

INTERVIEW I

DATE: August 18, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: MYER FELDMAN

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Feldman's office, Washington, D.C.

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G: Mr. Feldman, let's start with your association with that select committee. How did you get involved with it?

F: I was working for the Securities and Exchange Commission. The chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission was Donald Cook. Donald Cook was a friend of Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson was then a junior senator, but was a good friend and *protégé* of Senator [Richard] Russell. When Senator Russell formed the select committee composed of the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees for the purpose of investigating the discharge of General [Douglas] MacArthur by President Truman, he asked Lyndon Johnson whether he could help staff that committee. Lyndon Johnson went to Donald Cook, his *protégé* and his friend, who was chairman of the SEC. Donald Cook said, "I can't do it because I have a full-time government job, but I have a young lawyer who I think is able to handle this assignment."

I met Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson asked me if I would do it as an additional duty, and I said I would. It became a full time job. I had two other people from the SEC who also did it with me.

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G: How much of your day was spent in working with the committee as opposed--

F: Almost all day, and all night. The committee would ask questions during the day based on suggestions I made, and then the testimony would be typed. It would be handed to me shortly after the hearing adjourned. I'd go over the testimony that night and develop another line of questioning during the nighttime, give it to Lyndon Johnson, who in turn would have the senators on the committee go over this line of questioning that was suggested. Then the product of that would get fed back to me, and as I say, the others.

G: Did he give you any special instructions when he brought you aboard?

F: It was easy to determine the bias of Lyndon Johnson. Lyndon Johnson felt that President Truman had acted properly. I think he reflected the views of the chairman of the committee, Senator Russell, and so the questioning was designed to support the action of President Truman. I was convinced in reading the record that this was so, anyhow.

G: At the same time it was a very touchy political issue, and a lot of the senators seemed to have been running for cover at the time due to MacArthur's popularity.

F: Yes. There wasn't any way in which you could present this as a hearing that was adversary to General MacArthur. So it was a delicate maneuver. It had to be done in such a way that the President of the United States was vindicated, without at the same time impugning the reputation and the stature of General MacArthur. I think we did that. We subsequently wrote a book about it.

G: Was this Johnson's strategy or do you think it was something that Russell planned? Who would you give credit to?

F: I didn't have a whole lot of contact with Senator Russell. I saw him three, four, at most half a dozen times during the entire period. But I saw Lyndon Johnson every day. I always assumed that Lyndon was doing what Senator Russell wanted.

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G: There is some indication that Senator Russell managed to sort of superimpose himself on Tom Connally, who was his counterpart on Foreign Relations. Was this an issue at all? Did Senator Connally feel relegated to an inferior position?

F: I can't describe it as an inferior position, but there was no doubt in the minds of anybody on that staff about who the boss was. The boss was Senator Russell, and he indeed hired the committee counsel; he decided the manner in which the hearings were to be conducted; he was the one to whom you went when the report was to be written. Yes, I think it might be fair to say that Senator Russell dominated the committee at the expense of Senator Connally.

G: Anything on the relationship between LBJ and Richard Russell during this period that you observed?

F: As I have indicated, it was clear to me that there was a very close relationship, not a father-son, but a kind of *protégé*-patron relationship between them under which Senator Russell did everything he could to advance the position of Senator Johnson. Although Senator Johnson was a junior member of that committee he was given a lot of the best questions. In many ways the other members of the committee looked to him for advice even at that early age.

G: Was it a give and take between Johnson and Russell or did LBJ seem subservient at all to Russell?

F: No, no. LBJ was never subservient to anybody. I don't think that was in character. He admired Senator Russell. He reacted to suggestions by Senator Russell. If Senator Russell would indicate that he'd like to do something or somebody should meet him, Lyndon saw to it that that was done, not as an errand boy, but as an equal. Their

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relationship was a relationship of good friends in which one had a superior position and the other was helping him.

G: Did this experience give you any insights as to Lyndon Johnson's staff? Did you get to know the staff members? Did you form an impression of his Senate staff?

F: I believe that John Connally had left the staff at that time. At any rate, I never met John Connally. I think he was only with Lyndon very briefly. I met John Connally after that period of time and got to know him fairly well. But during that period of time I don't remember ever meeting John Connally.

I did get to know Walter Jenkins fairly well. I think Walter Jenkins--and my memory is hazy--succeeded to John Connally's position with Lyndon Johnson. It may be that John Connally had left already at that time

G: I think so.

F: But I got to know Walter Jenkins, to develop first an awe of the manner in which he conducted himself, and later an admiration. Lyndon Johnson, as we all know, was a very difficult boss; he was very demanding. He insisted on long hours. He didn't care that we were working all night, he just wanted the results. Walter Jenkins was able to give him what he wanted and to do it with meticulous attention to detail. Again, he filled a need that Lyndon had and did something that Lyndon couldn't do for himself. I believe that the most valuable record of Lyndon Johnson's career is Walter Jenkins' notes. He made a note of every telephone conversation. He took shorthand. Are you aware of that?

G: Yes.

F: And by taking those notes he was able to make sure that everything that had to be done was done, because he'd just read them and do it after the conversation. So I always felt, and I grew to understand later on when I worked full-time at the Senate, how justified

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this impression was. I always felt that any senator that had somebody like Walter Jenkins working for him had the equivalent of two men in that office. Lyndon Johnson didn't have to do most of the things that other senators would do. He could simply tell Walter about it, and forget about it. Walter would then carry it out, and you were sure that you wouldn't miss anything. Walter is the only member of that staff at that time that I remember. I don't remember working--oh, there were other members on Lyndon's Preparedness Subcommittee afterwards, and I get them confused occasionally.

(Interruption)

F: --with me. There were three people that were loaned by the Securities and Exchange Commission to the select committee: myself, Gerry Siegel and Sol Friedman. We were the three workers who were loaned by the Securities and Exchange Commission to the Senate select committee.

G: Now Donald Cook had worked with LBJ before on the [House] Naval Affairs Committee as a staff man. Did he give you any advice on dealing with Lyndon Johnson or working for him? Did you know what to expect, in other words?

F: No, I don't remember Don Cook advising us or cautioning us. We were more or less assigned to the job. Sometimes we didn't talk to Lyndon; sometimes we got it through Donald.

It just occurred to me. When I said that we talked to Senator Russell at most a half a dozen times, Lyndon much more frequently, the major point of contact was always Don Cook. Now, Don Cook did not work on the testimony, but he was kind of there if we wanted anything or [if we] wanted to contact Lyndon, we'd do it through Don Cook.

Listen, maybe we can continue this some other time.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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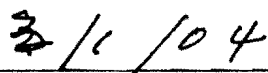
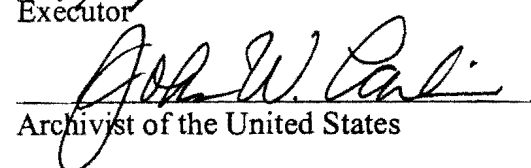
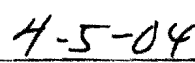
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