INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: LOYD HACKLER

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

PLACE: Washington, D. C.

Tape 1 of 1

G: We were talking off the tape about An American Melodrama, the book, and I thought we could begin the second session with your comments about some of the accuracies and inaccuracies that you've been able to observe.

H: Basically, I think these three writers [Chester, Hodgson and Page] have a pretty good perception and a pretty good grasp of American politics. One thing that I've mentioned that seems to be not just there, but in some other writings and of some concern is some of these just real absurd falsehoods that begin to become accepted. You know, the President had enough personality quirks that they could write about without dreaming up additional ones. One instance, in this one where they were making comparisons of governments and the operation of the presidency, they said that the President, Lyndon Johnson, ran his much as a royalist, even to the extent of not permitting certain people to walk on his right side, which is just asinine. I mean, I suppose I've heard every rumor and everything that happened in the place over there and this I never heard before at all. That's brand new. But this sort of thing that's creeping into some of the writing, the next guy will read this and this will

be picked up.

G: The unfortunate thing is that they don't document it, they don't footnote it, you don't know the accuracy or inaccuracy of it.

H: No, sometimes it's talk, barroom talk and gossip and this sort of stuff. And he did to an extent make it difficult on journalists here because of his method of operation. You know, he pulled the things to himself and his style of operation was such that he wanted to keep it that way. He kept his options open. This was the phrase we heard all the time: he kept his options open. Even on some of the things that other people may look at as relatively insignificant, he still kept his options open and the decisions were his.

You know, for a reporter or writer where he used to go out--and I noticed some of this is back in the way it was. But just from a reporter's standpoint,if you've got a hell of a good source, say in the State Department, and this source in the State Department dries up because they said, "Look, you're just making a decision and we prefer to make this decision in this manner," and "we prefer that you not be putting out your ideas and so forth." So his source dries up.

And it adds up that what the reporters had the most to write about was the President's personality, see. This irritated some of them, and I think this was the general part of the problem. But unfortunately some of these things become accepted as not what they are--as gossip and rumors. Somebody picks them up and carries them as facts.

G: Some of the folklore of Lyndon Johnson?

H: Yes.

G: What about his penchant for being photographed only on one side of his face? I believe it was his left profile.

H: Well, let me tell you, when I first came I'd read this and heard this and somebody apparently at some time had told him that this was the best side of his face. And I'm inclined to believe that this order had gone out. But after I got there one of the first events I handled was when we went to this meeting with New England governors. Well, I made a bunch of photographers move around on the other side, and it ended up getting in the papers, about making them move to the other side. Because I'd heard about it and I'd accepted the thing. But other than that one incident which I did myself, he never once said to me that this has to be on the other side. I went on this assumption: that somebody had put down the order at some time or the other, but we never ran into any real problem with it. We always tried to do it this way because if he felt like that was his best side, that's the way we would try to do it. But the times that we did it the other way, we never had any problem.

G: It didn't become a fetish.

H: Not while I was there. It was not of paramount importance. I handled the photographers' set-ups, although as I say, whenever I could I went on this assumption that this was what he considered his better side. It's not particularly unusual for people in this business to feel like that they photograph better on a certain side. My personal opinion is that he did not. It didn't make any difference. As a matter of fact, some of the best photographs of Lyndon Johnson were--

G: Candid shots?

H: --candid shots. His personality didn't always come through in these formal situations. I think this is one of the things that people really missed. We tried to use a lot of these candid shots later after I got over there and ordered this supply of pictures. We tried to make some of them available where we couldn't take the photographers in, we would make them available to them.

G: You said a moment ago when you were talking about the source drying up in the State Department that they would operate in a particular way, that they were suggesting that they wanted secrecy, they wanted the policy or the decision to be made without public exposure. There's been a good deal of controversy that's arison very recently over Arthur Sylvester in the Pentagon and a statement that he made about "if the government feels that it is in its interest to lie, that it should." Did this ever carry over into the White House?

H: No, no, to the contrary. George Christian takes a very firm position against lying. He's noncommittal on many occasions. He felt like he had not only the right but the duty to withhold, if he felt like this was in the best interest to the government but never, never to mislead, never to intentionally lie. I'd say that if it tended to be any way, it would be the other way--that you'd go out of your way to make damn sure you did not.

G: Was this Sylvester sentiment known throughout the various public affairs agencies in the government?

H: Of course, you know this happened [before I came]. Sylvester had left before I came over. As a matter of fact, I think this came during the

Cuban Missile Crisis. Wasn't it this conference? And he'd gone before then. But I don't think there was anybody in the information operation of the government--there certainly weren't any sort of instructions or guidance or anything else from our end of the thing to lie.

G: Lie really isn't a very good word for what I'm trying to get at. I'm trying to think of the article I read. It was in the Washington Monthly. I think it was by a former government statistician. He was talking about the old numbers game that statisticians sometimes play, and it would seem logical that if the government would want to put its best foot forward or show its best face that it would deliberately use the statistics most favorable to its position. Was this ever a case?

H: Oh, yes, I think anyone trying to present the best argument, a lawyer, a public relations man, a public information man, anyone, would interpret the figures to his best interest, to his best picture. But the withholding of statistics, the withholding of these reports, I don't know that any effort was made to change statistics to make them misleading, although you obviously would put your best interpretation on it. Because it's obviously the interpretation you put on it.

And remember one thing: these reporters, they're not always stupid and they're not fools. They accept this on the basis that these are your interpretation of the figures and then they begin to bore in, you see, whether it's a briefing, or background, or on the record. And if they don't get it there, they go back to the other sources. I mean, they're very available. So I don't think the government really has too much

[control] as long as we have the freedom that we have. And from our standpoint, this never was a major issue. The press would debate, argue, interpret, and put their interpretation on the figures.

G: I was thinking specifically of the poverty program. The face, or the best foot that was put forward, was that so many millions had come out of poverty, and they were attributing this to the accomplishments of the poverty program. This came, as I recall, under very serious fire.

H: Yes, but the critics would naturally take an opposing view. But the statistics were there, the figures were there. These were the Bureau of Labor Standards statistics and the official statistics. And the interpretation of statistics, you know, there may be some question about how you interpret the statistics themselves. I think. . . I know specifically what you are talking about. I remember a discussion. But,nevertheless, I think that to say that there was some motion, some movement, something happening, you use the best statistics that you have to prove this thing.

G: I want to go back to take off on where we left off on the last tape. As I recall, we were talking about the announcement on the thirty-first[of March] where Johnson had announced that he would not run. I wanted to ask you whether or not after he had made that announcement, did he ever explain to any of his intimates or advisors or people in the White House his own reasons. You were talking about why you thought he didn't run. I was wondering if he ever talked to people specifically about that.

H: Not in my presence. You know, his comments that he thought this would

help the situation, would cause a lessening of the dissent, that he himself as an issue would be removed; it would be on the basis of the issues rather than his personality. This I've heard discussed and battered about. And I personally have a very strong conviction that he did what he did because he thought it was actually the best thing for the country. He recognized the dissent that was causing problems.

He also felt very strongly, I think and I gathered--I say this from the things that you heard and the actions and comments--that anything he did, or anybody did, that would help conclude the killing in Vietnam, end the thing in Vietnam, they were just almost under a duty to do this. And this is one thing that bothered him most about some of the official dissent he'd get. Sometimes he had some feeling that this really wasn't contributing to what he felt would be the quickest way to bring the thing to conclusion. He felt like this would be. And as it proved out, this did begin the momentum and did begin the steps. I've heard him comment that to this extent there were certain actions that followed this that showed that--

G: It must have been an incredible burden to have borne, to know that factionalism and hatred and division and divisiveness and so forth in the country is really your responsibility. How did he bear this? If he made the decision because of this, then he must have been aware and he must have had some understanding of it, probably more understanding than most people would have thought.

H: Oh, I don't think there is any question about his understanding it.

I think he knew the extent that it existed. He was in a position that his decisions on Vietnam and military activities there that had to be made as the commander-in-chief and as the president, whatever decision was made had to be made on the basis of what he hoped the end result would be, what he thought would be the best.

Of course, he did not like the personal abuse. I think you can go back into his public comments in this area. The fact that anyone claims he didn't recognize it or didn't know, or downgraded it, I think would be misleading.

G: But for one man to be the focus of all this! It doesn't matter whether you hold the position as president. It's not the office. Because of the office you're making these kinds of decisions, but the personal invective that was leveled against him, the hatred, the poison.

H: I think this hurt very deeply personally. Yes, I think that it hurt his family. I think he took some note of this. But publicly, I don't think he let the thing--I don't know of any public statements. You knew that this was a tough thing. But again he felt that what he was doing had to be done, it was a decision that had to be made. And, you know, he said time after time, no one wanted to get this over, no one wanted to end this thing any faster than he did; no one had a greater desire to bring it to a conclusion than he did. But he had to weigh the options, had to weigh the outcome. I think he felt it. I think this probably had some real weight on his decision.

G: On the earlier tape, you also mentioned that several weeks before the

thirty-first, you had happened to spot a draft of a withdrawal speech.

H: Of course, this was in restrospect, in discussing it later with George Christian. I'd come in early in the morning and work at George's desk, you know, because this was part of the things I was doing, putting together the expected day's questions and going through the newspapers and screening all this stuff out, and making notes and memos. And on George's desk one morning, and this was some weeks before, George inadvertently the night before had left a draft of what he had suggested the President say. As I recall, it was even before the State of the Union speech. The time is a little fuzzy, but I know it was some weeks, a long time, before anybody had even raised the question of whether or not he might run again. Everybody was going on the complete assumption that he was. And this draft that George had drafted was pretty much the thing that he used. I saw the thing and of course my first reaction was, "No. What is it? What does it mean?" It crossed my mind and I just concluded, well, it's something that he's got drafted for some purpose, but not that he wasn't going to run. I just stuck it in a drawer and nothing else was ever said about it until a couple of days before the announcement, I resigned, and I was going to go over to the Johnson-Humphrey [re-election] committee to get the information operation over there going. George made a couple of comments then that raised some question about whether or not this would be the wise thing for me to do, to go over there. Again, I thought nothing at all about it. The announcement came as a complete surprise.

G: I wanted to ask you. Christian obviously knew then that this was a matter that the President was considering, and I wanted to know who

among his intimates and advisers also knew.

H: Well, on that question, I think George Christian discussed it with him. In fact, later George discussed his discussing with the President, and had even gone to see John Connally. In fact, George talked later about it. I told him, "George, now I know what that statement meant. I saw it on your desk." He was quite taken aback that it had been there. He said he certainly hadn't meant to leave it there, but that he knew the President was thinking about it. He didn't know the point of decision. My impression is that George Christian and Mrs. Johnson, maybe some of the family, and I think he discussed it with Horace Busby, but I think probably that's pretty much the extent of those, until right to the day or the day before, that really had any idea that this was the direction he was taking.

G: You think Tom Johnson knew?

H: Tom Johnson said to me the day before the speech, "There's going to be a bombshell." And I said, "Well, what are we talking about? Are we talking about stopping the bombing?" He said, "I can't say anything other than that." Because, see, I'd already left there [the White House]. He could have [known]. But if he did, he held it very well. I doubt seriously until the speech draft began that Tom did; he may have. But I had the feeling that this bombshell he was talking about was the stopping of the bombing, or part of the bombing. Because Tom really felt very deeply about this after the President's [announcement]. It really shook Tom up.

G: Do you know whether he thought it was a good thing or a bad thing?

H: I think the day after he felt like it may not have been good. I think as things began to evolve, Tom realized that the action was probably in the best interest. I think he--Tom--felt like that just for the country that the country still needed the President.

Tom had a real unique relationship with the President. He was sort of like a son to the President, very close. And Tom, of course, is exceptionally bright.

G: Do you know who might have advised him to run again or those who might have advised him not to run, of those that you've mentioned?

H: I think probably the only advice he got not to run was from George and from Mrs. Johnson. I think everybody else would have advised him to run, because there was no question about his getting the nomination. He would have gotten the nomination, and I think probably would have gotten elected, although it would have been a hell of a battle. But I think George and Mrs. Johnson would be my impression.

G: From what you've said on this tape and the other tape, it seems to me that George Christian had a great deal of influence with the President.

H: I don't know whether you would say it in that framework or not, except that I think the President had tremendous respect for George's judgment. I know he had a tremendous respect for George's judgment. George did not get particularly deeply involved in substantive decisions. That is, you know, on foreign policy and this sort of thing, except that he did attend all of the Tuesday Luncheon meetings, all of the cabinet meetings, all the important meetings the President almost insisted that George be there. In fact, he even wanted George

to draft his speeches, go over his speeches and in just a matter of time we, of course, had a shot at most of the speeches from our viewpoint. But George is a hell of a good speechwriter, too. And I think the President would have had him personally doing all of those if George had had the time. He [the President] did, he had a real respect for George's judgment. And I think probably George had a greater influence, not as advocating things but in responding when he was asked what he thought about things. And people would realize, because George just had a calming influence on the President.

George had absolutely no personal ambition. He had no desire at all to use any of the power that he had at his command. Even favors, little personal favors, that everyone asked of their friends, George would always, practically always, end up referring those to me, to let me take care of. But George himself had really no real ambition in this area. I think the President realized this and I think in contrast with what had gone on before that he just had a great respect for his judgment.

G: Subsequent to the [March] 31 decision, was there any speculation among people in the White House that he might re-enter? That with all that had gone on with the Kennedy assassination, for example, the troubles in Chicago, and so forth, do you happen to know whether or not he ever waivered, whether there was a possibility that he might have come back?

H: Yes. I think at one point he seriously considered it because there were a lot of people, a lot of his political advisors in particular, that urged him very strongly to get back into the thing and to announce

that he was going to run again. There was a lot of effort made to sort of maneuver him into this position. Now I'm speaking now not really too much of participation in the thing, but you know, the discussions you hear and the knowledge that you have from some of the people that were involved in the thing.

At the convention, for instance, there was a real strong effort by some people up there to try to get him to say, "Yes. I'll come back again." And I think probably there was a point or two when he really gave it some serious consideration. In fact, I'm pretty sure there was a point or two when he gave it some serious consideration, from some of the activities.

G: I wonder, thinking back to that convention, I'm trying to recall the atmosphere, not so much of the convention but also the immediate events that led up to it. I don't recall offhand how popular Humphrey was. I know that he had the thing pretty well sewed up.

H: I think in delegate votes that he had it pretty well sewed up. I think that the polls were showing by this point it was McCarthy and Humphrey. I've forgotten the precise poll except that it seemed to me it was something like 40 per cent.

G: Yes. I don't think McCarthy really had much strength at all particularly because there was no reconciliation between the McCarthy and Kennedy people.

H: No. Not even after it got awfully raucous up there. There was some discussion about McCarthy throwing his strength to Kennedy, but as the convention started, I think probably professionals had no question

at all about the outcome of the thing. Of course, it got awfully wild up there.

G: What I'm getting at is that there was, of course, what they called the Kennedy boomlet. I was wondering who would have been the people up at the convention who rather than. . . In other words, they were looking for somebody other than Humphrey. I'm not quite sure why. But who would have been the people who would have thought that Johnson should have come in?

H: I'm not sure at all. Of course, it was the Johnson people. Marvin Watson was up there. Marty Underwood was up there. And, of course, I think even Mayor Daley had some feeling about this.

G: He did?

H: Yes. My impression was that he had some feeling about this. So, you know, there were some of the pros up there who felt like they ought to get him back into the thing. In fact, I heard that some of them argued that the only way that the thing could be salvaged was for Johnson to get back in.

G: Do you think that it would have been a good idea if he had?

H: Personally, no. I think that especially after he had announced, then it would have been all the worse. If he'd said he was going back in, then all the darkest fears would have been renewed and all the worst side of his personality would have been brought out again and this sort of thing. So I think probably not. I think that had he decided before he announced, he probably would have made the grade. But, no, I don't think it would have been a good idea at that stage.

G: It was a pretty raucous and bitter convention.

H: Oh, yes.

G: I can't recall offhand if we got into the details of the White House or the presidential response to the McCarthy campaign or the Kennedy campaign. But I seem to recall reading somewhere, it might have even been in An American Melodrama, that George Christian made the statement that, "We're not going to be concerned with politics, polls. . ."

H: Yes, he said this. Of course, he kept being asked about the polls, what the President thought of this. And the position was that the politics and the polls and the feelings were not of paramount concern, that these changed and that the President was going to make the decision on the basis of what he thought was the right thing to do.

G: It must have been a stunning awakening after the New Hampshire returns when McCarthy did as well as he did. Was there any inkling in the White House that McCarthy was going to do this well?

H: I think probably not until late in the game. I think late in the game there was indication that he was going to do quite well. And the people up in New Hampshire, the Governor, and then someone with the SBA--

G: Furney Booth [?] ?

H: Yes.

G: Former deputy director of OEO, and SBA, and then in New Hampshire.

H: Right. I don't think they recognized it until pretty late in the game and they were the people I'd seen. But surprisingly there was not the intensity of interest. My observation was that there was not the intensity of interest that you would have expected on the thing. And this

may have been because of recognition that there were problems there.

G: Well, there was that bit about the pledge cards in New Hampshire.

H: You know, this came to me and I'm sure it came to George. I don't know the origin of the thing. I suspect it was of Marvin Watson origin. Marvin was a kind of political majordomo of the operation. My surmise, and without any knowledge at all of the thing, would be that this was where it originated. But it came as a complete surprise when I read about it.

G: Did any of them ever get to the White House?

H: If they did, I don't know. They said that they--see, the thing is you get a hell of a lot of things at the White House that the President and even those close to him may not know about and this sort of thing. But I think this was somebody's idea of brainstorming. They thought: this is something that will really work. And so it was done.

G: If they signed the card and sent it to the White House, they'd get an autographed picture of President Johnson?

H: I've forgotten what it was; you'd get a card or something back. Personally, I thought when I read about it, it was awfully stupid and I can't imagine anybody as politically astute as Lyndon Johnson having anything to do with this.

G: That's what I was going to ask.

H: But I have no knowledge of where the thing originated. I just don't know.

G: I was wondering how Johnson responded to all of this.

H: I just don't know. I know that when George got questions, he had no knowledge of the thing, and I'm sure this is true.

G: He surely couldn't have been too pleased.

H: I don't know; I just don't know. I don't have any impressions except that having seen it and heard the questions about it, he was thinking about how stupid an activity it was, you know.

G: Of course, the McCarthy people made political capital out of that.

H: Yes, yes. I don't blame them. That's what the game's all about.

G: Sure. During the Kennedy and McCarthy campaigns, since there were sympathizers to their cause or causes,if you can differentiate between the two,within the ranks of the administration as well as without, are you aware of any solicitation that went on by either the McCarthy or the Kennedy people to get people either who had been in the Johnson Administration and no longer were there or who were still in the Johnson Administration?

H: I think it's been published, and Moyers has confirmed this, that both McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy came to him. You know, seeking Bill's support, and he refused that. As a matter of fact, I talked to Bill by phone when I was going over to the committee and,frankly, just solicited Bill's advice and some names and contacts that he thought might be helpful, his having run the thing before. He said himself then that--you read what you read and see all the reports--he still felt very deeply about Lyndon Johnson, that he would not have been where he was at [without his help]; every chance he had, Lyndon Johnson gave to him, although they did part under fairly bitter circumstances. But he said then that both Kennedy and McCarthy had approached him and that he refused publicly to join either one of them at that point because the President had not made his announcement.

G: Then he subsequently came out for Humphrey.

H: Yes, I think this is true.

G: How about other people from within the administration?

H: I don't know. While there was a feeling of politics, there was a feeling that all of this was going on, I was as politically oriented as anybody, but I never had the feeling that except that as he considered these of note and influence on his policies and directions, I don't know that what the other people in government did so long as they did their job was of too much significance.

Now, later, after Humphrey had announced, if you'll remember, there was a specific instruction that they were not to get political. As a matter of fact, I got caught in that crossfire once. I advised, in two instances, one of them to go ahead in a political manner in Humphrey's behalf. It sounded to me like a hell of a good idea. And one of them did that morning and the other one called and I advised him to. That afternoon was when word of the memo from the President came out. I hadn't heard about it until I'd already given some advice to one to go ahead and do it: "It's a good idea to endorse Humphrey." But there were a lot of people in government that I think probably had some sympathy for the Kennedy cause. I don't know of too many in the McCarthy area except things that you read about people signing peace petitions and this sort of thing.

G: Actually, I guess my next question doesn't ask you to comment specifically with reference to knowledge that you had direct, or incidents that you have direct knowledge about. But I'm sure within the White House, there's discussion, there are talks and things that go on. You hear things that go on. Could you relate any of this in-house talk

that went on to, for example, Moyers' resignation. What was the aftermath of that? Was there any carry-over into the period when you came in? After all, you came into the press shortly after that.

H: Yes, there was some. Because I think of all the conversation and the people that were involved and what they said, you'd have to say that they left on not good terms. And it wasn't a very good idea to be on record as having talked to Moyers from the White House. Tom Johnson, who Moyers brought in as a White House Fellow, of course was still friendly with Moyers and was in sort of a bind in this thing. Tom still had a great deal of respect for Moyers, but he knew where his job and his loyalties lay, so, you know, he had some difficult times with this thing. He had to be very careful that he didn't look like that he was communicating excessively with Moyers.

G: Was there an apparatus that had been built by Moyers?

H: Oh, yes, Of course there was.

G: Did this break up? Was it deliberately broken up?

H: Pretty much, yes. If you had been too close to Moyers and had been one of Moyers' operatives, you weren't held in too high esteem unless your competence itself carried you. Of course, Moyers had already gone, I guess a month before I actually went over there, or maybe even longer than a month--although I worked on advance before. But, of course, Califano, as you know, took over many of the domestic duties and then Califano, I think, never had any particularly kind feelings toward Moyers. Califano ended up putting his own structer together which you would expect, I suppose. But those that could be recognized as Moyers' people I think would be pretty well cleared

out of this inner circle over there. Although I don't know, I don't recall specific names. I know Moyers worked in this way. He opened the door for these people. I don't know of any of them that were particularly close in the inner circle with the exception of Moyers. But a lot of people that were recognized as Moyers people ended up going elsewhere; they moved out.

G: Do you have any knowledge of the McNamara resignation?

H: Yes. Of course, this came as something of a surprise. I think, and again a lot of these are impressions and not personal participation, that the President felt that McNamara was ill, I mean had reached the point where his decision-making was not what it had formerly been. And the President felt very strongly about McNamara. He was a great, great defender of McNamara and thought he had one of the best minds that he had ever come in contact with. But I think he felt that this had to come. He caught a lot of abuse about the way he handled the thing and, you know, the surprise.

I think I mentioned this to you. At one point Phil Goulding, who was the information officer for McNamara, and McNamara and I were on the phone because of some of the press reports that night after the [announcement]. We were trying to run George down on the phone. So we got George on and discussed about how to handle it. McNamara's attitude was that, in discussion with us, it should be handled to the President's advantage, it should be handled not to reflect on the President. And of course Goulding is McNamara's press officer who obviously would take the position of doing anything he could to help McNamara. But even after George left the line, somehow they had left

the line hooked up, and I stayed on the phone hook-up. McNamara and and Goulding were discussing it, and McNamara took the same position to Goulding, that whatever was done however they handled it, you know, off the record, on the record, the leaks, or any way they wanted to handle it, it should be handled to keep the situation in the President's favor. I had a feeling that McNamara may have been somewhat hurt about that method of the handling of the thing, but that he had indeed discussed this World Bank situation with the President some time before. But, as I say, my impression was that the President--I think later in the discussions this came out.

G: McNamara was just physically--

H: Just physically wrung out. Physically and mentally wrung out and that it was, in a sense, for his own health, his own advantage, and also the government's, I think the President felt that this needed to be done.

G: Was McNamara one of those who would advise the President to--I hate to use these words for lack of better words--take a more dovish position? In other words, was McNamara there the resident moderator, as opposed to some more hawkish types of people?

H: Again, I'm not a participant. I was in and out on occasion of some meetings, but never to the extent that I heard a great deal of the discussions. I read a lot of things, read a lot of the reports on the thing. No, I think probably his wavering in the later part of the thing--I say wavering, that is showing some inclinations that there had been some mistake. But you know, you go back to McNamara's record, and if anybody was ever responsible for the report's forced initiation, McNamara would certainly fit into the category of prime

movers in the policy. Although I think probably he did have some. . . I never saw any real indication that he was as dovish as some would have you believe. Maybe he discussed it with somebody else, but I never did see it in the stuff that we saw and heard and felt there.

G: Being in the press office, did you ever have occasion to look at the kinds of intelligence, or the reports, and the memoranda that went to the President?

H: Oh, yes. We had the President's daily brief. We were supposed to know what was in it. And there were regular reports from Saigon, from Bunker, then the pacification reports and CIA activity reports, and all the stuff that came in.

G: What is your evaluation of these reports?

H: Of the intelligence reports?

G: Of the quality of them, of the depth of their perception and so forth.

H: Well, I think you can make a better evaluation in retrospect than you could at the time you were looking at the thing. One is that I think the President probably got a good part of the intelligence, although I have a feeling sometimes some of them were written in the direction that they thought the President would like to have had them, more so than what they saw. But by the time you got the composite of the thing, they were all pretty well put together. And some of them, it seemed to me, especially some of the Vietnam, Saigon reports, just got to the point where you felt like it was sort of useless to read the damned things, because they seemed to be trying to make an argument more than intelligence reports. Of course, the daily brief was a

composite of all over the world. Then the State Department also had an intelligence report that came in. Quite often you could see where the State Department information was, in part, the daily brief or the CIA one. I don't know how I would be qualified to make an evaluation of some of them except to say that some of the attitudes about some of the reports were such that sometimes you wondered if we had such an intelligence network that we claimed we had.

G: Was there any differential, could you differentiate in retrospect between the type of intelligence that would come from the CIA vis-a-vis Vietnam and the Defense Department?

H: Yes, I think you probably could say that each of them were, in a sense, looking after their own interests. I don't know that I know enough about it to be on record as judging the thing, except--

G: I could be more specific if you like. I'm thinking before Tet, what kind of advice or what kind of intelligence assessment was the President getting?

H: Well, the intelligence assessments--these were coming, that their forces were moving, but the timing of the thing, as I recall--I remember some disgust being expressed about whether or not the interpretation of the intelligence--I think probably the intelligence was there, but whether the interpretation was there or not. I remember how defensive Rostow was about intelligence. But I think anybody looking at the results would have to say either they refused to believe the intelligence or they took damned poor action on some of it. But I think there was no

question about it, the intelligence community knowing that something was coming. But the specifics of the thing, I suppose that will be debated a long time.

G: Of course, I'm sure that you know the case is made that prior to Tet public statements were that victory was just around the corner, that the pacification program--[Robert] Komer made statements that we had made many tremendous strides.

H: Yes. Komer's operation was, I think, excessively optimistic, you'd have to say in retrospect. These things coming from Komer looked like, boy, they're really moving into the areas and communities. And of course, Komer's argument after Tet was that this just verified what he said, that they were doing this and that the action came to counter it.

G: Because of their success.

H: Yes, but I don't know whether anybody has been able to figure out how to apply the statistics to what they're doing. It reached the point where it was awfully tough. And then you remember the stance after Tet about, "We clobbered hell out of them."

G: Well, I remember various ones. I think it was Rostow that was saying that this was a great success, that they hadn't achieved occupation of the cities, and that this was the greatest victory that we'd had.

H: I think militarily there may be some basis for that, but of course what I think in restrospect we can say what they were trying to do was not worry so much about the military victory over there, but what effect it had on the country over here. And I think there's no question about the effect if had on people over here. Because, as you know, shortly

after, this council that the President had put together got together and discussed the thing, and they took one hell of a different attitude than they'd had some time before. I'm talking about Taylor and all the intelligence people that he had, and this I think was reflected in attitudes. Again, not as a participant but from discussion and seeing some of the things reported, this meeting and the attitude of these people who had been pretty firm on the other side with the exception of George Ball was maybe the turning point in the President's policy-making, decision-making, that strictly the military wasn't getting the job done.

G: I'm not sure whether I should ask you this, but I will anyway, and you can decline to comment. But do you know whether or not they were still seeking a military victory as late as 1968?

H: Well, how do you define this? You know, the President said many times that limited action limited victory. I think one of the big mistakes we made was never fully explaining what he meant. You can find in the public pronouncements an explanation of it, but it wasn't a consistent theme explanation. He'd keep going into another area and back into the limitation. Really what I think the thing boils down to is if indeed the policy was to prevent a take-over of South Vietnam, then this was not really the theme that the people were given all the time. I think probably some of the other attitudes in some of the public pronouncements got us in real trouble on this. I don't know whether you can say they still expected a military victory. I think that they expected that the course that they were on was leading towards some resolution of the thing. I don't think anybody ever--

G: Tet shattered that illusion.

H: Yes, it sure did. Took some time to realize it, but it sure did.

G: Did Rostow ever come to this view, do you know?

H: I don't know; I just don't know. Rostow had an overall view of things, I think, that some of the others maybe did not have. But I know that during this period, in some of the explanations--I saw the other day again I had written a big long memo to George and Harry McPherson, and I'd had some discussion about the thing. But the confusion, you know, the real confusion, I had some real concern about how we were handling it, what we were saying. I raised the question--I mean we were trying to make people believe this, but I really wasn't sure; I mean it wasn't clear in my mind, and I thought maybe we were screwing the thing up pretty badly in the information handling of the thing. I'm not talking about the action itself and the who was right and who was wrong thing, but the information handling of the thing. This got to be a real problem, too: how do you do it, how do you explain it? The information is basically what you've got. But I think what the President was given to act on. . .how do you second-guess him now? Although I had some--

G: You yourself and others who may have felt as you did were put in the position of being apologists. Yet you weren't convinced that you were formulating, because you weren't given that formulation.

H: Well, you know: "Are you on solid ground on this discussion? Are you on solid ground on this reasoning?" See, we weren't sure we were. Right. Although again, I want to make clear that I wasn't in any forefront as the spokesman for this, except that in the discussions

and activities that went on in our office, I discussed this with George and raised the question with George, and I know the headaches of it. I don't know whether we discussed the thing, but you had to raise the question, you know--what are we trying to do. I'm not even sure I understand it myself. Of course, you didn't want to be in a position of saying that you're one of the ones that cut and ran, you know, that you didn't want to stand fast, but still I think these questions had to be raised. You had some real doubts.

G: What about those who cut and ran? How did the President respond to people who for so long were involved, even going way back to the Kennedy Administration, when, after all, I think this may be the roots of the policy itself that Johnson really just continued.

H: Well, I think he looked at them as, you know, I've heard some comments about people who, when the going got tough, got out.

G: But then they made public statements criticizing Johnson and his handling of it.

H: Right, right. I think he felt some personal bitterness toward some of these people who had been very deeply involved in the formulation of the thing and then they began to become strong critics. And without any preface to say that the thing has gone sour, the decision's been wrong and so forth, they just joined the noise of the doves, of the people raising hell about the thing. He felt pretty strongly about some of these people.

G: How influential was the voice of the doves, whether it be in Congress, whether it be the marchers on the street, whether it be the so-called

Eastern Establishment who were pressuring in this direction, and so forth?

H: Well, I think the President felt again that he had to make the decisions he had to make, although there was never any question about him seeking out the opinions. I think he knew the attitudes and the opinions and the feelings. You know, he had some people in, he had some groups. He had Reischauer and his group there. And he sought out this. But I think that he always seemed to feel that the preponderance of the weight of the decision was on the other side, and he made the decisions on that basis. But I think they were heard, and I think that--of course, you know the story of Clifford and his stance after he became secretary of defense.

G: I wanted to ask you about that because, as I recall, there was a Washington Post and New York Times article about the role of Clark Clifford when he became secretary of defense. Was it Bobby's statement--when Clifford was announced, Kennedy made the statement that he might as well have hired Ghangis Khan. And yet Clifford just went against what all the analysts said he was going to do.

H: Right. Of course, I don't think there's any question about Clifford's influencing the changing--maybe not the change, but the direction that some of this took, the idea that there had to be a different approach to the thing. Yes, I think he did; I think what I saw and felt and heard that there's no question about Clifford having been the dominant voice in this. But, you know, now, Fortas was over there on some of these discussions. I also think one of the things that really seriously

caused the President to take a real hard view of the thing was this [inaudible] committee. You remember the people that he had[in the group]; I've forgotten all the people that he had in the group, but he had usually the Tuesday Luncheon [group],.and then he had Taylor, and then Lodge, and I've forgotten them. You'd have to go back to the record.

G: Right.

H: But these people had a couple of meetings and then they had the briefings of these State Department people. After Tet, the State Department and the military and I think maybe they got Phil Habib. Yes, he was one of the ones that gave them a real hard look at the thing. I mean this had a real effect on the thing. That and then the policy and Clifford's attitude toward the thing and Clifford's evaluation that there could be some better way to handle the thing had a big influence on the way the President decided.

G: Do you know anything about the story leading up to the peace talks and the various roles of people like Rostow and Rusk?

H: No, except in generalizations, I don't. You mean when they came about after the announcement?

G: No, there was a whole--you know, you go back and there were these offers, counter-offers and then--

H: Oh, well, but specifically George Christian's role in one instance where, as you recall, the President had made the statement "Any time anywhere." So the Communists said--it was Cambodia, wasn't it? They offered to meet in Cambodia and of course our people were saying this

was not acceptable for obvious reasons. We were catching hell on "any time any place." I know the dissenters and the protestors, although it died down a great deal, were coming back, or they would with "any time any place." Then this item came over the Reuter's ticker, I remember, about the offer of Indonesia to make available this old ship.

G: You mean it was the one ship in the Indonesian navy?

H: I think so, yes, yes. And somebody remembered the ship from World War II or something when we'd let them have it, have the ship, or we'd given it to them in lend-lease or something. But anyhow it was an old ship that wasn't particularly luxurious.

I tore this ticker item off, and I remember George and Tom and I were discussing the thing about what the reaction was and the inclination was to say, "Why don't we accept it? Why don't we say, 'Yes, we'll take it.'." And, you know, just throw the ball back in their court. George had influence I think in this instance on the President that caused the President to make this decision, to say, "Yes, we'll accept it." But shortly thereafter, not long after this thing happened, George went into the Oval Office and talked to the President about this. He talked to Dean Rusk about this, I'm almost sure. Well, I'm not sure about the record. I'm almost sure he talked to Dean Rusk, but I do know that the State Department's position was that, "No, we can't do it. We should not do it." Well, I'm not sure he talked to Rusk. George's position was very strong that we should do it, not that we expected to meet on the ship but just from the standpoint of letting

them beat us over the head with propaganda, and he convinced the President that this was the thing that should be done. The President said, "Okay, we'll do it." And he drafted a little statement to put out saying, "Be glad to meet them there." And, as you know, this did put the ball back in their court, the propaganda ball.

So subsequently it ended up in choosing Paris.

G: Did Rostow oppose this, too?

H: Rostow, I don't know. I'm not sure of Rostow's position. I'm just not sure. I don't recall that. I don't think there was any written communication on the thing. I think that maybe again this was to me an indication of judging George's influence. He very seldom interjected himself into these things unless he was asked, but I know the initiative at this point was George's because we were involved in these discussions and he did take it in and he did convince the President this thing should happen.

G: To sort of go back to another topic that we were talking about earlier, I think you made the statement or I got the impression that once Christian became the press advisor, the chief press secretary to the President, that Johnson's press problems--well, they didn't disappear--certainly improved considerably.

Do you have any idea of the advice that was tended to President Johnson about the image that he should project as president? I've seen some writings about whether he should be the Uncle Lyndon with the ten-gallon hat, whether he should be a man of the people, or whether he should be the statesman and aloof, the President's president and so

forth. Was there any discussion that you are aware of about this?

H: Oh, yes. This was discussed continuously. I mean, this was a problem obviously. I don't know what happened before, except the conversation but I think that initially there was a big effort on some people's part to make him a southwestern John Kennedy. But he wasn't pretty. In other words, [there was] a recognition that he just did not project on television. Anytime he had a decision to say yes or no to put him on television, the decision was almost always no. George recognized that there were times you had to use it, but he felt that as a medium, it just was not a good medium for the President.

Now, the President could communicate. Everyone who'd been around him knew how well he could communicate, but he just did not project on television. Now, one press conference where I think you could say the television critics probably gave him good grades was the so-called--you know, where he got out from behind the podium and put the lavaliere around his neck and he discussed openly in the way he talked, and he came off with real good grades. George had something to do with that, but I think everyone recognized that if we could ever get him projected the way he was when he was talking to a group, well, then it might be much better than the formal stance that he took. Everybody advised him to do this.

G: Who suggested that particular conference?

H: Senator Pastore. Yes. He said that if he was a big tall Texan then he would go out and speak on that basis. He said it to the President on Friday before the broadcast.

G: Yes, I remember seeing that. That was a very impressive format.

H: Yes. The press gave him very good grades on this. Before, you know, his effort, he just did not come through as sincere on television. It just didn't work.

G: Did he do any of these [again]? I don't recall seeing any others of that nature?

H: No, I think that was the only one that he did on television that was a live television conference that he did on this basis. Of course, he was doing this without any notes although he always came in well prepared for television press conferences. Quite often the quickly called press conferences that they had in his office, there was no great preparation. He'd call them in there on a subject, and he'd end up going over a lot of other subjects.

G: Did you ever have to brief him on this yourself?

H: Well, no, we would always work at preparing these things and what we would do, we'd end up preparing a notebook. My chore in preparing for press conferences was to contact all the agencies and all the departments and say, "Okay, what are your major problems? We are going to have a presidential press conference. What do you expect will be a question in your area?"

Then they'd all send the questions and say, "This is what we expect. Then on the question you expect, "How would you suggest it be answered? What are the facts in the case?" We'd take these, and about 90 per cent of them you'd end up just throwing out because you knew what the questions were going to be. You could go into a press

conference, and if you were going to have a thirty-minute press conference and you were going to have fifteen questions, you could just almost be sure of what thirteen or fourteen of those fifteen or sixteen questions were going to be. And you'd put this together for the President and he'd have a chance to look at it and on the basis of this [be prepared] if any of those questions came up. But generally the foreign policy questions which were most of the ones that you got--if there were some immediate issue, you knew you were going to get it--were with Rostow and with George and with Rusk and the people in Rusk's shop in preparation of it.

G: Yes. Did you ever feel a need to protect the President in the sense that. . .

H: Oh, yes, sometimes you felt like his judgment in our area wasn't always the best. He sometimes told us to do things that we decided would be a whole lot better not to do in the area. He was particularly sensitive about his family and his personality and his previous activities at home. Anybody who handled any of those always had to be very careful about how you handled them. You always got questions about, "Did he have goats on his Ranch?" You know, of course, is it necessary to go ask the President of the United States if he has goats on his Ranch? But how do you find out? You call somebody down there and find out if he has goats on his Ranch. But this sort of stuff and his own business and his own private life, he was pretty sensitive about the handling of this sort of stuff.

G: How about his aversion to being filmed on camera?

H: What do you mean?

G: Would you allow during a conference, for example, or statements being made, moving pictures to be taken of him?

H: Oh, yes. Most always movies, see, the movies were. . . They always restricted the still pictures.

G: The candid shots are what I'm talking about.

H: Oh, the still pictures we usually tried to restrict them and especially in a live television conference and the other activities. Primarily, not because they were pictures but the commotion and the noise. I mean, we have the ceremony in the Cabinet Room, for instance, and we'd give them a few minutes or a minute or two when they first started the picture, and cut them off, see? Because if you didn't, you'd have fifteen photographers making all this commotion. Of course, photographers got under his skin.

G: They did?

H: Yes, and handling the photographers, I got a few chewings out about handling the photographers and one time in front of the Prime Minister of England. The photographers had come in and in their usual way had knocked over some piece of furniture in the Oval Office. As they left, he called me back. It was Harold Wilson [who was there]. And I got one of the Johnson real strong chewings and some suggestions about how to handle photographers. (Laughter)

G: Again to go back to that first tape when you were talking about the advance when you were on detail in the VA, on the Korean trip, I didn't ask you at the time and I think I should now. That was, I think, where

he made the Alamo reference, or it was on the same trip.

H: Yes. He made that at Camp Stanley. He was speaking at a military base. It was in a mess hall. He was eating in the mess hall. He was eating with the GIs. Of course, again, I was green and new, but he was speaking through this bullhorn system they had. Most of the press, except for the pool, I think had already been put back out in the bus and was waiting for him to conclude and go to the next stop. And I was holding the radio up, picking it up, receiving in the press bus so they could hear what he was saying to the troops. He talked about his granddaddy at the Alamo and this of course came back to bother him sometimes.

G: What was the press reaction to that? Did any of them know at the time or did they go busily out to research?

H: I doubt that they knew at the time. I don't think so, except George knew. George made a comment about it that day, about "We're going to hear about that," you know. Because George, on his Texas history, he knew. And later it became one of the issues in the credibility gap. The President's explanation was that, I think, he had an uncle at San Jacinto or something, but you know, it was--

G: Were you ever nervous that he might do something like that again, that he might go off the cuff, you know, speak extemporaneously and get a little too enthusiastic and do this sort of thing again?

H: Oh, he did, you know, on a lot of occasions. I think if you culled everyone's language the way a president's is scrutinized, you'd find that overall he did superbly well. He'd really get enthused.

He'd get the feeling of what he was talking about. And, you know, when you're in a group and it's not totally on the record, this is some of the things that have some real effect. But I don't think that there was any conscious effort to mislead. He was talking about what dedication and sacrifices these people had to make and his granddaddy at the Alamo. He just got carried away with himself a little.

G: Would you say that he was a moody individual?

H: Yes, yes. I never mentioned this before, but his day began when Bill Blackburn would take the Congressional Record and some stuff over to the Mansion. He was one of the first ones in to see the President. Later Larry Temple and Jim Jones and people went over to see him. Then when they first started feeding back, you got your first report of the mood that he was in at that point.

G: There were no little signs? I think with Eisenhower, if he was wearing a brown suit, I have forgotten the keys, but there would be little tip-offs as to what kind of a mood the President was in.

H: I have never heard this categorized. They'd come back and give you a report on the mood that he was in or how he was. They'd just go over how he took certain things.

G: Would it ever reach the point where there was not communication between a particular individual and the President?

H: Oh, yes, I think sometimes some would fall into such disfavor that this was one of his treatments, that he wouldn't speak to them, you know. And they'd be removed from the area of activity. Of course, in that circle that was one of the toughest things. It was quite a prestige

item to be called in the mess by the President. Same thing, the trappings of power and the feeling around the presidency. These people are all human beings and they all have a feeling and they all want to, you know. . .

G: I suppose you could tell by whose face was not present at a particular place who was out of favor at that particular time, then?

H: I don't think it was that general really. I think it was just an instance or two where a couple of people fell into disfavor and then, not always, you know, they could get back in. Things would happen [so they could get] back in and tomorrow it would be a different proposition. Yes, he used this treatment on some people.

G: And you could expect to be fired a half a dozen times.

H: I think this is, as I say, [true]. The only one, as far as I know, who never, never had the wrath of the President on his head was George Christian. Never have I heard him chewed out. Tom Johnson, as close as he was, I guess because he was really on the front line used to really catch some hell, he'd catch the abuse. But Tom would take it and, as he said, he always knew you take a man under the sort of strains and pressures and this is an outlet. And Tom would say, "Well, you know, if it does him good, if this is an outlet that does him good, I think I can take it."

G: Did you find that he had a sense of humor?

H: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

G: There's a lot that has been written about his earthiness which I find delightful, as a matter of fact.

H: Oh, yes, his earthiness. He had a great sense of humor. He could tell the best stories, just tell them in such a delightful, humorous way. He'd tell the same story and embellish on the story, and he might not tell the same story in precisely the same manner, but the same theme making a point. He was delightful, he really was.

G: He seems to offend a lot of what I would call priggish people, who feel that this is the vulgarity of the President, it demeans the office. Did this ever come back as a feedback?

H: Yes, we'd get some questions about that, some of the things. But essentially this would come through pretty much of an off-the-record thing, not too much when he was speaking publicly. But I think if a little more of this could have come through, a little more of this had gotten out, it probably would have been better for his total image.

G: Maybe as a counterpoint to Mao's quotations, you could have LBJ's Ten Best Dirty Jokes.

H: Right. You know someone put out a little red book, "Chairman--(laughter)" But he had a great sense of humor. He could kid you and he also could needle you pretty strongly.

G: They say that he had a fantastic ability to ape people or to mimic.

H: Oh, yes, great.

G: He did it superbly.

H: Yes. Also he was a lot of things. He was very complex, no question about this, a lot of things. He could be extremely kind, and he just almost never forgot something that was important to the people around him. Also once you caught a little hell, you knew there'd be some sort

of compensating reaction sometime. You never knew when it was coming, but--

G: I think you told me off the tape you might want to put it on the tape about how he impressed your children.

H: Oh, well, as I say, I caught a little abuse now and then, but what was more impressionable was the personal things. He walked in the office one day--our oldest son was in the service and he was on leave and he had gone to Laredo on leave--and he said, "How is George getting along in Laredo?" And how in the world did he ever know if George was in Laredo, but somehow he knew. Then one day my youngsters were in a receiving line at some sort of function over there; they'd been invited down. And they never had been too impressed. They were a little cynical. They were quite proud I think that their father was down here, but they were just teen-age kids prone to be. . .

G: Skeptical.

H: But he poured it on them about what a job their father was doing and this sort of thing, and they were just greatly impressed. They really were impressed that the President had done this.

Another instance I think I may have mentioned was that he met my mother. I was not there. He met her in a crowd in San Antonio, when he went back to the Ranch one time. My sister introduced him to her; she said, "This is Loyd Hackler's mother. And I think he convinced my mother that the government would fall if I hadn't been over there. But this sort of thing makes you feel pretty good.

Then one day there was a gathering of the Texas--I mean all of the

states had it--[people] at one of the Democratic functions shortly after I had been over there. He came into the Texas room and he introduced me--he didn't introduce me, he said something to the group of people around him, "Here's a good boy from Laredo doing a good job," or something like this. If you've been around your friends, he would. And if you want to impress anybody you certainly want to impress your mother and your wife and your kids!

G: Especially your kids.

H. Yes, this makes you feel pretty good.

G: Did you ever have any problems with reference to leaks?

H: Oh, sure.

G: Not from within, let's say from outside the press office where you had to confront this, without having known about it before.

H: Oh, yes, sure. We had a problem with leaks and again, you know, this is a function of the press to find out these things. But quite often this would bother him.

G: Could you ever trace them?

H: Oh, we didn't. . .Oh, he'd want to know sometimes, if it were important enough, where it came from. And there were some that I think violated security even, not in our place, but some of the other shops in a couple of instances. But, yes, occasionally, he'd say he'd want to know where they came from. But we never did make a great deal of it. Sometimes we really wouldn't follow up on the thing, you know. We figured the ruckus you'd cause in trying to find out would make it worse. And this is an instance, as I say, sometimes. You didn't always follow through

on these things.

G: I guess there are different kinds of motives for leaks. They may be self-serving.

H: Well, you know. one has a tendency to want to look important, so this is the. . .

G: Where you cultivate newsmen?

H: Well, cultivate newsmen or make them think you know something, that you're on the inside.

G: Want to generate pressure on a policy that you favor?

H: I suppose. Yes, I'm sure that this is used frequently. I don't know. I have some mixed emotions about it. I think that, certainly, the freer you can keep it the better it is, but also having seen the operations from there, I think I have a greater understanding of why they don't want too much of this discussed publicly until they're at a point of decision.

G: There's been some written about Johnson's tendency to be terribly annoyed if, for example, he were going to make some appointment, and the news about an appointment would leak before the appointment was made, and that could destroy a man's career. He wouldn't make the appointment if it was known and he wanted it to be secret. Did you ever see this?

H: Well, yes, this happens. This happened, I think. The point is you never know what state of decision that he may have been in, except that sometimes these would get out and the people involved would recognize the problems that they had. I think they became pretty savvy about [it]. You know, he wanted to make the decision and not [have] them

make the decision. And I think there were probably instances of this happening.

G: Were you ever concerned with the flamboyance of Johnson, the image that he sometimes would project, that he was doing something for show rather than for substance? Or that he might, for example, want to do a whole series of things at once to capture the headlines and the television newscasts and so forth in order to downplay something else that was going on?

H: He had a tendency, from our standpoint, of overdoing. I mean, he had a tendency of, if something was good, it's a good idea to overdo that idea, like visiting a military base. Instead of one, he may go to half a dozen in that swing. Or if this idea was effective and worked, then quite often he would overwork and overdo the thing. Yes, and of course we'd give our best advice and after our best advice was given and a decision was made, why, we'd do the best we could with it, you know.

G: Did he cause problems for you that way?

H: Oh, sure, it caused problems. One, in handling the press, although in our position we recognized that as the president he was the one that made the decisions and all we could do was say these were the problems. Then he decided what to do. In the handling of the press, for instance, the logistics of the press on the secrecy of movements, this was a real problem. Then just basic logistics itself. Then there is the press attitude. See, a lot of stories come out of a peeve pot by a reporter. He's teed off because he's tired or he didn't like the way it was handled or he considers you inept because you did these sort of things.

G: Yes.

H: And then the deadline of missing shows. The big impact of television is on the p.m. show. You know, we'd be doing things at five o'clock that were very important and had absolutely no chance in the world of getting on [the evening] TV show. Well, the next day it was dead news, see. This sort of thing. Of course, this causes problems, lots of problems. I don't know, except that I think we could have done a lot better job for the President, that is, in projecting what he wanted to project and his ideas if we could have had a little better cooperation.

G: Yes. From him, you mean.

H: Yes, From him. But these were the circumstances under which you worked and you just worked like hell and did the best you could under the circumstances.

G: Did you ever assume the attitude that some press people were prima donnas and they wanted to be treated as special people and that perhaps this personal pique was--

H: Oh, sure, sure, there are those people. But, you know, you--and I'm speaking generally of the press office--tried to handle them as indiyiduals if you could. You know, there are certain ones that you just say, "Screw you." Nothing that you could do. So you knew what was coming off and did whatever you felt was best. You know, not that you let it bother you too much.

I tell you, in my opinion, George was probably overly fair. You know, anyone had access to George and George didn't carry personal grudges. He knew people and knew what they were going to do, and

he was pretty much a master at handling these problems. He never did let his attitude show through too much. I think this was one of the secrets of his success.

G: Do you have any idea as to how Lyndon Johnson responded to some of the types of analyses that have been made to the speeches he would make or addresses he would make or decisions he would make?

H: Oh, he quite often had personal and some pretty earthy responses to some of these things. On the evaluation analysis, the night of the final State of the Union was one instance I may have mentioned where he is--

G: Trying to get you to. . .

H: Talking to the TV sets. To no one in general, but things they'd say and he would respond to them. And then he'd say, in Vietnam, too, if they'd just realize it, and this sort of thing. He really knew what was going on in this instance. There may have been an occasion or two where we decided, "Well, look, you're not going to serve anything by sending this to the President. This is not going to help any way in his judgment, and it won't do anything but tee him off." So you don't send the thing to him. But he had a real knowledge of what was going on. He had the tickers and TV in his office, so he knew what was happening most of the time.

G: Were there any particular individual reporters who he liked better than others, or would try to incur their favor or to encourage them?

H: No, I think he had pretty much gone through this before I was over there, except that he'd talk to some reporters and some reporters

he'd reached the point where he figured there wasn't any use to talk. Personally I think he talked too much to too many. I think some of the reporters, it would have been better maybe to have them in this group, but that was not our decision. But Pete Lisagor was one who was not particularly kind to the President, but the President liked Pete. And Phil Potter was another one. The President liked Phil Potter. Anyway, Pete and the President had a relationship much, much better than he had with most of the reporters. And, you know, Pete would write some pretty tough things about the President.

G: It must be difficult for a reporter to be taken into the President's confidence and even to be befriended by the President, because it would seem to me it would be difficult to be as objective or as critical as you might like to be.

H: Of course, sometimes it worked in reverse, too, if it's the only way to show your independence, even though you had done this, you know. And the influence that this had, I'm not so sure it had the kind of influence that. . .He also talked to groups when we had various groups of reporters that would be up, that he'd have, say, maybe for dinner or for cocktails off the record. These were almost always off-the-record basis, when he talked to the reporters on this basis, either off the record or background, because they pretty much had to be, except that they would end up in storage. In other words, you couldn't say, "I went in to see the President today and the President said this."

G: From your contacts and all your intimacy in all this business of the press, your own attitude must be somewhat jaded as to the reliability

when you know the motivations, when you see the personal things that go into it.

H: Yes, as a journalist, I look at it a little bit differently than I did before, when I was on the other side of the fence. And with a great deal of concern really because some of these reporters approached the President, and I don't know how they did the other presidents, but they approached it with: it didn't make a damn what the circumstances or the facts were, they were going to write what they thought anyhow. They could have written a story, and a lot of them did and do. I know some of the Evans' and Novak's columns about the President's attitude and moods, and they never showed up over there. They get it second-hand from somebody else.

But I don't know. I wonder about the quality. There are some good reporters, some good reporters. But I sometimes wonder about the quality of our profession. I certainly don't think that, as a whole, we get the best minds in the field, at least some that I saw there. I don't know how you resolve it, but I think something with real significance is just inordinately overbalanced, the impact that television has.

G: Yes.

H: With the drama of television, in my framework of references as a journalist, I don't know how you justify this medium having this much impact, or what you do about it, or how you compensate for it. Because, you know, you watch television, you get immediate impressions--you get it from the drama. It's a tough thing, it's a tough thing. It's hard.

People sometimes, I think, forget that the president is a person, too, and he has some faults like all the rest of us. But the press, I think, got so wrapped up and involved in Johnson's personality that they overlooked or failed to interpret or made no effort to get into the depth of the substance of his presidency. You know, one might be opposed to what was going on in Vietnam and just automatically opposed everything else Johnson said and did. I don't know.

So it's a real problem. I don't know how you find the resolution. I think that essentially you've got to keep it free. You've got to let them be a free-wheeling operation. If you don't, I think you may cause more ills than you correct.

G: I wanted to ask you, I think we did talk about this off the tape, but what was it like at the White House when there was a lot of pressure? When something really was big, for example, during the Israeli--?

H: Oh, I think this is when my admiration for Lyndon Johnson grew. His superb cool was just unshakable. He'd approach the thing during these crises just absolutely unruffled. I think when it got tough, I think that's when he really came out the best. All those small personal things that may have been some concern the day before were just nothing. I mean, here was the problem and he'd try to get almost complete and total information in explicit detail, all of which I presume was used in his analysis in reaching decisions. But when it got real tough, the toughest was when he was the coolest.

G: Would you consider the riots one of those situations when the going was tough?

H: Yes, I think so. I think it would be a period when it was tough.

I think his handling of the thing was pretty cool.

G: Do you know how he felt towards these personally?

H: Oh, I think he felt that the people were outside the law and there was nothing--the only thing that could happen would be what was necessary to control. Although I think he did understand some of the justification of these things, particularly with the racial things. He felt very deeply about these things. I've heard him say after the Nixon discussions about the way to do was to get to the roots of the problem, eliminate the things that cause it and open the opportunity.

But you remember the Romney statement?

G: Yes.

H: This was another instance where, while it may have been a political consideration, I think the legal aspect of the thing was one of the things, and I think that was probably a mistake that came back to bother us. Here again you see we have our problems. Well, this timing was a bad problem on this thing, a bad problem. You know, hitting a notice and letting the networks know and all this sort of thing, he'd get awfully impatient about this. If it's time to go, he wanted to go.

G: Yes, speaking about timing, there was some dispute as I recall over the issuance of the Kerner Commission Report. There was some speculation--

H: I don't think the dispute was over the issuance of the report. I think the dispute was over whether or not he should embrace the report.

G: Right.

H: Yes, there was quite a conflict. Some of his advisers felt that he should praise it and embrace it and he took the opposite position.

And he didn't. He recognized the report, but he did not give it the buildup and the interest and the acceptance and the publicity and the attention that a lot of them wanted him to give.

G: How did he feel about it?

H: I think he felt maybe they'd been overly critical in some areas and reflected on him, you know, on his actions and his presidency more than. . .I think a little later on, because of some of the comments that he did make publicly that it was probably a little less harsh judgment on it. But I think initially he had pretty harsh judgment on it, [thought] that they had done some things that didn't help the cause.

G: Just a couple of very short last questions. Was there ever a problem with the press with reference to the military in Saigon and the government operations of the press in Veitnam?

H: Yes. We'd get the reports of the thing. And then we'd also often maybe just give the Defense Department some advice. But we never personally got involved in this sort of thing. For instance, there was a time the Defense Department was going to kick somebody out or something, I've forgotten what it was. And of course, we'd get told this and the Defense Department made a decision and George would say, well, he thinks that from the overall standpoint that maybe this should happen. But I don't ever know of the President getting particularly involved in the thing. But now, much of the stuff is pretty much removed from the White House, too.

G: I recall that Frank Reynolds and Dan Rather and Ray Scherer from the

three major networks had that sit-down talk.

H: Yes, the conversations with him.

G: Were you involved in the planning of that and the execution of it?

H: Yes, when they set the thing up. They set it up in the Oval Office. Of course, this was done in segments. I mean it wasn't done all in one sitting. They'd do a part and then they'd watch it and come back and do some more. They set this up in the office. And this again was another idea to try to get the President's views and statements in a rather informal situation so, hopefully, he'd come through better than he did on formal statement type situations.

G: How did he react to this? How did he think his performance was when he viewed this?

H: I think he felt pretty good about the performance generally. I think he felt like he did get some points.

G: That's where he hit Reynolds with, "What would you do?". (Laughter)

H: Yes, yes, this was Lyndon Johnson. He very often did this in meetings. He'd turn to people and ask them, "What would you do? What's your idea?". And I think even there he was not [bitter]. He was pretty blunt in asking Frank what he would do, but there was no bitterness in this thing, and I don't think any bitterness on Frank's part at all. He took a lot of ribbing about it. But he [President Johnson] had a great respect for Frank Reynolds. He liked Frank. And of course it was difficult for him to understand how someone could be a personal friend and then write something in a derogatory manner about his activities or his policies. It was tough for him to understand sometimes.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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