he known something about them, I'm sure that his views could have been fitted into the theory. But he didn't [have to] know the theory in order to have a deep

understanding of the situation and what needed to be done in connection with it.

B: Did he tend to seek and listen to advice from all sides of all different kinds?

C: He always did this, and I thought this was one of his exceptionally good qualities. He tried to get the viewpoints of all kinds of people of different orientations. He tried to get a factual predicate laid by experts, and he genuinely and conscientiously sought to try and find what the facts were and where those facts ought to lead him. I doubt that it would have been possible for me to be deeply engaged in any kind of project where this approach was not followed.

B: Did you see anything of the members of Mr. Johnson's senatorial staff? Walter Jenkins?

C: Yes. I came to know Walter Jenkins, I thought very well, although you never, of course, can be sure.

B: I've seen it said that Walter Jenkins was simply "the" right-hand man for Mr. Johnson.

C: Oh, I think that probably is an exaggeration. I think that he had a great many people who were quite close to him, that he talked to, that he relied upon, and had a very useful working relationship. Without knowing, I would guess that the reason for the belief that Walter was kind of a right-hand was, I think, Walter probably was most familiar with most of his personal affairs than, so far as I know, anybody else was.

B: Is there anything else that should be recorded about your work

with that subcommittee?

C: I think that the work of the committee was in many ways unique. The Senate Armed Services Committee was a very powerful committee. It had as its chairman Senator [Richard] Russell, who I think was acknowledged in the Senate and acknowledged generally, by people who knew, as one of the ablest and most distinguished of the senators. The Preparedness Subcommittee was actually made up of a majority of the full committee. So that if that subcommittee were to reach a conclusion unanimously, it represented a conclusion of a majority of the full committee. Now that necessarily made it a group of much more power and much more importance, in the sense that its recommendations were likely to be followed, than would be the case of the usual group and including particularly the usual subcommittee. Ordinarily, a subcommittee is sort of a preliminary fact-finder and recommender, but this particular subcommittee had, in every sense of the word, the stature of one of the full committees of the Senate. Now, the fact is that there was never a committee report issued that was not unanimously approved by the subcommittee, and there never was a proposed report brought to the committee which the committee did not issue. So that gave it, I think, a unique position, and, I believe, allowed it to make a major contribution to a rationalization of the Defense Department and a contribution to the prosecution of the war. I think it had the incidental effect of bringing the relations between Senator Russell and Senator Johnson to a point of great closeness.

B: I was going to ask that, because there is another of those relationships similar to Mr. Rayburn and Mr. Vinson earlier.

C: Yes, and I would regard the cementing of that relationship as probably one of the most important aspects of Senator Johnson's political career.

B: Are you saying, sir, that obviously the relationship was very close at the beginning of that subcommittee's work or Mr. Johnson would not have been named chairman of it, but then it got even closer as the work went on.

C: Yes, that is true. I think that since Senator Russell was the chairman of the committee and Senator Johnson was carrying on these manifold activities as chairman of this very important subcommittee, that it resulted in constant contacts between the two.

I think Senator Russell formed the opinion that here was a man of tremendous competence, ability, patriotism, and that that had certain consequences both for the future organization and conduct of the work of the Senate, as well as for the election when Senator Johnson was running for the Vice Presidential spot.

B: I suppose that one could speculate that that was one of the things that encouraged Senator Russell to urge Mr. Johnson to the leadership position later on.

C: Well, I would think that would be true. We always like to deal with known quantities rather than unknown quantities, and it's sad to say that high competence is a rare commodity. The number of

people who have it is much smaller than the number of people who think they have it, and when you find somebody who is highly competent, you like to be associated with them, to work with them, or to have them work for you. I think the work that the Senator did in connection with this committee undoubtedly must have aroused a certain amount of admiration in his colleagues, including Senator Russell, because he did a remarkable job.

B: Sir, weren't you a delegate from Michigan to the 1952 Democratic Convention?

C: Yes.

B: Was there an attempt there to get the nomination for Senator Russell?

C: Yes, there was.

B: Was Mr. Johnson involved in this?

C: Yes, he was.

B: How close did it come to happening?

C: Well, of course, I was not privy to all the ramifications of that, although I was aware of the fact that this movement was going forward. I don't pretend to know much about politics, so I'm probably not a very good man to express any judgment on this. But having said that, I suppose like everybody else,even though he knows his judgment isn't much good, he's always willing to express it. I thought that Senator Russell deserved the nomination, but I also believed that it was impossible for him to get it. I think that

under other circumstances it might well have been possible for the strength that Senator Russell had . . . it might have been possible to divert that strength to a man like Senator Johnson. If that had been done, I think our political history might have been written somewhat differently from the way it is now going to be written.

B: You mean . . . was there any talk of trying for the Presidential nomination for Mr. Johnson in '52 or the Vice Presidential nomination?

C: It was in terms of the Vice Presidential nomination.

B: Did you ever discuss that with Mr. Johnson himself?

C: My association with him was for the most part entirely non-political.

B: I was wondering--again this might be speculation--but it seems quite possible that Mr. Johnson could think that perhaps his investigating committee could do for him what Senator Truman's had done for him in the forties.

C: That's possible. As a matter of fact, it might make an interesting study, sometime, for one to make a comparison of the work of the Truman Committee with the work of the various Johnson committees for the purpose of coming to some conclusion as to which made the greater contribution and as to which resulted in advancing the political careers of each of these men the most.

B: I gather you feel that the Johnson committees were more productive ?

C: I felt that it was an abler committee doing essential work on a

non-political, non-inflammatory basis.

B: Were you asked then, sir, after this time, to be counsel for the Policy Committee under Mr. Johnson?

C: Yes.

B: But you did not take it.

C: That is correct.

B: May I ask why, if it's not too impertinent a question?

C: Well, I was then getting to be a pretty old man, and I thought what I needed to do was to start carving out what would be my ultimate personal career, and I felt that going up on the Hill would be a kind of diversion from which I might not really recover. Not that it wasn't a post of extreme importance and not that it wasn't an effort that would be worthy of anyone, but just in terms of my own personal situation, I was at an age and in a position where I think I would have set back the maturing of my own career considerably.

B: Did Mr. Johnson understand this reasoning, or was he angry at your refusal?

C: Oh, no. The only thing he did was to ask me to recommend somebody to him who would do the kind of job he wanted done.

B: Whom did you recommend, sir?

C: I recommended a man by the name of Gerald Siegel. I took that assignment very conscientiously, and I looked over all the people that I knew around Washington, and I came to the conclusion that

the man that I had selected for my own legal assistant, after having gone through that process a little earlier, was the best man for the job. And, although it was like losing a right arm, I felt that I had undertaken to recommend the best man I could find. This was the man, so I did.

B: And, of course, Mr. Siegel became counsel of the Policy Committee and stayed there for a few years.

C: Yes, he did. Yes.

B: And if I may insert here for the record, for anyone reading this, at this time in '53, you joined the American Electric Power Service Corporation, where you are now President.

C: That is correct.

B: Then, sir, the subsequent years on from '53 into 1960, did you have any formal or informal relationship with Mr. Johnson? Did he call on you for advice?

C: Yes, I had a number of contacts with him, some that he would seek and some that I would seek.

B: What sort of things would those be? Primarily in economic affairs?

C: Well, I have always had a very lively interest in the financial and monetary aspects of our domestic economy and also in international financial affairs, and there were a number of occasions when I would discuss matters such as that with him.

There were occasions when he would raise questions with me in two fields that I recall offhand: one being equal employment opportunity and, two, certain affairs of the space program.

B: Equal employment opportunity would be in connection with the 1957 civil rights?

C: That is correct, yes.

B: Did Mr. Johnson need much encouraging to advocate equal employment opportunity?

C: No, he was, I think, a real self-starter in that field and under difficult circumstances I thought. I thought he pushed it very vigorously, and I think when the history of civil rights is written, a great deal of it is going to revolve around him--both with respect to his legislative activities and with respect to his activities as Chairman of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities.

B: Were you involved with any of the actual drafting process of the '57 bill?

C: No. I had nothing to do in any way, shape, or form with that bill. I think that you may find that a man we referred to earlier, name of Gerry Siegel, was deeply involved in it and would have some very special insights about it.

B: Yes, we'll be interviewing Mr. Siegel for this project,too. I believe you were asked once again to head an investigation in 1957 after the Sputnik launching.

C: After what?

B: The launching in October, 1957, of the Russian Sputnik.

C: Oh, yes, yes.

B: Were you asked to head that special investigation?

C: Yes, but I had become so deeply involved here that it just wasn't possible for me to do that.

B: Did you once again recommend an alternative?

C: Yes. I thought that Ed Weisl, who is a partner of Simpson, Thatcher and Bartlett, would be an ideal man for that job. He, that is Mr. Weisl, was not entirely sure that was the case, but after some discussions, he determined to do it, and fortunately, he brought with him one of his younger partners, a man who later has served this country with very great distinction, and that's Cyrus Vance. So that Mr. Weisl and Mr. Vance together assumed the major burden of carrying on the work of this committee.

B: Sir, when in this process did you see signs of Presidential ambition in Mr. Johnson?

C: Oh, I think probably within the first couple of months after I had met him.

B: Back in the 1940s?

C: Oh, yes. I think it was very clear. At least, it seemed so to me without hearing the Congressman say anything or without being told that this was an objective. It was very clear to me that he was a superb politician. It was also very clear to me that he was very dynamic, very aggressive; he had a desire to use his abilities to the fullest possible extent. Now, if you like politics and if you are dynamic, there is only one ultimate goal to which you ought

to aspire, and if you don't aspire to it, you shouldn't be in politics. And that is the Presidency of the United States. It seemed to me that all of the signs were such that he must have had in his mind, even then, the possibility that one day he would have an opportunity to become President of the United States, and I am sure that this desire undoubtedly shaped a considerable part of his career.

B: Were you involved in his try for the nomination in 1960?

C: No. Not to any extent. I may have discussed some things with him. I may have supplied him with some material that could have been more or less significant. But I did not regard myself as being any element involved in that activity.

B: Did you see much of Mr. Johnson during the years that he was Vice President?

C: No. I kind of drifted away from his operation. I was becoming more and more involved in our own activities. There was really no occasion for me to have any extensive contacts with him. I did talk with him on occasion, various things, but aside from his desire to have me come to Washington as head of the Space Agency and my inability to do that, I think that our contacts commenced to become quite attenuated.

B: Actually, sir, didn't Mr. Johnson ask you and Sarnoff and Stanton to form a study group on the space program?

C: Yes. Shortly after he became the Vice President, I think that he wanted

to get outside advice with regard to the direction the Space Agency should take, and I did participate rather extensively in that connection. The group actually was Frank Stanton, George Brown, and myself, not Sarnoff.

B: Is that George Brown of Brown and Root?

C: Yes.

B: The group recommended an accelerated program, I believe, didn't they?

C: Yes, it did. I deeply believed in it myself. I gave him my own recommendations in writing. I don't know how Stanton and Brown conveyed their views, but I conveyed mine to him. A good deal of work was done at that time, also, with Senator [Robert] Kerr, who I believe was chairman of the committee having jurisdiction over the agency. I think that because those of us who were conferring with him were from the business community, and it was essential to have a business community viewpoint, and probably desirable from the point of view of the President to know that there was this feeling in the business community, that Vice President Johnson was placed in a position where he could make this recommendation to the President and since Senator Kerr was also involved in the discussions, to give President Kennedy a feeling of comfort as to the recommendation, both from the legislative point of view and the business community point of view.

B; And, of course, that spring of '61 President Kennedy did announce an acceleration.

C: That is correct.

B: To try for the moon in this decade.

C: Yes.

B: And you were offered, and rejected, the Administrator position at NASA?

C: Well, the Vice President asked me to allow my name to be submitted to the President. It was never offered to me by the President because my discussions were only with the Vice President. And technically, although I'm sure the President would allow the Vice President to have that appointment, technically, the fact is that it was only discussed with Vice President Johnson.

B: I don't mean to imply any sort of cause-and-effect, but perhaps I should point out for the record here that in that same year you became president of the AEP [American Electric Power Service Corporation] . In '61, I believe, wasn't it?

C: Yes. I think that that, however, was at the end of the year, whereas these discussions were in the early part of the year.

B: Did Mr. Johnson seem in any way uncomfortable or restive as Vice President?

C: Yes. But then, I think, every Vice President does. It's an anomalous position, very difficult one. It's not conceivable to me that any Vice President could ever really feel comfortable in that role.

B: Weren't you one of the ones called by Mr. Johnson very soon after the assassination of President Kennedy?

C: Well, I don't know how soon. I did talk with him sometime after the assassination, yes.

B: What did you talk about on that occasion, sir?

C: Well, I spent an evening with him talking about a great many things--one evening, that I remember, before he moved into the White House. I spent, also, some time with him at the LBJ Ranch on one occasion in company with some other individuals. Let's see. I think the others were Frank Stanton, Ed Weisl, Sr., and Tom Watson of IBM.

B: Were these just attempts by Mr. Johnson to get the views of the business community on economics and affairs like that?

C: I think that was a part, yes.

B: Part?

C: Yes. I think he may have had some discussions, also, with regard to some Cabinet appointments.

B: You were offered the Secretaryship of the Treasury to replace Douglas Dillon in '65, weren't you?

C: That was discussed, yes.

B: And you didn't take it.

C: That is correct.

B: Again, if it's not impertinent, may I ask why, sir?

C: Well, there were a great many reasons. My wife was very ill at

that time, and that finally proved to be the determining thing. And there was a serious question about whether, if I interrupted my career at the stage it was in, it would ever have been possible for me to pick up the pieces again.

B: I have to ask this more or less bluntly: is there any hesitation about working for Lyndon Johnson?

C: On my part?

B: Yes, sir.

C: No. I believe that he's probably the most stimulating man in this country that you could have anything to do with. He really is a very great man. He is much abler, much deeper, much greater a patriot than I think he has been given credit for.

There are undoubtedly a variety of reasons for this. The Southwest breeds its own type of personality, and he, of course, is a product of that environment. I'm certain he had his personality affected by it. I think that he was unusual in that he was at one and the same time a great politician and a great patriot. I believe that he used his political skills to advance the best interests of the country, and when there was ever any major question, he, in my opinion, was on the right side of those questions.

We need always, I think, to differentiate between what you might call the shadow and the substance. I think that many people are created and many people are destroyed by the media. It's not

an uncommon experience to have a certain mental image of an individual based on newspaper articles, magazine articles, radio and television broadcasts, and then to later meet that individual and come to know him, and find that he is, in many ways, sometimes in most ways, entirely at variance with the created image.

I think that the skill that the President had in political affairs, which made it possible for him to have this extraordinary legislative record which he had, somehow or other got twisted and perverted by the media. I think that whereas he should have been known as a man striving to get the best possible result for his country and trying to use all of his skills and all of his talents to produce legislative results designed to accomplish this, that he picked up instead the image of a kind of a Texas wheeler-dealer. And since most people who are unthinking, and either not terribly educated or not terribly bright, tend to like the flamboyant and the sensational rather than the solid and less scintillating kind of portraits, that this took hold in the country, and I think that it hurt him very, very much. I think, also, that there still exists in the country what is sometimes described as an Eastern Establishment, both in university circles and in business circles. I think that in the minds of some people, a degree from any university somehow or other sets a man apart from a man who does not have one. I think there is the belief that a man with a degree from, say, Harvard, is somehow set apart from one who has a degree from Texas State

Teachers--if there is such a school.

B: Try Southwest Texas State Teachers.

C: I think that there are financial and industrial groupings that regard themselves as being in a different category than, say, the people who are perhaps first-generation industrialists.

B: Did you ever find yourself in the position of explaining or defending Mr. Johnson, President Johnson, to members of the business community?

C: Yes, and that was not hard to do, because the business community is, for the most part, either not very well-informed or not terribly bright.

B: Did Mr. Johnson get along well with the business community generally?

C: I always thought it was a kind of uneasy relationship. I think that he had a certain amount of distrust of the business community, and I think the business community had a certain amount of distrust of the other.

B: Is that just the normal relationship of the business community and a Democratic President?

C: No, I wouldn't regard it as normal, because President Johnson, I thought, made one of the greatest contributions to general thinking in the field of government-business relationships, and in the field of what I would call practical economics, that any President has ever made, before or since--although there hasn't been much time since. And it's this: the country has had, and does have, a vast number of problems; in the final analysis, regardless of what the

problem is, the solution of it depends upon the application of resources; if it's a problem of the cities, if you're going to correct that problem, it's going to take the application of vast amounts of resources; if it's a problem of the Negro, this takes the form of employment, and this gets you immediately involved with economics. Now he saw very clearly that, in the final analysis, we were going to have to have the resources if we were going to deal with any of these problems. How do you get the resources? He understood very clearly that all that we have to divide up amongst us is the sum total of that which we produce. He saw very clearly that the government was the senior partner in economic activity through the income tax system. Therefore, he saw very clearly that it was essential that ways be found to result in the largest possible increase in the gross national product, on a non-inflationary basis, so that we would have more for everybody, and the government, as the senior partner, would be able to skim off that which it needed to cope with these problems on a governmental basis. The importance of this contribution to thinking, and the fact that he was the man who really has, in the final analysis, the responsibility for making the demonstration, has not yet been realized. And again, I think this is one of the places where he has made a tremendous contribution, and the magnitude of it is not generally known, and therefore, he really has not had the credit that he deserves to have for it and will,

in years to come, in my opinion, get for it.

B: Did you help here, sir, with advice and suggestions?

C: Oh, I think I undoubtedly talked to him on a number of occasions about it. I have had some pretty strong feelings on this subject,and I'm sure that I, on more than one occasion, communicated those feelings to him. I always have been a firm believer in the necessity to avoid excessive controls in the monetary field and a firm believer in doing those things that would encourage the economy to grow and business to produce. And I am not around anyone for very long without making those ideas known.

B: Did you ever discuss Vietnam with him, particularly its domestic economic consequences?

C: Well, I think that I had some discussions with him over the telephone on perhaps two or three occasions, but this is the one place where I had a complete divergence of views.

B: Did he listen to your opposing views?

C: I don't think that he regarded me as, perhaps, being sufficiently informed or sufficiently expert in the field to take my judgment on it.

B: Sir, the time is almost up. Is there anything else you think should be on this kind of record?

C: Well, the only thing I would add generally is that he was a far greater President than he has been given credit for being. I think that because of the attitude of what you might call the

Eastern Educational Establishment and the Eastern Business Establishment, he may have been led into a certain amount of flamboyance, perhaps to show his belief that he really didn't think much, in the final analysis, of the establishment, and that this was one of the things that probably stood in the way of having a firm, genuine relationship with both the educational community and the business community in this country.

B: What kind of flamboyance exists when he is in private conversation with members of the Eastern Establishment? For example, you said you had been at the Ranch with Frank Stanton and Thomas Watson, whom I presume would be in that category. Is the flamboyance there,too?

C: I think it manifested itself in meetings of one kind of another--mostly private meetings, sometimes public meetings. I, personally, always thought that this was a part of his very attractive personality; but then I had a Middle Western background, and perhaps I would find it more interesting and more comfortable than many others would. But this is only a superficial thing, and I think that, unfortunately, something which was really superficial and not fundamental resulted in the creation of an image that was an entirely wrong image of the President on the merits.

B: What I was getting at . . . it's pretty clear that that image appeared publicly on television, but did it impress people privately, too? How about your acquaintances within the business community? Would they be put off by these mannerisms?

C: I think so, yes. I think it was unfortunate, because these are not matters of any real fundamental importance. But unfortunately, they did have this effect. Now, I believe, finally, that the only serious mistake that he made as President was to allow this country to be drawn into the war in Vietnam in the way and to the extent that we were. Had it not been for this, I believe that he would have had, without a doubt, one of the most successful terms of office of any President in the history of the Republic--not only one term, but two terms. The subject of the war is a complicated one. I wouldn't purport to have the knowledge that he had or access to the sources that he had, but I'm not sure that one needs that knowledge or needs that access to be able to form an opinion on this question. Here I think was the fatal error. Here is the worm in the apple; here is the thing that brought him down; and the paradox is that this occurred in a field in which he had so much knowledge, so much background, so much expertise. I can attribute this only to the kind of advice that he got, and I say this without knowing where his advice came from.

B: Anything else you'd like to add, sir?

C: No, I think that pretty well covers it.

B: Thank you very much.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of Donald C. Cook

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Winnifred C. Cook of New York City, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on June 30, 1969 and October 1, 1981 in New York City, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts of the June 30, 1969 and the October 1, 1981 interviews shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, except that pages 1 through 10 of the transcript of the interview of October 1, 1981 shall not be made available during the lifetime of Robert McNamara, former secretary of defense, after which time these pages may be made available as part of the transcript.

(2) The tape recordings of the June 30, 1969 and the October 1, 1981 interviews shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts, except that that portion of the tape recording covering pages 1 through 10 of the transcript of the interview of October 1, 1981 shall not be made available during the lifetime of the said Robert McNamara, after which time this portion may be made available as part of the tape recording.

(3) Subject to the foregoing, I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request, provided, however, that pages 1 through 10 of the transcript of the interview of October 1, 1981 and the corresponding portion of the tape recording shall not be made available during the lifetime of the said Robert McNamara, after which time these pages of the transcript and the corresponding portion of the tape recording may be provided to researchers.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, provided, however, that pages 1 through 10 of the transcript of the interview of October 1, 1981 and the corresponding portion of the tape recording shall not be deposited in or loaned to other institutions during the lifetime

of the said Robert McNamara, after which time these pages of the transcript and the corresponding portion of the tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to other institutions.

ESTATE OF DONALD C. COOK

By Winnifred C. Cook
Winnifred C. Cook, Executrix, Donor

July 28 1983
Date

Robert M. Warner
Archivist of the United States

Aug 29, 1983