INTERVIEW I

DATE: December 16, 1975

INTERVIEWEE: MIKE GEISSINGER

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 2, Side 1

MG: Let's just start out with your background: where you come from, where you were born, and how you became a White House photographer.

G: I was born in Huntington, Pennsylvania, which is a small town in the south central part of the state. From there I went to the Rochester Institute of Technology, graduated in 1964, went right into the air force. I got into photography in the air force, and in 1966 a temporary duty assignment came down--I was in New Mexico at the time--and it was for "a photographer in Washington," and that's all it said. I got the assignment. I only had about three months to go. I was getting out in September of 1966. So I had to extend my enlistment to cover it.

I went to Washington, and I was supposed to work in the lab. When I found out what lab it was I was supposed to work in--I didn't like lab work at that time; I still don't like to do lab work--I told them that I had a degree in photography, and it was in shooting, which in fact it was. So I guess you would say that I ended up in the White House by chance, pure chance. They tried me out. I guess I fitted in.

About halfway through the assignment--in November, I think it was, of 1966--I asked Oki [Yoichi Okamoto] if I could have a job after I got out of the service. He did some checking, and before I left in December

to go back to New Mexico, he had said that in February I could come back. I got out of the service in January of 1967 and went back to the White House in February.

MG: Tell us a little bit about the organization of the White House Photo Office.

G: Well, there were, let's see, one, two, three, four, five photographers including Okamoto--Okamoto being the boss--and one secretary.

MG: Who were the others? Frank Wolfe, I suppose.

G: Frank Wolfe, Bob Knudsen. At that time there was a specialist fourth class from the army, Kevin Smith was there, and myself. Kevin lasted until I don't know exactly when. He got out of the service, and that's when they brought in Jack Kightlinger. And then, of course, Okamoto. Oki had been there except for a brief respite that he took early on. He got fired.

MG: I didn't know that.

G: Yes. Shortly after Johnson took over in 1963, he brought Okamoto in, and of course Oki can fill you in more about that. But ***Newsweek*** ran an article in the press section about Oki and his job, at which point Johnson fired him. The press--he didn't like aides or staff members getting that much press. So Oki, who had been in USIA [United States Information Agency], went back to USIA as head of their Still Picture Division, and I'm not sure, it's still up in the air as to how long he was gone. It would be easily checked through the contact sheets. I think he was gone about six months, six or eight months, something like that, and then Johnson turned around one day and said, "Where's Oki?" to somebody, and they said, "Well, you fired him." "Well," he said, "get him back here." Something like that. That's the way I heard the story.

So, anyhow, Oki had been there the whole time. Frank had been there, I know, since Kennedy's administration. I don't know when that was, exactly when. Bob Knudsen had been there since Truman's administration. He had come there as a navy chief; worked under Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, and continued to work under Nixon up until, I think, just after Ford took over or just before Ford took over. Jack Kightlinger is still there, working for [David] Kennerly under Ford, and he went through the Nixon administration, too.

I was hoping to do the same thing, but it didn't work out that way. On January 10, I got a letter from Ollie Atkins--well, *I* didn't get a letter. We got a letter from Ollie Atkins. The Nixon people had fired all the people under our Schedule C civil service appointment. My name was at the top of the list, and I'm not sure why, but I don't think there's any significance. But I was a little upset because it identified the date as January 19. That was it, 11:45 the day of the inauguration, and I got a little upset because of the short notice. And it was a rather short period of time for me to find a job.

Anyhow, that was the personnel setup. Frank, of course, came down here to the Library. I have since had two jobs, one at Virginia Polytechnic Institute as head of their PR photo operation, and right now I'm teaching photo journalism at Rochester Institute of Technology.

MG: How would you get your assignments to cover something?

G: From the day's schedule, the President's schedule that came out of the press office or out of Juanita [Roberts]'s office, I guess. Okamoto covered basically everything on the schedule. I say that not without exceptions.

The structure that kind of determined the assignments was the work schedule. Oki worked a day much like the President's, and the President's appointments would start like at ten o'clock in the morning--that's when Okamoto would be in there--and go until four or five in the afternoon with a break for lunch and a nap around one or two o'clock. Frank worked a relatively normal day, what you would consider a normal day, if that was possible--i.e., a nine-to-five kind of thing, and the secretary did, too. Bob had a much looser schedule in that he was covering mainly the First Lady and the East Wing of the White House. That left Kevin and I to operate on an alternating schedule. One of us would be, for a week, on from eight in the morning until about four-thirty. The other one would come in at like eleven-thirty and work until Johnson decided to quit for the day. Okamoto and whoever was on late would cover the state receptions and dinners around the White House in the evenings up to the toast, and then Bob Knudsen usually went in and did the entertainment and the handshake kinds of things afterward.

So as far as the assignments--we never really had assignments--it was whoever wasn't busy at the time they were needed to do something, at the time somebody was needed. Oki spent most of his time upstairs around Johnson's office, just to photograph either nothing going on, no one with the president, an aide with the president, or the appointments that were scheduled. Any time the press was called in for a photo session, one of us--Frank, Kevin, or myself--would grab a camera and go up and shoot that with the press. For state arrivals, of course, we were assigned coverage areas, and because we had unlimited access--in other words, we weren't restricted to any particular area in the White House

or the grounds--we would do heavy coverage from positions or areas on state arrivals, and this kind of thing, outside.

Travel: there were usually two people [who] traveled with the President. Okamoto would travel on *Air Force One*, and generally speaking someone traveled in the press plane, except for Texas, and that one of us could handle. And we kind of rotated those trips.

MG: Which trips did you make?

G: As far as the overseas trips, I made three overseas trips: to Guam, Punta del Este, Uruguay, and El Salvador. [I] made two trips to the Mexican border with Johnson.

Domestic travel; there was a lot of it. The first one I ever went on was to Fort Campbell, Kentucky in July of 1966, which until I came down here to go through the contacts I had forgotten about, by the way. I thought the first trip I took was on Labor Day of that year. Then [the] Labor Day trip. At some point there was a Veteran's Day trip. I don't have a complete schedule. I mean, I know I made thirteen trips to the Ranch in two and a half years. I don't know how many Johnson made to the Ranch in that time. I just get the feeling that I made most of them, that's all.

MG: I gather then that Okamoto took the majority of the pictures that the President was in.

G: Yes, I would say that. Yes. I would say that the vast majority of the events at the White House or surrounding the President were covered by Okamoto. Now Oki didn't work on Saturday, and Kevin and I generally alternated on Saturday. We even, at the beginning, were working Sundays, but we finally dropped that. We were alternating Sundays as

well. We finally dropped that because he never did that much on Sunday except go to church, and unless something very special was happening, nobody would cover on Sundays. And it had to be very special for Oki to come in on Saturday, too, a very high-level meeting of some sort.

MG: Did LBJ feel a certain sense of having these photographs or this photographic coverage of these events for posterity? He must have been somewhat conscious of it to even allow this sort of coverage.

G: Well, I think--opinion--he did have a sense of [keeping a] record for history. I get the impression that the reason many meetings were also--like Tom Johnson or someone would be in there taking notes during a meeting. I would assume from that that those notes have gone into a file so that there is a record, a written record as well as this photographic record. I think the President's sense of history was very strong. I think probably Okamoto's was stronger as far as the position he had, the access he had, and what could be done with these photographs a hundred years from now by historians, what that would add to the written record. I have the feeling that over a period of time Okamoto established a working rapport with Johnson that allowed him to do many more things than we could do.

MG: What, for example?

G: I wouldn't say that from the position of the President, that he wouldn't allow us to do these things. We couldn't do it in our own head. I ran across a photograph, I think, that typifies this. We had gotten a new lens, a new super wide-angle lens for our thirty-five millimeter cameras we had at the White House, and Okamoto was fooling around with it during his shooting. There are several frames of the office, shot in the

office itself, with Tom Johnson and the President. The President [is] sitting in the rocking chair; Tom on one of the couches. Okamoto had pulled over one of the wooden armchairs that sat behind those couches next to the fireplace, and you could see his feet propped up on the back of the sofa, with Tom Johnson and the President beyond. That's what I mean by--I know that I would have never taken that kind of liberty even though I might have thought about doing photographs similar to that. I mean not the same photograph obviously, but photographs like that. I would never have taken the liberty to try it just because the--even the whole time I worked there I still wondered who the hell I was to walk through that gate every morning, going to work at the White House.

G: Did you ever have an experience where the President didn't want you around?

G: Yes. Yes. There were--

MG: Were there times when he didn't want coverage for one reason or another? Maybe he didn't want another person present or he didn't want a photographer present.

G: It was generally after we had several record shots of what was going on. I can remember one instance that turned into a very historically valuable group of photographs of mine. At least, I think they will be. They seem to be now. I was working one night, and unannounced and not even on the President's schedule that day, the Russian ambassador, [Anatoly] Dobrynin, came over. I don't remember the exact date right now, although it's obvious it's in 1967 some time. And as a matter of course, I think Marvin Watson called down and said, "Come on up." So I went up. I went in. Dean Rusk was there. I made--I don't know how

many photographs--a few photographs as Dobrynin was passing out some papers. He had handed President Johnson some, and he was handing them across to Secretary Rusk, and they were both reading the papers. And at one point, I don't remember when, I saw the nod from Johnson, which meant, you know, "Get out."

For some reason, I didn't. I went out in the Rose Garden outside his office, and it was at night, and shot through the windows. And I shot until the meeting broke up, and the President had given Dobrynin some sort of little cufflinks or tie tack or something like that, and off I went. It didn't come out until about 1970 or 1971, I guess, when Prime Minister Harold Wilson of England wrote a book saying that on a specific date a peace proposal for Vietnam was handed to President Johnson, to the United States. He named the date in the book. It was written up in the newspaper at the time, in 1971, I think, and I said to myself, "God, that date rings a bell." I have a few photographs that I shot now, and I went to the photographs because I had a couple of these photographs. I looked at the date on it, and that's the date. So it wasn't that he did not want a record made of it.

I was never prevented, unless it was a totally family kind of thing--and I don't think Oki ever was either--never prevented from making at least some kind of photograph. Obviously there were things that happened that we didn't know about, over in the Mansion, for instance, that nobody was around for. But by and large, anything in an official capacity, I would say we missed very few of; in his office as President, there were few things that we did miss.

MG: Seeing Frank Wolfe around the President, it seems like whatever the President is doing he seems almost unconscious of a photographer being there in his face, practically, taking all of these pictures.

G: Here again, I think--yes.

MG: He doesn't seem at all distracted by it.

MG: No, he wasn't. And fortunately for us, that kind of feeling was extended onto the people that were around him, that we could work completely free. The only thing that prevented us from doing that was our own head. I've noticed from my contacts that throughout my time at the White House I never got close, I mean physically close, to Johnson. I didn't make many big-type photographs of just his face. I didn't get close to him. For me, as a photographer looking at those now, I say, "That's a real shame." Oki of course did, and I think Oki at that time could get much closer to Johnson than we could. I sometimes have the feeling that, if Okamoto had wanted to, with an extremely wide-angle lens--and Johnson were talking to someone right in front of him like we're talking across this table--Oki could stand right between the two of them, shoot Johnson's picture, and leave, and he wouldn't see it at all. He wouldn't see Okamoto walk in there. Probably not. (Laughter) He probably would have reached out and just pushed Oki aside.

But I sometimes get that kind of feeling from watching Oki work and looking at the photographs he did. I mean, there is still something about being next to or near the President, and even for the two and a half years I worked there, that kind of feeling never left me, which was a hindrance for my photography, but which was obviously a great thrill.

MG: Yes. I'm sure.

G: Both sides of the coin.

MG: Let's shift gears a little bit and get into some narrative of your views of Lyndon Johnson as you saw him. When did you first meet him? Do you recall your first contact with him?

G: The first one-to-one contact? I was in the Yellow Oval Room for the presentation of an ambassadorial credential. That was the first time I was in the same room with the President, and I was pretty uptight then, but so were the--I was with the rest of the press. I remember Frank and--I'd only been there a couple of weeks, I think--and all of a sudden Frank got up out of his chair, and he shoved the Nikon into my hand and he said, "Here. Go shoot. Come on. We're going up to shoot the President, photograph the President." That's vernacular, "shooting the President." And I just fell apart. I mean, I had used the Nikons that we had, the cameras. I had one of my own, but when he put that thing in my hand, and I walked into that room waiting for the President, it just felt like a rock. I mean it felt like my hands wouldn't work or anything else. I don't think there's a single sharp photograph on that roll of film just because I was shaking so badly.

The first time I had any one-to-one contact alone with him--more or less alone--was the first night I was working at the White House by myself, and I had worked with--this was once again several weeks after I'd started up there, and I got called up. Marvin had called down to the office and said, "Come on up. We have an appointment." I went up for this next appointment, which was a bill signing, and I walked into the office, and I was standing right inside that hallway, the connecting hallway between Marvin's office and the President's, and I just walked

in there, and I must have been plastered right up against the wall because I wasn't going to move, and he did the worst thing that I could possibly think of for him to do and that was that he talked *to me*, directly to me, and I didn't need that. All I needed was just for him to do what he was supposed to do, sign the bill, with these two congressmen standing there: I was going to shoot the pictures and run just to get out of there.

MG: What did he say?

G: Well, he looked up from his desk--he was sitting behind his desk--and he looked up from his desk, and he said, "Can you take a good picture?" And I didn't need that either. I just blurted out without even thinking, "Yes, sir. I think I can," and then I realized what I had said. And I said, "Oh my God, no!" So he started to get up from behind his desk, and he walked around the right side, and he started walking toward me, and he said, "Well, I guess I'll go comb my hair then." And he was walking toward me. I didn't know where he was going, and then he was going into that small john that he had in that connecting hallway. And I mean I was frozen. I was just petrified. And then I think Marvin helped me out because I think he saw how scared I was, and said something about, you know, "You're just photographing the bill signing, and that's it, taking pictures of the bill signing." But that was the first experience, and in a way that broke the ice because then I didn't have to worry about him talking to me again as badly as I did that first time. But that, as I say, that was my first encounter with him, the first face to face.

MG: What was he like?

G: I think for the first while I was so damn scared that I didn't really have an opinion. I think it was one of the trips to the Ranch--although in retrospect, after that initial period of really being uptight about being around him, after that subsided I really had the feeling that I did want to just go in and sit down and talk to him. This would have been into 1967. And for no particular reason. Just to go in on some Saturday when he wasn't doing much, and you can imagine days like that, but just to go in and sit down and talk to him. I think that grows out of--the kind of image I had of him was like a photograph I had made of him at the Ranch when he was carrying Lyn, Luci's son, and he had a khaki outfit on and a hat, and he was holding Lyn, and Lyn was all dressed up. I think it was Sunday after church; I'm not sure. When I made the photograph, [a] full-length thing, got it back, he looked exactly like my grandfather carrying me. That, I think, is the largest impression I have of Johnson, a grandfather image.

MG: You must have seen him a good deal with other people, discussing things on a one-to-one basis, say with a congressman or a senator or someone else, when you were in a position to observe without being given the Johnson treatment, let's say. What was he like in these sessions? How did he relate to other people?

G: I would rank him--I don't rank him. I saw him as a true professional politician.

MG: What were his skills?

G: I think that's probably pretty difficult, for me to answer anyhow. I would rank him with [J. William] Fulbright and [Everett] Dirksen, and of course, if you look at who taught him with politics, Sam Rayburn. Why

shouldn't he be? He was a very good student of Rayburn, I feel. But in that contact, in the one-to-one contact, I think he was very, very effective in putting his position across. Not convincing someone to agree with him but just in putting his position across. He would use a lot of tricks. I became aware of what body space is, and he would use that very effectively to get someone's attention.

MG: Did you get the feeling that he was always closing in on someone a little?

G: When he had to, yes. When he felt he had to in order to convince someone that he felt what he was doing was right, yes. He was closing in on them, all right. One of the things that I did that just jogged into my head, that now I have to go back and find in the contacts, is a night that I was on and there was a congressional meeting in the Cabinet Room, and he was trying to get his surtax passed, that 10 per cent-15 per cent surtax passed. Wilbur Mills was being pig-headed about not passing it. They had this congressional meeting not about the surtax, but about something else completely. After that meeting broke up, he took Mills into the office. I made a few frames, as I remember it, and he threw me out. He didn't throw me, but he nodded. He gave me the nod. I went back out in the Rose Garden again because I knew that was historically valuable. And they got pretty loud as I recall it.

MG: Is that right?

G: Yes. I got two photographs through those windows from the Rose Garden, of Mills listening, and Johnson kind of up on his toes, not very close to each other. They were separated by probably a couch length. But it was very obvious that Mills could hear him very loud and clear. That

still didn't change Wilbur Mills, and I think that each of them had a great deal of admiration and respect for each other just the same as Senator Fulbright, Bill Fulbright and Johnson did, too. Up to a certain point, as I understand it, they were very good friends even while Johnson was president, but at some point it became very disadvantageous for the two of them to be seen together because of Fulbright's position on the war. But I think they had a great deal of respect for him. I think Dirksen and Johnson had a great rapport even though Dirksen was a Republican.

MG: The relationship between Johnson and Fulbright didn't seem strained in spite of Vietnam when they were together?

G: I think it probably became strained, yes, because the feelings began to run to the emotional. It wasn't an issue any more. It was an emotional thing as well as an issue, and I think then it probably became strained.

MG: Could you see this in your work when you were--?

G: I couldn't really see it, and I saw some contacts that I did toward the end of the administration. I don't know the event. I don't know the reason that Fulbright was in the Cabinet Room, but I know that the heavies were in there: [Walt] Rostow, Rusk, [Richard] Helms. I'm not sure whether [Earle] Wheeler was in there. No, Wheeler couldn't have been in there, but Clark Clifford was in there, so it had to be about the war, and I think it was near the bombing halt of 1968. But Fulbright was in there, and at that point, as I remember it, there are no frames of just the two of them together. They sat across the Cabinet Room table from each other, and as I remember, there was no personal kind of contact.

MG: About Mills; do you remember any particular arguments that LBJ used on him?

G: No. I didn't hear anything. I was outside, so I--and that was the thing that I learned very early on there, that what went in one ear came right out the other as quick as it went in.

The most extreme example of that was the first day of the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, June 5. I went into that situation room before anyone. Bill Fisher, one of the motion picture camera men, and Tom [Lt. Thomas M. ?] Atkins were in there, but I was the first still guy in there. And that was just so heavy that they could have taken me as soon as I walked out that door, and I wouldn't have remembered a word that was said in there. That's really the way I operated. The only time I remember not doing that was when [Hubert] Humphrey and [Edmund] Muskie came in after the 1968 election. I think it was two or three days after the election, and Johnson had them up in the Mansion for lunch. I think it was for lunch, and they sat around like three Monday-morning quarterbacks going over the game.

MG: Is that right?

G: It was the most phenomenal thing, and I actually stopped photographing, and had to like pinch myself to get back into photographing because I started listening to the conversation. And it was one of the things like, "If we'd only done this--" "If this hadn't happened here--" "If we'd started this a little sooner--" "If we'd done this kind of thing here--" and "I remember a situation in Kentucky--"

Muskie had told this story. He was going to give a commencement address at a school in Kentucky or Tennessee, and he said he had his

address all prepared, and of course he was an announced candidate and everything else. I guess it had to be after the convention because he was the vice-presidential candidate, and he said, "I was getting ready to give this address to the college, and about five minutes before I was supposed to go on, the president of the school came up to me, took me by the arm, and he said, 'Senator Muskie, I wish you would not talk about anything controversial.' You know, it just destroyed everything because here we were in the middle of an election and a campaign and everything else, and he tells me not to talk about anything controversial or issue-oriented. I didn't know what to do." But that was the kind of conversation they had, and that was the only time that I ever really forgot about photography and started listening to the conversation.

MG: Well, there were several things here. One, Humphrey's speech in Salt Lake City, in which--

G: I think they went over that.

G: Did he feel that that was a mistake, do you recall?

G: Now we get into specifics, and I'll probably get lost here.

MG: This had to do with his position on the bombing.

G: Yes. Yes. Of course, this was after the bombing halt. The bombing halt was in the end of October before the election. I honestly can't say. I really don't know.

MG: Another thing I've heard about the campaign strategy that they felt was a mistake was with regard to Anna Chennault's role with the South Vietnamese. Did Humphrey have material he could have used in this regard? Did they happen to mention that, do you know?

G: I really don't know, honestly. The one instance of Muskie I do remember is talking about the speech. The rest of it [is] just in essence more than specifics, the essence of the whole situation.

MG: Did you get the feeling that LBJ was playing the role of a teacher in this? "Now, you should have done this," or "You should have done that?"

G: No. No. As I say, what came through to me was just three Monday-morning quarterbacks sitting around talking about the game, and it wasn't like--I never got the feeling that Lyndon was saying, "If you'd just listened to me and done it the way I told you to." I never got that feeling. I really didn't. As I remember it, he was asking them questions, and maybe they were leading questions for him to just, let's say, maybe prove himself right in his own head, you know, or to hear them say it, so they knew he was right or something like that. But I never got the feeling--it wasn't like two people who played the game for the Washington Redskins talking to Sonny Jurgensen. If Larry Brown and Charlie Taylor got together after the Dallas game with Sonny Jurgensen, it would be that kind of thing as opposed to Sonny Jurgensen and somebody else that [had] retired getting together with George Allen. Or a better analogy than that, I guess, would be if Vince Lombardi were still alive, for two people that played for him who were now coaching--Bart Starr and somebody else--to get together with him and his saying, "You shouldn't have done it that way."

MG: You were talking about his relationships with Fulbright and Mills. I was thinking about Richard Russell. Did you witness any of Johnson's contacts with Russell and--?

G: Yes.

MG: --how would you characterize their relationship?

G: I think it was a very good relationship, from what I saw. I photographed Russell and Johnson one Saturday.

MG: Did you notice any particular warmth or deference toward Russell that might have been to a greater degree than other senators?

G: I guess I would only talk from a personal standpoint because that's what I could see, and I think they were very close personally. How they felt politically I don't know.

MG: From what you were able to witness, which aides did the President seem to rely on the most?

G: All of them. They all had to work their asses off. You know, I think he even relied on Okamoto in a certain way. Obviously not as much as he relied on, let's say, Marvin Watson or Jim Jones, but I think that he had a tremendous--I don't want to say dependency, but I think there was a reliance on an aide doing their job.

MG: Well, you're familiar with the thesis that the system of presidential advisers isolated him from other viewpoints and from what was going on in the country. Did you ever get the sense that he was isolated?

G: Yes, and I think that's indigenous to the presidency.

MG: Really?

G: Yes. In looking at it in retrospect--I mean, I got the same feeling because toward the end of the administration I began to get pretty strong views against the war and saying, "Let's just stop all this garbage. There's really no reason for it." And even with the arguments that came out, the opinions that came out for and against, I think the advice that he was getting was very heavily military oriented. That

colored it. It made it biased, so that the believability of a James Reston or a Max Frankel or a Hugh Sidey, or something like that, their credibility just wasn't there because they didn't have the inside information. "All my military people over in the Pentagon are telling me one thing; you guys are saying something else. I can't believe you. They've got all the people over in Vietnam. They know what they're doing. Don't tell me how to run my war. Don't tell me how to run my policy." So I think that in that respect he was isolated. And I think that just because the president has the hiring and firing power over his aides, as does really anyone who is in charge in an executive position, they surround themselves with people who not necessarily are going to be "yes-people," but they're at least going to have the same kind of ilk that the man in charge does, which I suppose biases it right off the bat. As I say, they say they may not agree with him on everything. In other words, maybe Joe Califano didn't agree with Johnson on the war, but that wasn't his area. He may have believed Sidey and everybody like that--I'm only using that as a hypothetical example--

MG: Right.

G: --but that wasn't his area. His area was domestic, so even with the President, Califano, if he didn't agree with the war, wouldn't have had any credibility with him.

MG: Sure. Did you ever seem him try to get a good representation of the other side, say from George Ball or someone of this nature?

G: I think probably the most effective at that, at least toward the end of the administration, was Clark Clifford when he became secretary of defense. I suppose that was such a blatant, such a hundred and eighty

degrees out of phase from what he was hearing from McNamara that it probably--here again I'm speculating--just snowed him, and he said, "Wait a minute. How can I have one guy who was not supportive of the war but is at least agreeable to the policies and all of a sudden I get somebody in the same position and they don't? Wait a minute. What's going on here?"

MG: I've had the impression that he had a good deal of respect for Clifford, and relied on him heavily.

G: I think so, too. I find it really phenomenal, I think, between Clifford and [Dean] Acheson--of course, they were professionals, too. They were like professional advisers to presidents. I know the night Martin Luther King was killed--for some reason; I don't know why--Clifford was there, was in the office, and he spent the whole time--and I think it almost appears in looking at the contacts, and I don't mean this in a derogatory way to anybody, he was more torn up by the assassination of King, or at least expressed it more visually for me to capture--because I gravitated to him. A lot of my photographs are of Clifford that night, and he just expressed it more. And I gravitated to his hands. I have photographs of him wringing his hands, walking around with his head down. Now everybody was obviously in shock. No problem with that, but Clifford just seemed to be expressing it so much more visually. And I think there was a tremendous amount of respect for Clark Clifford.

MG: What about Abe Fortas?

G: He was probably a tragedy because I think Johnson and Fortas were so close personally.

MG: Did you have a chance to see them together much?

G: I think only once.

MG: Really?

G: Yes. I think in the two and a half years I was there, there was only one time that I saw them together and that was in an official capacity, I think, at a swearing-in or a bill signing or something like that. That was all. I did see contacts of Oki's of the two of them together, and that's the only thing I can draw from, contact prints.

MG: Did the President tend to relax a good deal at the Ranch when he'd come down on weekends?

G: Yes. Some people wouldn't look at it as relaxing. Dale Malechek wouldn't say that he relaxed, but I think that was such a diversion from politics, as far as running the Ranch. I think that was such a diversion that it was relaxation to him even though he was going constantly.

MG: Could you normally get a better view of him here than you had in Washington? Could you see him in a more informal environment?

G: Oh, yes.

MG: Were you closer to him at the Ranch?

G: No. I wouldn't say I was closer to him. We weren't closer at the Ranch. We actually were probably more isolated at the Ranch. Only because the way the photographic coverage developed, the feelings that I had, and I think Oki would prove this out or agree with it--what we were doing was documenting the President and the presidency, in contrast to what Kennerly is doing with Ford, and I think that comes from the two chief photographers' backgrounds. Oki was very much in touch with and knowledgeable about the issues that were before Johnson, and I think he could much more effectively than any of us begin to put the essence of

those on film. I think that's going to come out. Kennerly, on the other hand, is not as knowledgeable about that, but he is more knowledgeable about Ford as the individual, Ford as a person. So that when we got to the Ranch, that was when Johnson was a person. No, I don't want to say it that way. That's when he was the private LBJ, and that kind of thing we weren't interested in unless he wanted us interested in that. Unless he called us to photograph, there was no reason for us to follow him around. Unless it was in his official capacity as president, we didn't--and I don't think he wanted it either, because I think he recognized that he had a private life and that's what he wanted to keep. That's why he probably didn't like the press jumping all over him about drinking and smoking and running around, the private side of him. He, I think, would rather have had them address themselves to the issues that were before the President and the presidency, as opposed to him as an individual. You probably could separate the two, and that's how we felt, too.

MG: You probably traveled some with the press plane, did you not?

G: Yes.

MG: How did they regard him in this respect? Did they feel that he should be entitled to a private life?

G: Probably not.

(Interruption)

MG: Let me sort of rephrase this. If you had been handling his press relations, what changes would you have recommended to improve them?

G: The only job worse than that is being president. I have got to admit, I have never even thought of that question. I think Johnson being the

person he was, the man he was, first of all, you would have had to change him, and you weren't going to do that. I think probably the biggest thing that a president has to deal with as far as press relations and the deterioration thereof is just time in the presidency. I don't think there has ever been a president who has maintained a high, good--

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G: --rapport, a high level and a good rapport with the press for the total term of his presidency. And I don't think they can just because the more the press learns, the more the president learns, and for whatever reason it might be, the worse the relations get.

MG: Well, one of the complaints we have heard a lot from the press was his lack of advance notice on trips.

G: All right. You can get the same complaints from me. I mean the staff probably felt the same way. Sure. The only thing I could think of as far as the advance notice--well, of course, it didn't make them happy, but the only thing I could think of as far as the advance notice was that he was a bit paranoid about assassination. I mean, it didn't do the Secret Service any good either, and I would imagine they expressed it too. Even though they probably liked it in one respect; they liked it because they couldn't do any advance planning. They couldn't do any advance work. So if he all of a sudden decided to go to Timbuktu, they didn't know who was in Timbuktu, and they didn't even have time to check it out, to find out if there were any nuts there that were going to go after him or whatever. But I suppose no one ever gets used to that kind of impetuous nature of him. I mean he, I think--and this is a reconstruction in my mind--I had about an hour and a half to get ready to go

to Guam. I went out on the advance plane, but at one point the advance plane was supposed to go out four or five days before him. And nobody knew exactly when he was going to go out, and all of a sudden I went into work one day at nine o'clock, or eight o'clock, or whenever it was--no, I went in at eight, and at 9:15, I think it was, Frank looked over, and he'd just gotten a phone call, and he looked over and said, "You had better get home and pack. You're leaving at 11:45 for Guam." And I lived out in Adelphi, right behind the University of Maryland, so I had to drive the whole way out there and get my clothes, all of them winter because it was in March--I didn't have my summer clothes yet; I had them all in Pennsylvania--and drive the whole way down to Andrews. I just made the plane. I don't think anybody can ever get used to that kind of thing. That probably had something to do with it, yes.

MG: Yes. As long as we're at that Guam trip, why don't you give me some more of your recollections on that? That was in March, you say?

G: I think it was March of 1967, yes. Well, Tom Atkins, one of the film guys, and I went out in advance to get the lay of the land and get the word back as to what to bring and what kind of setup it was and what kind of equipment to bring for photographic coverage.

MG: You flew out and then went back? Is that--?

G: No. No.

MG: You stayed out?

G: Yes, we stayed out. Walker [?] had gone ahead and set up communications. So we had lines back to Washington, and everybody was out there in advance. I don't know who from the press office went. There were so many from the travel office, and Walker, and the Secret Service,

and things like that. I mainly photographed the preparations that were going on there, getting ready for the thing. Once he got there, I really didn't have that much contact with him. I stayed mainly with the press. I was trying to think now if anybody else came out. I don't think they did, other than Okamoto. But I stayed mainly with the press, covering what they covered, and I didn't even get into the conference room except when the press did for a photo session. So that's really about all that I can recall. I obviously didn't stay in the presidential complex. Okamoto did. Tom and I were in the bachelors officers' quarters.

MG: And you also went to the Punta del Este trip?

G: Yes.

MG: Do you have any recollections here?

G: Yes. That was a good trip. That really was. Once again, he spent enough time there--and Frank also went on the trip. So there were two still people as well as Okamoto there, which really made it a good trip. One of the funniest goddamn things, and I don't know whether--you may not have heard this, but one of the funniest things was that one night Bill Fisher [?], Frank, and myself were sitting around the hotel with nothing to do. Nothing was going on. Okamoto was covering the President, so we decided to go out, go to a local bar--and they had to open up Punta del Este. It was a resort town, but it was the end of their season. This was in March or April, too, I think. But it was the end of their season so they had to import everybody back in to open up the shops and to walk the streets and everything else.

Anyhow, we decided to go to this bar, and I think we'd asked the hotel owner or the guy at the desk where we could go, and he told us

[about] a place a block away. And as we were walking up toward the place, it had a red light outside of it. I mean just like your typical red light. We walked into the goddamned place, and everybody was there, every off-duty Secret Service man, even the President's valets, one of them was in there. There weren't any members of the press there. They were staying at a different hotel much farther away, and here were all these Secret Service agents, and Frank, and Bill and I, and the girls, buying drinks and everything else. And it was one of the most bizarre scenes, because I don't think there was a person in the house that spoke Spanish. I had a little bit of Spanish in the house. And immediately we sat down at a table with some Secret Service agents and some girls; I struck up a conversation in my broken Spanish and her broken English, and I don't know how--I can't remember the name of the valet that was there.

MG: The military aides or--?

G: Paul--

MG: Paul Glynn was one.

G: Paul and the other guy. The other guy that was there--I can't remember his name.

MG: I'll think of it in a minute.

G: Anyhow, I left. Not alone, but I left and went back to the hotel. Well, afterwards, the next day there was a big flap among the Secret Service agents. I started talking to one of them, and he asked me at some point, "Did you know it is illegal in Uruguay to take a woman up to your hotel room?" And I said, "Christ, no." During the course of our conversation--a very light conversation with this girl--I also found she

was a University of Montevideo student. She was also a communist, and I would imagine they all were. All the thoughts that went through my head then: I said, "Oh, no!" Anyway, evidently--not Paul, the other guy had left with a girl, too; they were asking outrageous prices--and taken her back to one of the Filipino cooks' rooms. The guy at the hotel--it was a different hotel--called the police.

MG: Is that right?

G: As soon as they came in, they took him down to the station. He said he never passed out LBJ pins so fast in all his life. The only thing that got him off was a lighter to the sergeant on the desk. That's the only thing that got him out of there, and I'm not sure whether this should be restricted or not.

MG: That's terrific.

G: I don't know how much of that one has come out yet, but I couldn't believe that. That's all I would have needed, right? Because I didn't have any of those goodies to bail us out. That was one of the big recollections.

The other one was of the troops that surrounded the San Raphael Hotel. I have a photograph of Frank's that he made of one of those guys with a submachine gun and flags in the background, and the Uruguayan Army had surrounded the hotel. They had submachine guns, had the safeties off, and their fingers on the trigger, and I just couldn't believe that when I saw it. It was just phenomenal. I was scared, is what I was. Those are my recollections, pretty vivid recollections, of Punta del Este.

MG: I've heard that the advance men on a lot of these trips were really enjoying themselves, whatever part of the world they happened to be in.

G: Well, the only one I went out on advance was to Guam, and I know they didn't enjoy themselves on Guam. They just couldn't have. I suppose they probably did to a great extent, but I know that if they worked half as hard on any other trip as they did on Guam--yes, there was time for it, but they had a hell of a lot of preparation to do on those trips, too. I would imagine that they tried to balance it out, the work with wherever they happened to be. I can imagine that nobody had any fun on that seventeen-day Asian tour because they didn't have time to have any fun on advance.

MG: Right.

G: I know that the Secret Service was leap-frogging their agents from one place to another. As fast as they would get it set up in one place, they had to go two places ahead to set that up because the guy had just come in, and he never stayed that long in one place. That was probably the most devastating trip that they went on, anyone went on. People came back from that, and they were just wrecked, just wrecked. Tom Atkins came down to the Ranch afterwards, and he could not get on track with his sleeping. He would wake up at three o'clock in the morning and not be able to go back to sleep. He would fall asleep at three o'clock in the afternoon and not wake up. From what I heard, it was pretty much the same thing about everybody that came back, just because of the pace and that kind of thing.

MG: Right. Well, did you get the feeling that he enjoyed traveling, that the President was happier when he was away from the White House or when he was on a trip?

G: [This is] only an opinion, but I would say yes. I would be safe--maybe--I would express the opinion that he probably, being a down-home

country boy, was never really comfortable in Washington for thirty-four years, but he liked that. He liked politics, and that's where politics was at. I think he knew it wasn't where it was at for him on a state level, that he could go further than that. I think even as a congressman, you know, he knew he could do more than that--senator, vice-president, and when he became president. And I think he tolerated Washington only because that's where it had to be. And I think he probably was happier traveling. I think he probably wanted to, or would like to have kept in closer touch with people, because that's where he was at ease. That's where he was at his best.

MG: Who were the people he liked to relax with? I've heard, for example, that Jack Brooks was a very good friend of his for just sitting around and chatting informally. People like A. W. Moursund.

G: Yes. And who was the judge in Johnson City?

MG: That was Moursund, I think.

G: That was Moursund.

MG: And then there was [Homer] Thornberry?

G: Wesley West.

MG: Yes.

G: I would say those were the people in Texas, and I--the [Arthur] Krims, because Arthur had a place nearby. Who else? Those are probably the closest. I can't recall offhand. As far as relaxing in Washington, I don't know.

MG: You have a story, I believe, about dropping an ash tray in a cabinet meeting.

G: It wasn't a cabinet meeting. I didn't drop it. They have floor ash trays, metal floor ash trays. As I remember it, it was a meeting that

happened after Henry Fowler, Secretary of the Treasury, came back from Europe and an International Monetary Fund [meeting]. It was a Saturday, I believe. I really have to look that up in the contacts since we talked last. I was moving around the Cabinet Room, and there were two of those ash trays pretty close together, and I had moved around one of them. I had looked back at it or something like that, and ran straight into the other one, and it was the loudest noise in the world. I immediately just collapsed into a chair and felt like just crawling into the nap of the rug. But the meeting didn't break up, and I think that was the effect of Johnson tolerating us. It was like a picture falling off the wall. There is nothing you can do about it, so you just might as well let it go. I think that's probably what it was like, you know, during a meeting.

Anyhow, I never heard about it right after the meeting, or I didn't hear about it right after the meeting. Of course, I think I ran, too, before the meeting was over, and nobody ever said anything to me a day later, two days later. About two weeks later, when I had forgotten about it, I walked into the office one day, and there was somebody--an ambassador--in the office, and when I walked into the office to make the pictures, to photograph, Johnson looked at me and he said, "Oh, I'd like you to meet my photographer that kicks over ash trays." And of course the ambassador had no idea what he was talking about. I did, and then once again I collapsed, crawled right back into the nap of the rug. I kind of smiled a little bit, I suppose, but that was the last there was about it.

MG: Did he mean it in good humor?

G: Probably half and half. He wanted to remind me that he still knew about it, and I think he probably wanted to just say, you know, "Hang in there, but you better be careful from now on."

MG: Do you recall any other conversations with him on this plane?

G: Yes. There was a conversation, probably the only time I got chewed out by him, myself and Bill Fisher, the film man. It was down at the Ranch one time, and here again I know the essence of the conversation. I can't repeat it verbatim because it went by so fast, and I was so god-damned scared because it was one of the few times that he was talking directly to me about me, and Bill, of course. I don't know how he felt. There was a nebulous area of coverage when we were at the Ranch--at least I felt this way--of people who were friends, who came in to see Johnson when he was at the Ranch, people who were advisers and came to the Ranch only in an official capacity, and then there were people on both sides of the fence that were friends of his and/or advisers or cabinet members or whatever. In that area, it was tough to decide whether or not they were coming to the Ranch as an adviser or a friend, and whether or not we should cover the arrival of the plane, et cetera.

Well, one morning we got up, and we would check--I say we. The motion picture photographer and I would check with the military aide, whoever it was at the time, what was happening that day: how many planes they had scheduled in, who was coming in on them, whether we should go out and cover them or anything. He told us there were three planes coming in that day, and the first one was coming in around ten o'clock. It was going to be there around ten o'clock, and there were two in the afternoon. So as ten o'clock approached, we kept calling the

aide, who was in contact with Jim Jones, and I think it was Haywood Smith. And we couldn't get any answer as to whether we were going out, and it was one of those nebulous areas as to whether they were coming in for a visit or for business. It was about ten minutes of ten, and we still didn't have an answer. So Haywood said, "I'll call Jim again and find out." I think we had a couple of conversations with Jim, too. Haywood called back and said, "The boss isn't even out of bed yet, not even dressed yet. Still in his pajamas. He's not going out there to cover it."

Well, of course, Johnson had the knack of being able to get dressed in ten seconds flat, and that's what he pulled that morning. Haywood ended up running out behind the car--and we stayed down at the Ranch House--to the runway. We heard that he wanted us, so we went up to the Ranch House just as he was driving by with the people going down toward the Cedar House. We made the fatal mistake of waiting there, thinking he might bring them back, and then we could get the photographs. He came back alone, got out of the car right by the house where we were standing, and said, "You boys come here." We walked over, and he says, "Now look. You're over twenty-one. You can vote, and you can think for yourselves." He said, "Now, we have three planes coming in today. You missed the first one. That puts you 33 1/3 per cent down," and he went on from there. [It] never got loud. It was never the wrath of LBJ that I felt. He talked to me like my father did in a very soft voice, making me feel smaller and smaller and dumber and dumber for doing what I had done wrong, even though in this case I knew I wasn't wrong. It wasn't my fault. It wasn't Bill Fisher's fault. But that was really the only time that I can remember.

MG: Why did the pictures mean so much to him on this?

G: Well, I suppose at that point--and I think that was probably in 1968--it was probably an expectation. It was an expectation that they would be there. It would be like he wanted to go somewhere, and when he walked outside, his car wasn't there. "Why wasn't the goddamned car there? I don't care if it was getting fixed. I want my car there when I want my car there." [It was] not something he had to think about, not something he had to concern himself with. So when it wasn't there, that's when it was brought to his attention. That's when it would hit him. As long as it was there, it would be like a glass of water. If he wants to go get a glass of water, he knows that when he turns the faucet, it's going to be on. If it's not on, he's going to get angry; he's going to get upset because he wants a drink of water. [It's the] same kind of thing. And I had to agree with him. He had more important things to do than to think about photographers. He had more important things to do than to think about a briefing paper that wasn't there. He had more important things to do than think about than why the goddamned plane wouldn't start. That was somebody else's problem, not his, but when it didn't start, it became his problem, and he was sitting on it, and he didn't like that because he didn't know anything about planes to fix it.

So as I say, in that respect I don't think it was that the photographs were so important to him. It was just that they weren't there.

MG: Yes. He could move rather quickly, though?

G: Yes. I timed him one night at a state dinner, and he was invariably right on time for a state dinner, and the timing on those things was

critical. Bess Abell would be sitting up there on the phone to the Blair House, giving them moment by moment, so that as soon as Johnson came out--it was timed so that the guy would make his U-turn on Pennsylvania Avenue, come driving in the grounds of the White House as Johnson was going down in the elevator and coming out to meet him. Split-second timing. Well, Johnson never made that happen. He was never there early enough. He always had somebody in the office; he always had a phone call, and Oki and I would be standing over there.

And one night I timed him. We always had somebody outside photographing the arrival for a state dinner. Oki and I were upstairs. I was carrying a strobe, and Oki would shoot it. I was carrying a slate of strobes; we had two lights. I saw him walk in there, as I remember it, at what seemed like two minutes before eight, and I have the distinct feeling that I remember timing him getting into his black tie in two minutes and forty-five seconds or something like that. When he walked into his room, you know, his bedroom--I watched with my watch--and I swear to Christ it was two minutes and forty-five seconds when he walked out of there with his black tie and went downstairs. It didn't take him long once he put his mind to it. That's why I get such a goddamn chuckle out of Nixon walking into the shower when he got into the White House. It was that all-around shower that Johnson had built. [It] almost knocked him over.

But you know, as somebody pointed out to me here, he had three people dressing him. I don't care how many people he had dressing him. There are only so many hands you can put on one man's body at one time to help him get dressed. It was still phenomenal. Yes, he could move

very quickly. A number of times I almost got left wherever I happened to be.

MG: I've talked to a number of people who have had that experience.

G: When he started to move for that car, it was a mad scramble, especially with the press, because the pool photographers--AP, UPI, ***Time***, ***Newsweek***, sometimes ***U. S. News and World Report***--[were] in a motorcade, and White House photographers were in a convertible, and the convertible was at least three cars back, if not four. Well, every time he stopped on a motorcade route to go press the flesh, we'd all pile out of the car and run up there. Well, of course, by the time we got up there, the crowd was just intense around the car. As soon as we saw him start to sit down, elbows started flying--anybody that was around us--because we knew that that goddamned car wasn't going to wait. It was going to take off whether we were in it or not, and it was just this mad scramble back to the car.

One Labor Day trip into Michigan, which I think was--yes, I know it was in 1966, he had stopped, it seemed, like every ten feet, and everyone was just exhausted from running back and forth to these cars. And he finally got to Battle Creek, and at one point he stopped just two hundred feet from where he was going to go, where he was supposed to go. The motorcade stopped, and he got out, stood up in the car and started to shake hands, and we all kind of looked around at each other and just stayed in the car. We couldn't do it any more. There are just so many times you can do that, but he--yes, there was no doubt he could move fast, and I would imagine that Dale probably figured there were about five of him running around that Ranch because it just seemed that every

time he went down to the Ranch he always picked out the things that Dale was going to get to tomorrow, the things to fix, and he started giving Dale a list of things that piled on to whatever Dale had to do anyhow, no matter where Dale was.

MG: Did you get the feeling that he was enjoying being president, or did he consider it a burden?

G: I think he probably did up until March of 1968.

MG: Did his attitude noticeably change after that?

G: Oh, I don't know about "noticeably change."

MG: Well, to you. Did you see a difference?

G: I think it probably only changed in that he could see the end of the tunnel. It wasn't just a light then. It was the end of the tunnel, and I think probably the closer January came . . . he just seemed to slow down. There wasn't the intensity of being president that I think there was before that. That's just an impression. I wouldn't be able to give you any concrete examples of what I meant.

MG: Did he seem in good humor much of the time that you were around him, or did he seem--?

G: He did after March 31.

MG: He did?

G: Yes. That seemed to be not only a down time, but I think it also picked him up. It relieved a lot of the pressure. It gave him an answer. You know, "When am I going to be out of this office?" "Well, I know when I'm going to be now. It's going to be January 20, 1969." I think that did perk him up in one respect, but I think it was also a double-edged sword. He knew it was the end, too, that there was nothing else for him

to do. I think he always maintained his sense of humor, even through the most critical times.

MG: Do you have any Johnson anecdotes?

G: I heard one from Okamoto that I think probably has come down somehow from the eight hundred people that have gone through this thing, and that is somebody asked him about--that's great; I just went blank--the head of the FBI.

MG: J. Edgar Hoover.

G: J. Edgar Hoover. Somebody asked him why Hoover was still there. Why didn't he fire him? And he said he would rather have him on the inside of the tent pissing out than the outside of the tent pissing in. I'm not very good at that. It's like jokes. I don't remember jokes worth a damn.

MG: You do remember him as having a good sense of humor in this respect?

G: Yes. It was his humor, you know. He very seldom laughed at anyone else's humor, as I kind of remember it. It was always his humor he enjoyed best about everything. The number of times that I can recall him in really raucous laughter was over something that he had said more so than what somebody else had said.

MG: Yes.

G: I think it was because he may have felt uneasy about what a joke was to someone else, what something funny was to someone else. I know there are a lot of them that Oki tells, not only about him but about the staff members, too. There are so many funny things that happened to staff members and that staff members got involved in, like that Punta del Este thing. If I were to write a book on my White House experience, that

would be the kind of book that I would want to write. No one else may appreciate it, but I think they really can. Obviously, since I've been back here, we've been trading stories and here again, kind of like him, the funny stories that I know are about me and maybe ones that I've heard and remembered, like the one in Punta del Este, but I was trying to remember--you know, the stories about Liz Carpenter and flying are probably very--

MG: She was afraid to fly, I think.

G: It went beyond that. I mean, she was just paralyzed. Some of the stories that are funny now were potentially tragic at the time. Like coming back from Anchorage, Alaska on *Air Force One* after the Asian tour, seventeen days in [inaudible] and I got the thing from Colonel Cross. When we went to the Ranch, he was down at the Ranch, and I was asking him about it, and he said, "I really didn't think that bird was going to hold together. I thought the wings were going to fall right off of it."

MG: Is that right?

G: Yes. I think Cross would say that was the worst one ever. Major Rice, the helicopter pilot, on their round-the-world Christmas Eve jaunt with Santa Claus that he did--they didn't have time to get the helicopter into Rome when he went to see the Pope. Rice got in there about an hour before he did from Pakistan. They had to fly him in by fighter.

MG: Is that right?

G: Yes. And he got into Rome, and I think they had borrowed a helicopter from an admiral in the Sixth Fleet and put it at the Rome airport. Rice gets in there, and he looks at the Italians at the Rome airport, and he

says, "Where are your charts?" "What charts?" "Where are your charts on Rome and the area around here so I can know how to get to the Vatican?" "We don't have any charts." Rice said, "Well, give me a road map then. Do you have one of those?" It was night, and he was taking the President to the Vatican by road map. It took him a little longer than normal, but he finally found the way. Here is Major Rice flying the President around Rome, not really knowing where he was going, from a road map. The copilot is sitting there with a road map trying to find a way to the Vatican.

MG: That's incredible.

G: And Johnson was back there saying, you know, "Well, Major Rice, when are we going to be there? We should be there pretty shortly, shouldn't we? It's taking a long time to get there, Major Rice."

MG: That's a good one. I've never heard that one.

G: Well, you know, as I say, those are the kinds of things that make that whole goddamned experience human and make it believable too, because I know that in my talking to people who were not at the White House, or had never been at the White House, the impression seems to be that everything is so professional, so smooth, and in fact it is, over a large majority of the time. But then there are times when those people are really people, too. They're human, and that I think is what made it so much fun and so much of a really great experience.

MG: How about Marvin Watson? Did he make your job easier?

GE: Easier? Probably not directly. Indirectly he did because of what Oki did to set it up, that Marvin was the one we were reporting to, and I think as far as the internal operation of the White House, Marvin was the one that had the power.

MG: Did it help you to know in advance what sort of mood the President was in?

G: I don't really recall any time when that happened. Many times I could gauge--if I were working at night, I could gauge the mood of the President from Oki because when Oki was around him, and he was in a bad mood, Oki was in a bad mood. And when he was around him and Oki was in a good mood, the President was in a good mood. So it would help, yes, to know what you were walking into, whether it was the lion's den or whether it was a. . . .

MG: You must have had some unwritten rules for shooting the President. What were they?

G: Well, there were no rules. There were none unwritten, spoken, implied, or anything like that. I, of course, when I first got there knew the rule for the press, shoot on the left side without glasses only, and for about the first three months, I started looking back over my contacts, and I found myself just gravitating to the right side with the glasses on. A lot of my photographs were of [the] right side with his glasses on, and finally I said, "Now, wait a minute. Let's give the guy a break, will you? You're not going to get any photographs [inaudible]."

We didn't have any unwritten rules, no. Oki never expressed to me any particular way to photograph the President or any particular attitude. I know it was kind of difficult because as soon as we walked in--I say we; other than Okamoto--he would strike a pose, and it would be tough to break that. We would have to stay there and shoot and shoot and kind of blend into the furniture for a while until he loosened up. Oki never had that problem, I think, because he was there; he was a

piece of furniture anyhow. But that probably wasn't even a rule. It was just something that Johnson went into.

MG: Was there a tendency for LBJ to take off his glasses before being photographed?

G: Oh, yes. Yes. If he had his glasses on when I walked into a room, let's say, he would invariably take them off and generally strike a pose leaning forward towards the guy and listening to him, and whoever was with him. He would have to start talking at that point, it would seem. Not generally in the Cabinet Room; if it was one-to-one in the office that would happen. Once he became back involved in what they were talking about before, then he would sometimes put his glasses back on or sometimes pick up papers. He would read papers.

Tape 2 of 2, Side 1

MG: I was going to ask you if he ever had the photographers do other things for him while they happened to be in the room. Did he ever, say, ask Okamoto to do something else, assist him in some other way, for relaying messages or something like that?

G: Yes. Usually with us though it was, you know, "Go tell Marvin I want to see him," or "Tell Jim Jones to come in here," or something like that. I was working over in the State Dining Room one night that he called me over and said, "Go get one of the waiters. I want to talk to him," or "I want something. Go get that waiter and tell him to come over here," something like that. As I remember it, at least in my experience, those were the only situations where I was asked to do anything else.

MG: People who were close to him have told me that he had a fascination with gadgets.

G: Yes.

MG: Did this extend to cameras at all?

G: No, never did. At least, for me it didn't. As I can recall, he never picked up a camera. He never looked at one. He did have a fascination with gadgets, probably within his own realm. I suppose a blatant example of that is a battery-operated pepper mill that he had along. But the funny thing was, we would go into that family dining room or into the Ranch in the dining room, and it was just like second nature to him. It was like taking off his glasses. He would reach out and put that pepper mill down on its side because it did stand up rather tall. It was probably about twelve or fourteen inches high, and maybe Okamoto said something about it one time. Maybe somebody sitting at the table said something about it one time when we were in there shooting, but as I say, it was just like taking off his glasses. We'd walk into the room, and he'd take up the pepper mill and put it right down on its side.

MG: Is that right?

G: Yes. I don't know whether you can find a photograph in this whole file with that pepper mill standing upright.

MG: Did he seem to have a favorite picture of himself?

G: Yes, and it was one that Frank Muto did when he was on Capitol Hill. That was the one that he seemed to like best.

MG: Which one was that? Do you recall?

G: It was one that was done, I think, when he was still a senator. It was near the time when he became vice president, I guess.

MG: Yes.

G: And it was one that was done in front of some bookcases, and it was just a head shot. We always had trouble with that. I always had trouble getting a "stock photograph" that he liked, one that we could just send out. [I had a] tremendous amount of problems with that.

I think in a sense he was--I won't say a difficult man to photograph because he wasn't, because he was unconscious of the camera, but at least as far as Okamoto was going--here, I think, this is where the value of Bob Knudsen comes in. But as far as Okamoto was concerned, he wasn't looking for a pretty picture of Johnson. He was looking for expressive photographs that showed the man in the situation. Bob Knudsen was--up until Frank came down here and began working down here; Frank could do it, too--but Bob was really the only one that could photograph him and Mrs. Johnson and the family and get photographs that they liked.

MG: Really?

G: Yes. [It was] just a knack that Bob had.

MG: Do you think that LBJ tended to appreciate "a pretty picture" rather than an expressive photograph?

G: Oh, yes.

MG: He did?

G: I think his sensitivity to photographs was very slim. Oki expressed it to me one time that he was vain, but he was not egotistical. He was a vain man as far as how he looked, and he wanted to look good, but he was not egotistical, and I agree with that. In the knowledge that I have of him, I would very much agree with that. So he liked to see himself look good in a photograph, and many times it wasn't that he didn't look good,

but it was that the photograph was expressive, and in his eyes, he looked bad. He had his mouth open, or he had his arm up, or whatever. But I think that those photographs are so expressive of not only that situation but of him as a human being, much more so than "a pretty picture" of him.

MG: Did he ever give Okamoto, to your knowledge, instructions on how to shoot, other than the rule about "the right side without glasses?"

G: Well, that generally was just out for the press. No.

MG: Okamoto had a free rein?

G: As I say, we had a position much like a piece of furniture, fortunately. It was a movable piece of furniture. It would move around, but I suppose he loosened up to an extent down at the Ranch. If he wanted a photograph of that deer over there or wanted us to go over and photograph the cows or whatever, as I saw it, that was different anyhow. He never really gave me directions at the White House.

MG: I get the feeling that he was never completely satisfied with a photograph of himself.

G: Probably not.

MG: Did he use the photographs for gifts frequently, say, a photograph of him with another person sent to them?

G: Yes, that would be his style. He would sign and send them out. One of the funniest instances in that respect [was when] we were going to Texas one time. And I think this will probably be the most valuable photograph that went across his desk. Someday somebody is going to pay a mint for this photograph, I think.

We're going to Texas one time, and there was a book that came out while he was president, ***Quotations from Chairman LBJ***. We were going to

Texas, and there were tables in *Air Force One*--facing seats and a table in between--and I looked over, and one of the Secret Service agents was over there reading the book right in front of the cabin. He could have opened that cabin door at any time. Of course, he probably wouldn't have seen it, but you know, right in front of the cabin door. So I had all my cameras out on the table, and I take the top off one, and I get it focussed as best as I can--no, I didn't even do that--and I shot it. One frame. It's kind of fuzzy, out of focus, but you can see it's ***Quotations from Chairman LBJ***. I got a couple of prints made up, and I was just going to give it to the agent because you can't tell it's on *Air Force One* or anything else. Phyllis Bonanno comes into the photo office for something. She looks down on my desk, and she says, "Who's that?" And I said, "Denny Shaw, a Secret Service Agent." She said, "Where'd you take that?" And I said, "On *Air Force One*." She said, "Oh, give it to me. I'll have the President to sign it to him." I said, "What, are you kidding me? There'd go both our jobs," because my name was on the back of it. The agent and me and Phyllis, all of us would have lost our jobs.

She said, "No, no. Give it to me." I said, "No," and put it in the drawer. Well, a few minutes later she went on to what she was going to do down there. I went out to get some lunch at the machine room, and a little while later I opened the drawer, and one of the prints is gone. Two days later it came back to me. It says, "To Denny Shaw, from LBJ," and a note Phyllis attached to it, "Would you give this to him?" So I saw Phyllis later that day and I said, "Phyllis, what did you do? How did you get that signed?" She said, "Well, it was easy. I just went in

and put it down at his desk." And she had her hand over the book. And she said, "Would you sign this to Agent Denny Shaw?" And he did. [Inaudible]. I was really sweating it when I saw that photograph come back. I said, "Oh, my God!" So I gave it to Denny, and he just couldn't believe it because he hadn't seen it before that. When I walked in there with this thing, and I handed it to him, he just about shit. He just couldn't believe it. He said, "How did you take that picture without me knowing it? How did you do that?" But as I say, some day that's going to be a valuable photograph.

A lot of them went out, no doubt about that, and I think that Okamoto knew that when he came on. He knew that that was going to be a part of his job. What we did was maybe take it to extremes--I know there would be a lot of people that would say that we took it to extremes with the handshake photographs after bill signings and ceremonies and things like that, but maybe we've diluted the collector's market now, the value, in the future, but okay. The facilities were there; the opportunity was there, and it was a snowball effect, I think. The more he saw, the more he demanded. The more he demanded, the more we--you know, it just snowballed. I don't think it snowballed to the point of being outrageous because I think the value of the rest of the work that we did is going to be so great.

MG: Was this part of Bruce Thomas' operation, if an individual had an appointment with LBJ, a photograph was automatic, and it would be signed and sent to the individual?

G: I think you would have to talk to Yolanda [Boozer] or Juanita about that. I don't think it was automatic because there were people that

came in to see President Johnson; two days later, depending on his frame of mind, he may not want to send them a photograph. And I think if you get to the reporters who were in and out once every two weeks, three weeks, something like that, and we made a record of it, he probably didn't send them one each time they were in.

MG: You would cover those reporter visits?

G: Yes. I have three or four shots of Hugh Sidey in there, in the two and a half years, and I know Oki does. That was just when I was on. I know Oki does. Frank probably does. Peter Lisagor and the rest of the press corps.

MG: Did you get a chance to sense which reporters he was particularly fond of and which ones he was--?

G: I think any of the [inaudible] reporters he was fairly--he liked to have them in. Helen Thomas. And I know he got a tremendous kick out of Sarah McClendon, even though she [inaudible].

MG: Did he really?

G: I think so.

MG: Did you ever witness them together that you--?

G: No. I saw some contacts of Oki's. I never photographed her. I photographed another woman, a tall, white-haired woman. I can't think of her name now.

MG: What about Nancy Dickerson?

G: I photographed her, yes.

G: Marianne Means. I was trying to think of some of the others. Helen Thomas, of course.

MG: Did you ever get the feeling that he was trying to sell reporters on the LBJ story or the LBJ version? He didn't try to persuade them that--?

G: No. I really don't feel that. I think a lot of people might disagree with me. I never got that feeling. The feelings that I got were that he was trying to express his position and why that position was the way it was. He would, I assume--and who wouldn't?--have liked to have had them come around and agree with him, no doubt, but I think that was a kind of thing he did.

One of the instances that kind of brought this home to me in my own mind was an instance when Oki came down from upstairs one time, and he was just in awe of that man. There were a group of young, black--I want to say militant, but they weren't really militant--I guess they were militant editors of newspapers and magazines, black newspapers and magazines around the country, that had come in for an appointment in the Cabinet Room. About fifteen, something like that. It was one of the few times that I saw Secret Service agents in the Cabinet Room, physically inside the Cabinet room. Pretty uptight meeting that, I guess, several people didn't want him to have. Oki came down, and he said that he had never seen that man get a group like that in the palm of his hand, not convince them to come to his side, but in explaining his position, that those guys sitting in that room were so in touch with that man and his job and his position and where it came from and why it was the way it was, that he said he just couldn't believe it. And I say, I truly think that was the kind of man he was. That's the impression that I have of him.

Yes, that's a professional politician, but I think it's also a tremendous individual, too. At least as Oki put it, he never tried to convince them that they should come to his side. He only tried to

convince them that what he felt was important, where the priorities were and why those priorities were there, what background he had on it. And he said it was just phenomenal to see them sit there. They questioned him, and at first it was evidently pretty tense in that room. The more he talked, the more they understood. They didn't have to accept. He wasn't interested in having them accept it because I think he probably knew before he went out of the chute that it wasn't going to be accepted by them, but at least that they understood his position; that was the important thing. Well, yes, accepted it was important, too, but not to come over to his side. That would have been nice; that would have been gravy or icing on the cake if they had done that.

MG: I've gotten a feeling that he treated his employees as members of his family, and he really didn't treat them like subordinates socially.

G: Yes. I suppose I would agree with that, especially the immediate aides, I think. [He was] very fond of them. I think there was a tremendous amount of respect going both ways. I never got the feeling that I was in that position, you know, because I wasn't doing an essential job. I wasn't advising him, but I think the immediate people that he surrounded himself with, he did feel were family. I think that was good. I think that helped them respect him. He was also very demanding, which I think was very important, too. At some point, there was the old line going around the White House that said, "If you didn't get fired this week, you weren't doing your job."

MG: Was that right?

G: Yes. Only thing is I don't know whether anybody would substantiate that.

MG: Did Oki have any other difficulties after the initial firing?

G: Well, then he began to understand, yes, and I think there were days that Oki was fired, but it was nothing serious.

MG: He knew, I suppose, not to take it seriously?

G: Yes. At the first, anybody that was fired probably left, you know, simply because they didn't know. But I think after that, it was--and I think Johnson began to understand that, too. It was an outlet. It was an outlet for the frustration of whatever [inaudible]. God knows, there were enough of them.

MG: Well, have we missed anything? Have you got any other stories you haven't recounted? Anything else in Texas that you recall of interest?

G: I'm about drained. There probably are. That's why I say that I would dearly love to have a whole set of my contacts because there were things that I had forgotten about. Maybe the most valuable photographs that we will have done might come out to be the shoot-offs at the beginning of the roll, which are the two or three frames at the beginning of the roll.

MG: What would you--?

G: Only because there are some really funny photographs there.

MG: Really.

G: Yes. I ran across one today that Frank had forgotten about, and I reminded him of it: a Secret Service agent standing outside the President's office with a pair of false fangs in his pocket.

(Laughter)

You know, things like that are in the files. I don't know that that was a shoot-off. You know, some of the other things, we're sitting around

waiting for an appointment, and one of the secretaries walks by, and you take her picture, you know, for no real apparent reason, and she sticks her tongue out at you.

I think probably photographically, a group of photographs that are in these files here--they just have to be preserved, and at some point, they have to get out, because they're just such a dynamite group. Oki got this new lens, this super, wide-angle lens, and focussed it at one foot, and did a bunch of the aides, special assistants, cabinet members, and really made them into caricatures of these people. And it was done over a period of a couple of months when he first got the lens. Just a dynamite group of photographs. There are a couple of Harry [McPherson? Middleton?] in there and a couple of Dorothy [Territo] in the files, and as I say, only photographers are going to appreciate it. Well, I don't know about only photographers, but as caricatures of the people, they're very real. It's almost like a Herblock cartoon, caricature, or something like that. The distortion that the lens produced, being that close, really accentuated things and distorted things to a point where the people become caricatures; the photographs really become caricatures.

MG: Gee, I'd love to see those. Those are good.

G: I just ran across them today, so they're late 1968.

MG: Well, anything else?

G: I don't think so. I'm all talked out. I know there are more. I probably could go on for hours. I think we've hit the high spots. They're pretty well covered.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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