INTERVIEW IV

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INTERVIEWEE SID DAVIS

INTERVIEWER Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Davis office, Washington, D.C.

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S: Election day was the third. Well, I believe we were in New Orleans on the weekend before election day in 1964, and the President made this speech at the Jung Hotel. Did I tell you that story about the President in New Orleans driving in from the airport--the Governor of Louisiana didn't want to ride with the President?

G: Didn't want to ride with him.

S: Johnson fandangled him into the presidential car. The Governor [John J. McKeithen] had his own car at the airport, but Johnson got him to ride in the presidential limo into town. Johnson stopped along the way several times, most often in black neighborhoods, to greet the crowds. The big issue was whether Louisiana would support Lyndon Johnson, who was considered too liberal and very active on civil rights. McKeithen never got out of the limo. Johnson spoke that night and most reporters on the trip felt that that was one of Johnson's best speeches. He talked about the need for racial equality and he also talked about the world situation. He tied the two together, saying that he was trying to save the world from nuclear war and at the same time he wanted to save our country from

exploding internally. He knew that winning Louisiana was going to be tough for him and I recall the last lines of his speech. He ad-libbed these remarks. He said, "I think I know what you're thinking and I hope you vote for me, and I'm not going to say anything bad against you publicly if you do. But in the privacy of my bedroom I might whisper something to Lady Bird." It brought down the house, of course.

Then we went on to Texas for the last two or three days of the campaign. The night before the election there was a big rally at the state capitol and there was a parade up Congress Avenue. It was an enormous crowd and the adrenaline was really flowing in Lyndon Johnson. He was regaling the reporters on the size of the turnout. "Take a look at the size of the crowd," that sort of thing. He was confident of victory. Then he went home to the Ranch and the next day of course he had this landslide. I don't recall how soon it was after the election that we got invited down there. It might have been the very next day. It would not surprise me if Lyndon Johnson wouldn't have invited us right the next day to give us his analysis of the election. But it was the first encounter a lot of us had with Texas, to watch him in his own element, now. He'd been president for almost a year, but now he was president in his own right and I think he felt a little more comfortable.

A steady stream of government and other people came to the Ranch when the President visited the Texas residence. There were always people who he summoned for business meetings and that sort of thing. As a matter of fact, in the press room we had heard that there were complaints after a while from some of the cabinet members about the difficulty of having to go to Texas to have a meeting, because they'd have to get up at

two or three o'clock in the morning and get on an airplane and fly for a couple of hours--two and a half hours, three hours--to Texas, have a meeting and then come back that night. But the President--so far as we knew in the press, was always engaged in some form of meeting or on the phone.

(Interruption)

S: I remember one of the guys that Johnson liked in Mexico--I see [President Gustavo] Diaz Ordaz was at the Ranch--but there was a Mexican comedian that Johnson knew and liked, Cantinflas. And I think he stayed at the Ranch once when we were down there. Johnson had a very warm spot in his heart for the Mexican people, dating back to the days when he was teaching at Cotulla. I was fascinated when I would visit Texas and had time--if we were in Johnson City I'd go over to the Boyhood Home after the President restored it and read LBJ's letters to his mother when he was teaching down in Cotulla. There was one very poignant letter where he asked his mother if she could gather some old clothes from the neighbors for the little kids who didn't have enough warm clothing. And he also asked for, I think it was, twenty-two toothbrushes for Christmas presents for these little kids.

So there was that side of him that predated or preceded what was perceived to be a metamorphosis on civil rights. This soft spot for the less fortunate had always been there. Maybe in the heady days of Congress and as majority leader it didn't show as much as when he became president and had to take on the bigger battle of equality for the whole country.

I don't remember much about the--I remember the contracts for the supersonic

transport development. I remember one day we were just talking about what it meant. If you ask me a few question I might be . . .

G: [Inaudible]

D: LBJ's news conferences would go sometimes around thirty-five, forty, forty-five minutes even though it was only supposed to be a half an hour. But President Ronald Reagan used to stand there and Helen Thomas, the senior correspondent, would say, "Thank you, Mr. President," shutting off the news conference, even though there would still be a lot of hands in the air, people raising their hands and shouting, saying, "Mr. President, Mr. President." And the President would say, "Helen says I'm through. Helen says that it's all over." What do you mean, Helen says it's all over? Here's the commander-in-chief, leader of all the armed forces, commands every airplane and battleship we have and he says, "Helen Thomas of UPI [United Press International] says it's all over." If he wants to stay there for another hour he can. But President Reagan would walk out at thirty minutes and that was it.

They were beautifully handled, those prime-time news conferences, but they're gone. George Bush doesn't believe in them. George Bush, I think, has had some good advice and maybe he's got good judgment himself in this regard--I'm sure he does--and that is that he's not Ronald Reagan. He's George Bush. He has these informal news conferences called on the spur of the moment sometimes, sometimes in advance. But they're in that White House briefing room at ten o'clock in the morning, eleven o'clock in the morning, sometimes two in the afternoon. But the importance of that to the White House is that the President doesn't have to get beat up in prime time. As a result, you

don't manufacture these great celebrity journalists any more at these news conferences, the way Reagan did. Sixty million people are not watching anymore, daytime. But the gem of it for the White House is that these news conference remarks are then snipped and cut up into news stories so the reporter asking those questions doesn't get a chance to be seen going toe to toe with the President. The President appears on the evening news with a story written about it, but you don't have this whole show that you had before. Clearly it puts the President out front, and to George Bush's credit, I think it's a much better news conference from his standpoint than it was in the last eight years. I think you're getting more information because there's not this posturing for prime-time visibility by correspondents.

You have to understand what that has meant to the industry. We have in the television industry--in my previous life, that's what I did--we have created reporters who earn up to a million dollars just being reporters. I'm not talking about anchormen. I think that some of these high-class reporters who cover the White House were earning six and seven hundred thousand dollars, three times more than the president of the United States. There is something in that kind of an income that gives them the feeling of power, too, when they confront the president with a question. It's just human nature. And I think reporting has lost something because of that power.

I think that Lyndon Johnson had a baptism of fire, in a sense, under television. We were learning it then but today it is much more refined. You have experts in the field who really know how to use it. And the White House tries to give the media what it wants but under its own terms. And that's the gem of our system, the fact that the White

House and the press do have this dichotomy or adversarial relationship or whatever it is. It kind of works in the end. Both sides are never very happy with each other but the system seems to work okay. I don't know where television goes from here, but more and more, government operates through the use of television. It's so pervasive and so powerful an instrument that government has to know how to use it. And I think that this White House is doing a pretty good job with it. I think that President Johnson had a tougher time with it. He had the first television war to deal with, where the casualties were seen in living rooms day in and day out. No other president has been confronted with that.

I might have pointed this out to you earlier, that in World War II don't think an American body was shown in newsreels or photos until months after the first casualties were taken. I don't think they showed you those bodies on the beaches in the Pacific for months after it happened. They were all censored by the military. And in Vietnam, whatever happened was on your television screen in living color daily. So President Johnson had to contend with having to fight that kind of a war, where it was very open and you had the public seeing it every day.

In any case, I think that presidents can go back and learn from some of the things Johnson did. Johnson brought television to the White House in a bigger way. He tried to use it. He had a knack for the picture even though some people think he was not as good on television as he was in person. He knew television's power. He sensed it; he was a great producer, perhaps not a great performer but a great producer. The education bill, where did he sign the education bill? He could have done it--most people say, "Okay, we

got a great victory, the education bill. Let's invite all the members of Congress down here to the White House and get the East Room lights turned on. We'll get some pens and give out some pens and do the education bill." No, he didn't do that. He signed the education bill down in a field where his little Texas schoolhouse had been, a one-room schoolhouse had been, on a little desk and his elementary school teacher was there. That was a great television picture. I don't know who dreamed it up. I have to believe Lyndon Johnson had a role in that. But they found this teacher and we interviewed her afterwards, and she told us what a wonderful child Lyndon Johnson had been.

G: Miss Kate [Deadrich].

D: Miss Kate. Was that her name? Well, see, that was television. And when Larry O'Brien was sworn in as postmaster general--again, they didn't do that thing here in Washington in the East Room or at the Post Office Building. They went down to that little post office in Hye, Texas, which is red, white and green or red, white and blue with the gingerbread trimmings outside. I had a picture of it here. Everybody got a picture of that post office from the President. And he swore Larry O'Brien in at the Hye Post Office, that little temporary--it's just a rural post office in Texas--because he envisioned the television picture. It was a cute picture because it had these ginger--it's a country store with gingerbread. And it's red, white and blue or red, white and green decorations and frills outside. That was good television.

G: One of the major events on television that year was the Selma march and the violence there with police breaking up the march with fire hoses and police dogs. Tell me about the perspective of that from the White House and the press covering the White House.

D: I'm trying to remember. There were so many of those things that I covered. The Selma thing was really a high-water mark. I don't recall Johnson's direct involvement with Governor [Georgel Wallace. I'm trying to think of what the relationship was there, whether he was on the phone to Wallace or not. Do you remember? I don't remember specifically many of the events involved in the Selma thing. I do remember the confrontation with Governor Wallace and federalizing the National Guard units, and military police units going down to Selma. I think Johnson learned from the 1963 march on Washington that he had to act more boldly than Kennedy had, in certain respects. When they had the 1963 march on Washington at the Lincoln Memorial, which is really one of the most moving things Washington had seen in terms of numbers--yet John F. Kennedy did not agree to meet with Martin Luther King and the black leadership in a big public meeting prior to that thing. He did meet with the leaders quietly and privately afterward. There was no great public display of the meeting with black leaders, and Kennedy was criticized for that. I think Johnson recognized that. Johnson was overt in his actions with Wallace and with the civil rights movement in the South. I think as a man from Texas he felt that maybe he could talk their language and deal with them. In one of the campaigns he invited Wallace to the White House to talk about the civil rights situation when Wallace--wasn't Wallace a third-party candidate at one time?

G: In 1968.

D: January 1968. And he invited Wallace to the White House and sent him out the back door as I recall, didn't give him a forum on the White House driveway. It was one of those finessing moves, just get him in and get him out. But I think in the whole civil

rights movement Johnson was asked a couple of times why, as president, he was acting as forcefully as he was when as a congressman he didn't seem to be as committed. And he took the question and he said that [was] an instance in his earlier life, that had happened some time ago and his responsibilities were to his constituency, but now he was president of the United States, of all the people, and he intended to carry out the mandate. He said he had a greater opportunity now. I think that that was something he felt when he was in the White House as president, in Selma and some of the other places where you had serious, serious problems. He did try very hard to bring the whites and blacks together and in some areas he succeeded and in other areas he didn't. But I don't recall a single instance where, if there was violence, he hesitated to take action or try to do something. Selma was a very difficult period. The whole country was in terrible shape then.

G: Do you remember his speech to Congress, the "We shall overcome" speech?

D: I remember the words, "I now have the power to do something about it. I aim to use it." I remember that line and I remember the closing line, "We shall overcome." I think it was Douglas Kiker of the *New York Herald Tribune* who said that Johnson saw him after that speech--when he got the voting rights legislation--and said that they had just lost the South for the Democrats for the next twenty-five years, or words to that effect.

G: The South?

D: I'm sorry; yes he had given the *South* to the Republicans for the next twenty-five years, recognizing how difficult that was going to be for the Democrats. I had not heard that before I heard Douglas Kiker say it; I had not heard the President said that. But I heard Douglas say that at a panel discussion we had about six or seven months ago.

I wonder if Johnson knew where he would stand in history based on the commitment he made to the civil rights movement, because certainly today, looking back, the civil rights legislation and some of his other efforts on behalf of civil rights are now becoming better known and are among some of the monuments to him. He did not live to see some of that. The Vietnam War so overshadows everything that he did. It was such a big, traumatic experience and it's very hard to erase those war years from the people's minds, because almost every day there is an anniversary of some kind. The war enters into some picture every day and of course the Johnson years are going to have to be a part of that.

(Interruption)

D: --the Johns Hopkins speech. In April 1965 Lady Bird and Lynda were out of town and there was a ceremony at the Smithsonian. They had received a new--I believe it was a whale or a fish of some kind, or a flag. I don't remember specifically what it was, but something was being dedicated and the President decided that he would accept the invitation to go over and help dedicate it, and he did. It was a warm night. Washington in April is a beautiful place. It was about 7:30 p.m. It was dark already, the street lights were on, and I was walking down Constitution Avenue back to the White House because it's not very far. I was with two other reporters. We were chatting and walking along after the President had completed the ceremony, and this big limousine pulled up alongside the curb, stops, the window rolls down and this guy with big ears sticks his head out and says, "You guys want a ride?" or, "Are you riding or walking?" Something like that. We said, "Well, we'll ride if you want us to." So we got in the car with the

President, and Jack Valenti was in there and LBJ said to Jack Valenti, "When's my next appointment?" And Valenti says, "Your next appointment is waiting right now." And LBJ said, "I've got time to buy these people a drink." It was myself and Muriel Dobbins of the *Baltimore Sun* and another reporter. So the President took us over to the White House.

We stopped in the Oval Office and LBJ saw Valenti for a second and said he'd he back in a few minutes. We went upstairs to the family quarters, the Yellow Living Room or drawing room; whatever it is it overlooks the Ellipse. We had a scotch and soda and we started talking. The President was talking about the War on Poverty and some other things that were going on, and then he took us on a little tour and took us down to the Lincoln Bedroom. He told us to sit on the bed, and none of us wanted to sit on the bed because we thought it was Lincoln's bed. He said, "No, it's all right. We have guests all the time who sleep in this room. They sleep in the bed all the time. It's fine." So we sat down on the bed and he walked over to the fireplace in there and he said, "I come down to this room a lot at night. I come down here about two o'clock in the morning. I pick up that phone over there and I call the Situation Room and I say, 'How many of my boys are out flying?' There's a twelve-hour time difference. If it's 2:00 p.m. in Vietnam, it's 2:00 a.m. here. So I check on my boys to see how they're doing." He said, "I often will sit here through the night and call back every few minutes or every hour until I find out how many came back and how many didn't come back." Well, of course, this was a side of Lyndon Johnson that we had never seen before. And the rules were that when you were invited to the family quarters for something like that, it was off the record. So none of us

ever really wrote about it. I talk about it in some lectures but I never wrote the story.

After LBJ finished, he took us back down to the Oval Office and he said to Jack, "How's my speech coming?" Jack Valenti said, "Well, it's fine. We're coming along okay." And that point he told us how good Jack Valenti was at being able to put the schmaltz into his speech, the emotion into his speech. He said Jack was good at drafting speeches that way. He said, "I'm going to make this speech at Johns Hopkins University tomorrow night. It's embargoed, you can't use this, but I want to read you some if you'll tell me what you think." So he read the speech to us. He read us the first few paragraphs of it, standing there with this raw draft.

By the way, we hadn't had dinner. We hadn't eaten a thing; he hadn't eaten a thing. Lady Bird wasn't there. Lynda was out of town. Luci was doing homework up in the loft. But he had this big box on a chair. Someone had sent him some figs from Israel, with this heavy yellow cellophane on it. He started trying to open this thing and it was just like he was fighting with an adversary. He started tearing at this carton and it wouldn't tear. Finally he got his hand punched through the cellophane and this yellow cellophane is flying all over the Oval Office. He gets a hand full of figs and he shoves them in his mouth and he takes this box and he hands it to each of us. We've all got figs in our mouths, we're chewing figs, and then he starts reading this Johns Hopkins University speech with his mouth full of figs. And it was quite serious; it wasn't meant to be comical. It just is comical now looking back at it.

And then he said to us, "What do you think the lead is going to be? Sid, what do you think the lead is?" "Well," I said, "there's a bombing halt and a billion-dollar

development program for Southeast Asia if Ho Chi Minh would just stop the war." I said I would lead with the relaxation of the bombing--I went for the military side of it. One of the other reporters thought the billion-dollar development program was the thing that he'd lead with. The President was quite interested in how the newspapers and television worked. He said, "Well, I figured you'd like the billion-dollar development program"--the other fellow--"because you're a wire service reporter. They like numbers." Anyway, we did get an idea of how important he thought that speech was. At that time he was wrestling, looking for a way to get out; I think he knew this war was destroying him.

He was looking to us almost, saying, "What can I do?" That was the time he said to us, "Doing what's right is easy, but knowing what's right is the problem, is the most difficult thing." And he said that several times that night.

One other point. While we were upstairs in the Lincoln Bedroom he walked over to a picture of Lincoln. "I sure hope I have better generals than he did," he said. So we could see what this war was doing to him. You didn't see that every day when you engaged him on environmental bills or other things he was doing or in meetings with businessmen. You didn't see that side of Lyndon that we saw that night, just the constant inquiry as to "how do I get this war settled" and that sort of thing. Now I may be misreading it. That's my perception of it. But it seemed to me that even in 1965 that this thing was drawing every bit of energy out of him that he had and he was still able to work on the other legislation.

(Interruption)

I think you've got it in the notes when we came in that night when we left--it's in here somewhere. But the person who he had the appointment with was the woman who was drawing his portrait.

G: Madame [Antonia] Shoumatoff.

D: Yes. He was having his official portrait done that night. That's why Valenti said, "You've got an appointment that's going on right now." The easel was in the Oval Office, as I recall, and we went back out through the Oval Office. No, we never did have dinner but we ate a lot of figs and we had a couple scotch and sodas. We used to be invited as reporters--the President invited people to the family quarters quite a bit. And I'm told that very few presidents have ever done that, with members of the press or even members of Congress. They didn't get that much of a chance to see the president in his private quarters. I think the Bushes are very friendly and open, much like the Johnsons were in the use of the family quarters. I can't see it here but I believe that April 6, no--I know I was in the room the night before the Johns Hopkins speech and I see that April 5, 1965, is when he did Hopkins, so it must have been the third of April that were at the White House that night.

We had seen the President in an informal setting often and it probably was not to his benefit that he saw the press that many times in that manner. Most reporters later would say that one of Johnson's problems was that you see him too much. He was very open in some of the things he said and sometimes he would get into trouble because sometimes he would say, "This is off the record." There was a feeling sometimes that Lyndon Johnson didn't understand the rules of "off the record" or "on the record."

Sometimes he said, "This is off the record," and three days later be'd he looking for it in the newspapers and it wouldn't be printed. He'd say, "Why didn't they print this? I told them about this story." "Mr. President, you said it was off the record." "Well, that doesn't mean anything." Sometimes he'd tell you something off the record and you put it into print and he'd just raise the roof because it got out.

I think there have been so many things written about Lyndon Johnson and his manner and his style that sometimes his style became a story over substance. And he worried about that. Style to him was some well-educated, articulate easterner. Earlier on in his administration he mentioned style, and we thought he was drawing comparisons between himself and Kennedy. And he said it in kind of a sarcastic way. We think we knew what he meant, that substance is what you wanted. After a while I think the country got used to him and his different--he was quite a different person from Kennedy in his behavior and mannerisms, and I think the country took a while to get accustomed to it. For a long time the country loved it. But like in so many cases, if the economy starts to go bad, if things are not going well, all the little pimples and warts start to get bigger in the public's mind. Carter found that to be true. Everybody used to joke about Jimmy Carter's brother, Billy, and his mother, and make fun in a good-natured way, but then when the economic and the oil problems mushroomed, then people got tired real fast of Jimmy Carter's relatives and family, and that's the way it works, pretty much.

(Interruption)

Back to election night, 1960. That night they had the wonderful parade in Austin, the night before Lyndon Johnson was going to be facing his first election in his own right in

1964, and he went down Congress Avenue and the crowds were massive and they were tearing at him. He got out of the car and walked along shaking hands. He had these Wedgwood cufflinks. Now Phil Potter of the *Baltimore Sun* was both an antagonist and friend of long standing. And Phil Potter liked Lyndon Johnson, I'm sure. Their friendship went back to the Senate together and that sort of thing, when Potter covered the Senate, but Potter was a curmudgeon and he still was in awe of Lyndon and I think he liked Lyndon Johnson. Although I don't think the President always realized that, because when Phil wrote his column you didn't see any signs of liking or disliking, you just saw objective news coverage. If Johnson didn't do something right, Phil Potter was going to say so, which is as it should be.

Well, the crowds were massive and they tore at Johnson and it was quite a night. We in the press were trying to get in the crowd to see what was going on and get up the street. And I believe it was the next day we went to the Ranch. You asked me earlier what we did after the election and I think after the election we went to the Ranch. I believe we saw Johnson and he went through the whole thing about how he wanted the biggest plurality and he had the notes and figures on these little cards he pulled out of his pocket. "Did you see the crowds on Congress Avenue?" and all that sort of thing. At that point--somewhere between the rally and the election--the President said to Phil Potter, "Those crowds were so happy to see me and things were going so well. Did you see the size of that crowd? They were tearing at me." He said, "As a matter of fact, Phil, they tore off one of my cufflinks, my Wedgwood cufflinks." He said, "The Secret Service is looking for it. We lost one. It's tore off. Someone's probably got it." He said, "Phil, you

and I go back a long way and I'd like you to have the one I have left."

So Potter came back to the Driskill Hotel and he was thrilled. He told the story about Johnson telling him about the crowds and how they were grasping at him and clawing at him to get to touch him and how they got one cufflink. And now he was left with this one cufflink and it was worthless, just being one cufflink. So he was going to give it to his longtime friend, Phil Potter. And Phil was just thrilled. This tough old newspaperman talking about the President of the United States and getting his cufflink, his one last remaining cufflink, at this historic event. We were all kind of touched by this, you know. I don't know how long after it that was, but one day Phil Potter got called in by the President who said, "Phil, remember what I told you about that night at the election in Austin and the crowds just tearing at me and they tore that cufflink off and I gave you that one cufflink?" And Phil said, "Yes, sir. I'll never forget it." Johnson said, "Well, I had the Secret Service out there looking and searching. I don't know how they did this, but Phil, they found that other cufflink." And Phil said, "Yes," thinking he was going to be the owner of *two* cufflinks. And the President said, "Could I have my cufflink back?" (Laughter) And Phil Potter gave back the cufflink--at least that's the story Phil Potter told us.

But Johnson liked to give presents. He seemed to like to give out those souvenirs, the little knives with the "LBJ" on them. He was extremely generous.

G: Lighters.

D: The thing that struck me the most about the presidential emblem is--Lyndon Johnson monogrammed the whole state of Texas. Max Frankel of the *New York Times* once wrote

that Lyndon Johnson was the curator of his own museums. He was a fascinating man. One thing that struck me once when we were at a press conference at the Ranch, and as usual after the press conference Mrs. Johnson brought out the cookies and coffee. And the Styrofoam cups had been stamped with the presidential seal!

Those were very interesting days and he was quite an interesting, complicated person. He admired other presidents. He loved to talk about Truman and he talked a lot about Roosevelt. He spoke admiringly of Eisenhower and their relationship. I was present many times when he would talk about Eisenhower and his relationship. In the 1964 campaign, when he thought the opposition was getting tough on him he'd recall his relationship with Eisenhower, the working relationship he had as majority leader, Eisenhower formulating our planning policy, and him being majority leader saying, "We, the Democratic majority in the Congress, will work with you and the Senate will work with you." He was very proud of that relationship and he would recall it to us from time to time.

I must say I only saw Eisenhower on two or three occasions when I covered the White House briefly in the 1959 period before he left town in 1960. I really started covering the White House in 1960. But I could see the reasons why Eisenhower was an attractive candidate. He had that winning smile. He looked like he had just stepped out of the shower all the time, just neat and trim, fit-looking, that military stride. He'd just flash that smile. He was very presidential. You saw the magnetism. You could see why George Marshall picked Eisenhower to be supreme allied commander. There's something about the presidency that does something to people. I think Eisenhower

probably had that bearing beforehand, being a five-star general. We saw it in Kennedy and I saw it in Johnson. Certainly you saw it in Reagan and I think you see it in Bush. Something happens when that mantle is passed. Whether we confer it in our own minds, or whether it's real, I don't know. I certainly didn't know Lyndon Johnson prior to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. I'd see him come to the White House as vice president but I did not cover him, either as senator or as vice president. The beat was the White House. I never gave much thought to Lyndon Johnson as being the next president, for some reason, and when Kennedy died and suddenly LBJ became president, he looked different to me. And I think that was true of everybody.

G: One more thing. When he was reading that Johns Hopkins speech, did he seem hopeful that North Vietnam would be interested [inaudible]?

D: I think the Mekong Delta thing was something he thought would work. I think so. I don't know what the story is; I am not an historian, it seems to me. I thought that it was a speech made in earnest; certainly it was a major speech. And I think if you look back, the Hopkins speech was a major effort on Lyndon Johnson's part to get the thing over with. Someone once said Lyndon just couldn't figure out Ho Chi Minh. I think I mentioned this before. What does Ho want? Every politician had a price of some kind. Lyndon Johnson was a master of the art of compromise and getting legislation through Congress. If you can't get a whole loaf, take half a loaf. What does Ho Chi Minh want? It was a puzzle to Johnson. He could deal with almost anyone in Congress and some of the toughest, and he was able to win them over and make a deal. This was so frustrating to him. So I think he thought the billion-dollar development program would do it. He'd

rebuild all of Vietnam, clean up the Mekong River, do whatever you want with it. I think it was a bold effort, a billion-dollar cleanup. But when you stop and think of it in terms of the bottom line, it was probably much cheaper than continuing that war, in terms of bloodshed and the human toll and the cost. And Johnson felt very, very strongly that if he could keep public opinion on his side he could have--"won" is not the word. You could tell a victory wasn't in the cards, but I think he felt that he could have succeeded in reaching his objectives in Vietnam if he could have kept the public on his side. That's why he was so frustrated with the press. There's no question that it was public opinion in this country, and the fact that while Ho Chi Minh thought he had a chance of turning the American people against the war, why buy any deal? They could read the newspapers in North Vietnam and Lyndon Johnson felt--I'm sure he felt--that the reporting was unfair to him, and this is where the old adversarial relationship comes into play.

I think that the Hopkins speech, yes, was a serious effort to get the thing over with. There were several serious efforts, especially his trip to see the Pope in 1967. Was it 1967 he went and saw the Pope on Christmas Eve? That failed. The thing didn't work but he went around the world; he went to Australian Prime Minister [Harold] Holt's funeral and circumnavigated the globe the other way, went to Rome trying to see the Pope.

G: Did you go on it?

D: Yes, I was on that trip. It was a remarkable trip. Lyndon Johnson presenting the Pope with a bust of himself. I'm sure you've heard the story. We really didn't know where we were going. We went to Mr. Holt's funeral. We took off from--I forget whether it was

Melbourne or Sydney and our pilot, Doug Kelly--I think his name was Doug Kelly--of Pan Am didn't know whether we were going east or west or north or south because the White House didn't tell him whether we were going back to the States or where. We already had a sense that the President wanted to go somewhere else. So we ended up leaving Melbourne or Sydney and instead of going back to American Samoa, which would have taken us back to the United States, we went to Darwin, Australia, this godforsaken place on this map over here. It was heading up toward Vietnam toward Thailand. There was a one-landing-strip air field, one telephone. We couldn't phone out. There weren't enough phones for us to call our office. We landed there for fuel. We took off down in this area somewhere and flew across Australia heading toward Thailand. Lyndon Johnson wanted to go back to Vietnam. So we went to Thailand and landed at a secret air base that had never been made public before. There was an air base in Thailand which apparently we were using to bomb the North Vietnamese. Korat, I think; there President Johnson visited with the U.S. pilots.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

D: "Lyndon Johnson visits Vietnam just before Christmas." Now we don't know where we're going again. Are we going back to the United States, to Washington or are we going someplace else? The rumor is out that the President wants to see the Pope. So the pilot of our press plane says, "I'll let you know as soon as we get in the air. I just have to follow *Air Force One*." So then we went to Pakistan. We went to Karachi and Ayub Khan, who was the president of Pakistan, met Lyndon Johnson at the airport while we refueled. Now you have to understand this press plane is a Pan Am 707. It has not had

any cleaning up. It has not been restocked. It's gotten fuel but it hasn't gotten any food or anything like that because we didn't stop at a single place now for several hours. All of this is now happening within a 116-hour time period, less than five days, or whatever it was. The airplane bathrooms are in terrible shape. The stewardesses are going around searching to scrounge up sandwiches from local people because there's no food on the airplane. Now we're in Karachi and they finally have a place there where they can clean the bathrooms. The President meets Ayub Khan out there on the tarmac and a big crowd gathers. Now we still don't know which way we're going and we take off from Karachi and the pilot says, "I have to wait to see which way *Air Force One* is going before I can tell you where we're going." About half an hour later he says, "Well, it looks like we're going toward Europe."

So now we're going back around the world toward Rome and we go to Rome. The President is going to go see the Pope on Christmas Eve to see if he can't get the Pope to help him sue for peace, desperately trying to end this war. And we seemed to sense that there was something wrong. Why didn't they just tell us we were going to Rome? Well, I learned later that the reason why there was some problem in going to Rome was the President was told that if he went to Italy to see the Pope he had to first meet the president of Italy, because that was protocol. Lyndon Johnson apparently said, "I don't want to meet the president of Italy. I want to meet the Pope." They said, "No, it's protocol. You must find some way to"--the president of Italy runs the country. The Pope doesn't run the country; he runs the Vatican.

So they arranged for the President to have some *pro forma* meeting with the

president of Italy so then he can go see the Pope. And I think that was done at the airport. Meanwhile Joe Laitin of the White House press office is over in Rome. We don't know this, but the White House has actually set up an entire press office at the airport over there to help us file our stories, but the staff's been told it can't surface unless they are sure they're going to have a story for us to file. So they're in hiding. We get to Rome; we have no telephones, no press accommodations, no typewriters put out for us, no nothing. A small pool is picked to go with the President to meet the Pope at his winter home. And it was very nice the way they did this. They found reporters who were Catholic so they could have Christmas Eve with the Pope and get a blessing from the Pope.

G: Who were they? Do you know?

D: Frank Reynolds of ABC was one. Frank and I were pretty close friends. We were neighbors. So we used to drive back and forth to Andrews Air Force Base a lot. I was not one of the pool members, but Frank gave me wonderful fill-ins on what happened. Frank Cormier, I guess, of Associated Press had to be among them. I've forgotten who the others--Frank Cormier was one. Anyway, they went and they did see the Pope and we stayed at the airport. They kept us incognito.

Meanwhile, we don't know this, but Joe Laitin of the White House press office is already in Rome. He'd flown from Washington anticipating all along that the President was going to go to Rome. We didn't know that when we went to Australia to Hunt's funeral. And Laitin told me later, "Hell, I had telephones; I had everything. But I was told not to put them out." So he never did put them out and we never filed on it that way. We had to fight for a little pay station telephone at the airport in Italy. I didn't speak the

language, trying to fight with operators to get a call to the United States that the President met with the Pope.

We were gone about 116 hours, I think, total. I had figured up how much gasoline the airplane consumed on the trip, and how much booze the reporters had drunk on the whole trip.

G: How much booze had they drunk?

D: Well, I've forgotten. I had it all figured out at one time how many gallons of fuel the airplanes consumed. I believe the total running time from Washington to Washington was 116 hours. *Air Force One* consumed 132,000 gallons of jet fuel. We had circumnavigated the globe, gone to a funeral, gone to Vietnam, gone to Thailand to a secret air base, gone and seen Ayub Khan in Pakistan, seen the Pope and come back to the United States. All of this in a span of just over four days, traveling 26,959 miles. But the President, now, when you greet some world figure you ought to have a gift. Have you heard the story about the present?

G: Tell me.

D: Well, the story is that there was nothing unique on the airplane that you might wish to give the Pope, except that they had brought along some customary articles. The Pope is there in his white flowing robes and LBJ or someone on the LBJ staff brings out this box and sets it on a table. There's this thick, heavy manila hemp rope around it. It's not even gift-wrapped. The President gestures to the Pope and the Pope looks at it. Of course it's going to take a man of great strength, with a great big pocket knife to see what's in this box. The President looks at the Pope and the Pope looks at the President, indicating,

"What do you want me to do with it? I'm a religious leader. I'm not a fellow who opens packages." The package was tightly bound.

So finally the President says, "Anybody got a knife?" So someone hands the President a knife--you know Lyndon Johnson didn't do anything gently. So he started slashing this rope and he gets this rope untied from this carton. This is how ABC's Frank Reynolds related this story to me. And LBJ gets this box open and now--it's packed with this excelsior. Johnson puts his hands in the box and starts flinging this stuff and it's getting on the Pope's white, flowing robes and on President Johnson's suit and the straw and other packing is getting out. Finally President Johnson reaches in and pulls out this gift, which is a bust of Lyndon Johnson. Of course the Pope looks at it and is very profuse in his thank-yous and that sort of thing, and that was the Pope's Christmas present, on Christmas Eve, 1967.

The reporters bitched a lot on that trip, mainly because we didn't know where we were going and reporters have a tendency to bitch anyway. The food was not great. We had some people who were terribly ill. We had not slept in a bed except for one night when we first got to Australia. So you can understand that tempers were frayed. The President had great intelligence; he had great antennae. And Frank Reynolds told me the story. He was one of those picked in Karachi who would fly to Rome with the President to be on the pool for the meeting with the Pope. They would fly on *Air Force One*. While they were flying from Karachi to Rome the President invited the pool back into his cabin to chat, which he always did--well, almost always did. And the President, after talking to them about what his plans were and his hopes for peace and what he was trying

to accomplish--now you have to understand, the rest of the press corps is on a smelly 707 flying somewhere a mile or two behind. The President remarked at one point, as reporters were getting up to leave the President's quarters in *Air Force One*, "I understand there's a lot of bitching and griping over on the press plane." Whereupon one of our colleagues, who always wanted to be nice to the President, said, "Oh, no, Mr. President. That's not true. They're with you a hundred per cent." As reporters left the room, Frank Reynolds of ABC News was lagging behind and the President called Reynolds over out of earshot of the others, laughed and said, "That so-and-so has always been an ass-kisser."

Well, the trip ended without a major breakthrough. The Pope didn't commit or couldn't commit. For whatever reason, it didn't happen. Lyndon was hoping to come back on Christmas Eve with good news, some sign that the Pope would intercede in the war with Ho Chi Minh. Some days later Hugh Sidey wrote a piece for *Life* magazine and he called it, "Around the World with Lyndon B. Magellan." And Sidey told this story about this historic, marvelous trip that we had taken except it wasn't so marvelous at the time to many people who participated. Johnson was furious with Hugh over that piece. Sidey said our average speed during the trip was 225 miles per hour, even while sitting or sleeping.

G: Really.

D: Hugh said--well, LBJ got over it. I've got a copy of that somewhere.

G: What did Johnson dislike about it, do you know?

D: Just the nit-picking stuff about how arduous it was. He believed he had made a serious

effort toward peace and it was belittled by trivia.

G: They did open the PX up in the Azores or some place like that.

D: They might have. I've forgotten. That's fuzzy to me.

(Interruption)

D: The White House Transportation Office always would stop--on the way back across the Atlantic you stopped in Shannon because they used to have a great duty-free store in Shannon. So we usually stopped there. But on this particular trip we refueled in the Azores, I think, and the Irish were not happy that we skipped Shannon.

Johnson knew the press pretty well. He knew what their gripes were. A good White House press office will always keep the press well watered. The problem is that many people think the press are all alcoholics, which isn't true. Airline stewardesses were indoctrinated from the start when they got a White House press trip, "They like to drink, so keep them happy." That's not necessarily true. I remember getting on the airplane going somewhere with the President--not necessarily Johnson, but any president; and I covered three or four. You get on the airplane at Andrews Air Force Base at 5:00 a.m. for an overseas trip. It's going to be an arduous day of many, many hours. You're not going to sleep for two or three days and you get on the airplane at Andrews, and as you get on the plane they have a little table set there where you can take something back to your seat with you: Bloody marys, bourbon, scotch, gin, beer, wine. You'd say, "Where's the coffee? It's five o'clock in the morning!" "Well," the stewardesses would say, "we were told that you fellows liked to drink." "Look," we'd say, "can you get us some coffee?" But that used to be sort of a routine.

I think the press gets spoiled, too. Johnson, being determined and single-minded about his purpose, would be furious when he heard that the press was complaining about their accommodations or the working hours. He didn't want to be bothered with having complaints about his style from people. I don't know why it even got to the President that the press was upset. But he would learn about complaints the press had and he would mention it to you later. He would say, "I understand you fellows weren't very happy last night." I don't know why it was his business to even know these things but he would get to know them because apparently he encouraged his staff to tell him these things. So he knew what we were all saying to each other.

One night I remember he was furious. He wanted to go to Texas but he had some meetings at the White House. We were sitting around in the White House--the West Lobby at that time was where the reporters sat, right close to the Oval Office in those days. And some reporter's wife had a dinner party and he was supposed to go home to a dinner party, and we didn't know whether we were going to Texas or not. This reporter didn't know whether he was coming home or not. Johnson was in his office meeting with people. Johnson did not go by the clock. He met at all hours of the day with people no matter who they were, the board chairman of General Motors, some college president. You never knew who was in there. They wouldn't put a lid on so we could go home, so we'd have to cover that. It was one of those days where we thought since it was a Friday night we'd go to Texas.

Well, this reporter complained and complained and complained, and George Reedy was the press secretary. George Reedy suddenly appeared in the press lobby and

said, "Now you've all done it. You've done it. Go on home. You've done it." Well, we found out that the President called Reedy in and just raised the roof with Reedy because this reporter had said, "Why am I here? My wife has a dinner party and I want to know if we're going to Texas or not." Meanwhile here's the President of the United States in the Oval Office picking up this little tidbit, gets furious, calls in his press secretary and says, "What the hell is wrong with those guys out there? Send them all home." Now George is worried because the President is mad at him. George is mad at us because one of us in the lobby hitched. It's about ten or eleven p.m. So they sent us home, and wouldn't you know, the same night about four or five a.m. we got phone calls saying, "Get to Andrews Air Force Base. You're going to Texas." Johnson just had these meetings, extended meetings that would overlap, run into each other. He felt, "If you want to cover this White House the way I operate, this is the way we do it." Why it was necessary for the President to know what all the press gripes were is just beyond me. I don't know why that would have to come to his attention, but all those little things did come to his attention.

The next president I think who paid attention to that--well, Nixon I think did and Carter certainly. Carter supposedly knew who had the tennis courts reserved at the White House. So presidents do have a tendency to get involved in minutia and I don't think that's entirely a healthy thing. Johnson knew that we were all griping on that trip to Rome; I know that. And if you have a chance you might want to talk to Hugh Sidey. He's got that article in *Life* magazine.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV

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