INTERVIEWEE: LISTER HILL

INTERVIEWER: T. H. BAKER

February 1, 1971

B: This is the interview with Senator Lister Hill. Sir, let me just read here very briefly your background. You were born here in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1894, and attendéd the University of Alabama and were elected and served in the Army in World War I. Then in 1923 you were elected to the House and served in the House until 1939--

H: '38. January '38.

B: Yes, sir. You were elected to the Senate then to fill Hugo Black's unexpired term, and then the next year, I guess, won the regular election.

H: That's right.

B: Do you recall, sir, you had been in the House for ten years when Mr. Johnson arrived in the 1930's. I believe you said beforehand that you knew him when he was a secretary to Congressman Kleberg?

H: I knew him not too well, but that's when I first knew him, when he was with Dick Kleberg.

B: In those days did young Mr. Johnson go out of his way to make the acquaintance of people like yourself who had been in the House for awhile?

H: Yes, I'd say he did.

B: Did he make a favorable impression in those days?

H: Yes, he made a very good impression.

B: Did he strike you as a man with some ambition?

H: Oh undoubtedly, there's no question about that.

B: How does a thing like that show in a young man like Mr. Johnson?

H: Well, the very fact that he seeks out people, seeks to make contact with them, and make friends with them and that sort of thing.

B: Did he ask your advice about whether or not he should run for Congress, or was it just assumed that he was going to do that sooner or later?

H: No, I just assumed he was going to do that.

B: Then when he came into Congress after he left Washington for awhile and was in Texas with the NYA--

H: The National Youth Administration, yes.

B: Then he came back as a congressman.

H: He came back in a special election in 1937.

B: Yes, sir. Did you get better acquainted with him then?

H: I got some better acquainted with him, although, you see, he came back in '37--I'm not sure just what time, it was a special election, and I left in January. I was elected in '38. The truth of the business is my wife and I that summer of '37 went with General John J. Pershing and the Battle Monuments Commission over to France and Belgium, England, the British Isles. We were dedicating these battle monuments that had been built over there to our American boys, and went to the cemeteries where we had these chapels and dedicated them, you see. So I guess I left out of there. That was in the summer of '37, and then Hugo Black was appointed to the Supreme Court by Franklin Roosevelt in August 1937. My friends here called me on the long distance telephone to tell me I ought to come on home and run for the Senate. So I came home as soon as I could, and pretty much the rest of that year of 1937 I was campaigning for the Senate.

B: This doesn't have anything to do with President Johnson, but what was

General Pershing like?

H: He was a nice man. I liked him.

B: You know, it's kind of curious. Usually a war like World War I will produce a hero that will then become active in politics afterwards. You and I were just talking about Andrew Jackson before we turned the tape on.

H: I don't think Jack Pershing ever had any desire to get in politics.

B: It doesn't seem like it.

When you were in the Senate then and Mr. Johnson was in the House as a Congressman, did he seem from over on the other side of the Hill to be anything more than just another run-of-the-mill congressman? Again, was there anything special that stood out about him in those days?

H: I don't recall anything special. You have to realize that he had two fellow Texans who occupied very prominent positions there. One was John Nance Garner and the other was Sam Rayburn. Naturally they would overshadow any man not in that high office.

B: You often see it said that in those days Mr. Johnson was something of a protegé, at least of Sam Rayburn's.

H: He was. I think he was. I doubt if Lyndon ever took any kind of a step that he didn't consult Sam Rayburn.

B: You and he in those days shared interest--the New Deal in general--

H: That's right.

B: Franklin Roosevelt's policies, the TVA. Did you ever get together on bills or legislation?

H: The truth is by the time he got to the House, we had already passed the TVA bill. You see, we passed two bills with reference to the

Muscle Shoals plants and the Tennessee River. Silent Cal [Coolidge] vetoed one, and Herbert Hoover vetoed the other one.

Franklin Roosevelt came in on March 4, 1933. At that time the President instead of coming in in January came in on March 4, so he had George W. Norris of Nebraska, who had been fighting to try to bring about development there, and me down to his office, and we sat down there and talked about TVA. Then on the 18th day of the following May he signed the TVA Act.

B: Was his mind already made up? Did he need any convincing?

H: Who--Franklin Roosevelt? No, I'd say not. He was ready to do business.

B: I know the Muscle Shoals project had been talked about for a long time. Wasn't it mentioned in the campaign?

H: Yes, it was mentioned in the campaign. You know how it came into being?

B: No.

H: When Congress passed the National Defense Act of 1916--they foresaw the war clouds of World War I--passed that act in 1916, they put in Section 124, which was to provide for the production of taking the nitrogen out of the air--nitrates which you need to make ammunition. As a result of that Act of 1916, they started these two plants down there in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. One was using the cyanamed process for taking the nitrate out of the air; the other was using the Haber process. The truth of the business is those plants stood idle then from the time they finished them, right after they were authorized in 1916--they stood idle until Franklin Roosevelt signed that bill in 1933.

B: On account of the war had ended?

H: That's right. The war had ended. The war ended, and when the war ended, there wasn't anything done about them.

B: Then, to get back to President Johnson, he came over to the Senate after winning a special election in 1948. Did you get better acquainted with him then?

H: Yes, I had more contact with him then, naturally.

B: Had he changed any from the time you first knew him?

H: I don't think so.

B: Did he still make an effort to--?

H: Still ambitious? Yes.

B: And still made an effort to get friendly with the older hands here like yourself?

H: I would say so, yes.

B: Was it pretty clear that he was going to move up into leadership positions?

H: I couldn't say in '48, but I think it was evident very soon after he got there. When there was a fight over the leadership between Ernest McFarland from Arizona and Joe O'Mahoney from Wisconsin--no, not Wisconsin. Joe was from Wyoming.

B: Washington state, wasn't he?

H: No, Joe was from Wyoming. There's no question that Joe was much the abler of the two men. But Lyndon was thinking in terms of Lyndon. I guess he thought if Ernest McFarland got in there, Ernest wouldn't stay too long, and it would open the door for him. And that's exactly what happened.

B: There are those who say that Senator Russell may have had some influence

on that too.

H: I think Dick Russell did have some influence on that. Lyndon was smart. He recognized what an able, outstanding man Dick Russell was, and right away he began to play up to Dick. He captured Dick.

B: You mean it was not the other way around?

H: No, not the other way around.

B: You know, Senator Russell--of course for the record Senator Russell died just a few days ago. Senator Russell doesn't seem like the kind of man who would allow himself to be used.

H: He wouldn't. He wasn't the kind of man that allowed himself to be used. But after all, when you're playing the game you've got to be in one place or the other. You know what I mean?

B: I'm not sure that's clear to me.

You had been Whip yourself just before this. I believe you were Whip up until about '46.

H: '47. I got out in '47.

B: You didn't enjoy that kind of leadership position, huh?

H: I'm going to be frank with you if you want me to tell the truth. I foresaw all this integration stuff coming up. And the people of Alabama weren't for that, as you know. That's what made George Corliss Wallace in his issue.

B: You thought you would be much more effective in the other things you wanted to do if you were not--

H: If I were not tied in on that.

B: And in a leadership position you would have to be tied in on it?

H: That's exactly right.

B: That's good forethought. I seem to recall that a little later on in

the early '50's when Senator Johnson became Majority Leader there was at least one public suggestion that you would make a good Majority Leader at that time. Senator Gillette I believe--

H: Guy Gillette from Iowa.

B: --suggested your name.

H: He did. But I didn't have any ambitions along those lines because I foresaw this thing coming.

B: Do you suppose Mr. Johnson foresaw it coming too?

H: I guess he did. It didn't have the same effect in Texas that it had in Alabama.

B: In those years did you think of Mr. Johnson as a Southerner or as a Westerner? Or is that too fine a distinction?

H: As a Southwesterner, I'd say. A Southwesterner.

B: That is, a man who didn't exactly have the same problems as a senator, say, from Alabama or Georgia or Mississippi would have?

H: That's right. That's exactly right.

B: You've been reading all this lately because of Senator Russell's death--that in those years no Southerner could ever really hope to be anything much beyond the Senate itself.

H: Dick wanted to be President in the Democratic nomination of 1952, and I supported him. He would have been happy to have had it in 1948, and I supported him then. But we just couldn't muster the votes outside the South.

B: Did Senator Russell really think he could muster the votes?

H: I don't know. He ran and Walter George, who was then his colleague from Georgia, placed his name in nomination at the convention. Some of us did all we could to help him, but we just couldn't get the

votes.

B: Back to Mr. Johnson and his leadership position in those days. Everything you read about Mr. Johnson as a senator is about how well he led the Senate, and you almost get the impression that he was driving the senators.

H: He had great capacity, I'd say, for persuading men to go along with him, bring them together, and to get a result, get an answer.

B: How does he go about doing that? Did he ever persuade you to do anything?

H: I don't recall any particular instance, but maybe he did. I don't recall any particular instance.

B: Is it just the kind of thing that he'd just plug away at all the time?

H: The kind of thing you plug away at, yes.

B: You also see written that he really made the Senate work, and the implication of that is that unless somebody is working at it full time the Senate doesn't work very well.

H: He kept them on the ball all the time. He stayed on the ball himself, and he kept the Senate on the ball. He sure did.

B: Did that ever breed any kind of resentment on the part of other senators?

H: I don't recall it.

B: Did he help you with any of the specific legislation you were interested in? For example--these are kind of roughly in order--the Tidelands Bill?

H: No, I don't think he helped on that. He was from an oil state. No, he wasn't helping on that.

B: Was he actively on the other side, or was he just trying to stay

out of that one? That got to be a long--

H: Drawn out affair. I'd say he was much more on the other side than he was on our side, much more so.

B: About the same time that that was getting started, the issue of Senator McCarthy--Joe McCarthy--the censure of--

H: I know--Wisconsin. The man who beat my friend Robert LaFollette for the Senate.

B: It is sometimes said that Mr. Johnson played a major part in that, but there seems reason to believe that you and a group of other senators might have been just as influential in arranging the mechanics of the censure.

H: I want to give him full credit, but I don't recall whether he took any outside leadership, so to speak, in the matter.

B: You did, didn't you?

H: I helped all I could.

B: Did you feel that that was one of the things that had to be done just to protect the Senate's good name?

H: I thought so. I sure did. I thought so, yes, I did.

B: Did that cause any kind of divisions among senators that didn't get publicized at the time?

H: It caused some division, but the McCarthy crowd was in the minority.

B: These are some of the things that I know you were interested in in those years, sort of roughly in chronological order: the Dixon-Yates affair, involving the private power plant over by Memphis.

H: I was against that.

B: Did Mr. Johnson play an active part in that one too?

H: Not that I recall, not that I recall.

B: Also in those years, the thing that you had suspected came to pass. There was

the civil rights legislation attempted in '56 and then passed in '57.

H: That's right.

B: I have seen in print a story that the '56 bill--the bill that was coming up during that presidential election year--that Mr. Johnson as Senate Majority Leader pretty well killed it and that you helped him on it. You were presiding over the Senate and got the bill assigned into Senator Eastland's committee before anybody could object?

H: Jimbo Eastland from Mississippi.

B: Is that the way it worked?

H: I think it worked that way.

B: Was that deliberately planned?

H: It was part of the overall strategy.

B: Did you ever sit down in those years and discuss with Senator Johnson what could be done about civil rights, about holding off legislation?

H: Not much.

B: I ask that because the next year the Civil Rights Bill of '57 was passed.

H: That's right.

B: And with Senator Johnson as Majority Leader taking a pretty active role in it.

H: Behind it, supporting it, yes.

B: Did that mark any kind of change in philosophy for him?

H: No. I think he was playing to win.

B: You mean that he was already looking toward national office?

H: Uh-huh, playing to win.

B: Do you think it was all just expediency, or do you think he just

might have thought the time had come for some national civil rights legislation?

H: It might have been both, to be fair about it.

B: But I gather you expected expediency might have been--

H: It might have.

B: --might have been up there ahead of--?

H: Knowing LBJ as I do, I--but I can't say that. It might have been.

B: Of course, your major interest in these years, as always in Congress, has been in medical and health legislation.

H: That's right.

B: Did Mr. Johnson share your interests here or help with any of the bills you wanted to get passed?

H: To say the least of it, he didn't oppose us. He didn't oppose us.

B: If this isn't just banal, I suppose you're a prime example of what's wrong with categorizing people as liberal and conservative because through your entire congressional career in matters like education and public power and health you've been what most people would call nowadays a liberal.

H: I think that's true.

B: And passed a whole bunch of mighty fine legislation, I must say. Did you ever have an occasion in the Senate to sit down and talk philosophy of government with Senator Johnson, or was that something he was just not interested in?

H: I don't recall ever having any conversation with him.

B: You mean any conversations at all, or just any along that line?

H: I don't recall having any along that line.

B: I gather that during these years in the Senate you saw signs of

presidential ambition.

H: No doubt about that.

B: In '56 he was a favorite son from Texas at the Democratic convention.

H: That's right.

B: Was there indication that he really would have like to have been more than that in '56?

H: I don't know. I never talked to him about that. But he might have felt that Dwight David Eisenhower being the great war hero that he was, that perhaps he'd be wise to wait a little bit. He may have thought that, I don't know.

B: Then in 1960 he ran seriously for the nomination.

H: He did.

B: In the spring before the nomination, did he ask your advice in helping with the Alabama delegation?

H: I think he did, as I recall, yes.

B: Did you support him, did you offer him any--?

H: Well, I was not at the convention.

B: I meant in politics within Alabama here.

H: I spoke well of him.

B: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but that sounds like faint praise.

H: [hearty laughter]

B: I realize it was probably a delicate situation for you then because there were other contenders for the nomination. Were there other contenders that you--?

H: Jack Kennedy was serving on my committee. And he made a good committeeman. He always supported me on that committee.

B: Did he ask you for your support in the nomination too?

H: I don't think he ever made any direct approach to me. I don't think he did.

B: Did that put you in some kind of a bind?

H: No, I didn't go to the convention. I went to Bermuda.

B: Deliberately?

H: My wife and I needed a trip.

B: I gather you would not have needed that trip if--

H: Oh we might have gone. We liked to travel in those days.

B: But you did not openly endorse either one of them before the convention?

H: No, I did not endorse either one of them.

B: Did you have any reservations about whether or not Mr. Johnson would get the nomination or the election, or indeed whether or not he would make a good president?

H: I had reservations whether or not he was going to be nominated, to be frank with you. Let me see, we hadn't nominated a man from down in the South in some time, had we, to elect him.

B: No, sir. I guess, if you want to stretch a point and call Woodrow Wilson a Southerner, that was probably about the last one.

H: But you see he was Southern born in Staunton, Virginia, but he'd been the President of Princeton University in New Jersey.

B: That's why I say, stretch a point.

H: That's right.

B: He'd been governor of New Jersey.

H: He'd been governor of New Jersey and he was looked upon, no doubt, by most people as a New Jerseyite rather than a Virginian. Did you ever visit his home there in Staunton, Virginia?

B: No, sir, never have.

H: You need to go there some time.

B: I should have because I spent a year living in Washington working on this project and tried to tour as much as I could but I missed that one.

H: You should have gone on down there.

B: I visited the homes of some of those other notable Virginia Presidents like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

H: Thomas Jefferson?

B: Uh-huh. I guess you're right. Really since that crew there haven't been any true born-in-the-South Southerners.

H: No, there has not been. I wouldn't say this to take any credit away from Woodrow Wilson because I'm a great admirer of Mr. Wilson's but you'll remember one thing that worked very much in his favor. Teddy Roosevelt had put William Howard Taft in as his successor. Then Teddy decided he wanted to come back, and he ran on the Progressive Party. Taft ran on the Republican Party, and that more or less split the Republicans which was very much to the advantage of Woodrow Wilson.

B: In 1912 when he first got elected?

H: In 1912 when he got elected the first time.

B: And then in 1916 he was a war president.

H: That's right, he was a war president by then.

B: Were you surprised then in the '60 convention when Jack Kennedy got the nomination and Lyndon Johnson was offered and accepted the vice presidential nomination?

H: No, I was not surprised. I thought very likely Jack would get the

nomination, and then he would say, "The thing to do now, we've got to win. And the way to win is to combine these forces." You see. And of course that's what he did.

B: Had you ever by any chance suggested such a step to Mr. Kennedy?

H: No, I can't say that I had.

B: If it was good political sense for Jack Kennedy to offer the nomination to Lyndon Johnson, what about your reaction to Lyndon Johnson's accepting it?

H: I wasn't surprised at that one bit.

B: Again, the opinion you had already formed about Mr. Johnson's ambitions?

H: That's right.

B: But to give up the Senate majority leadership for the vice presidency?

H: Well, the vice presidency ranks higher than the Senate majority leadership.

B: I guess it does in protocol, but you think of--barring acts of fate such as what happened--you think of the vice presidency as just a kind of dead end, really.

H: Yes. But not with Lyndon. He'd take that vice presidency.

B: And make it into something--

H: Try to make it in, sure.

B: Did you participate in the campaign in '60?

H: Yes, I campaigned.

B: Did Mr. Johnson or Mrs. Johnson come campaign in Alabama that year?

H: I don't think they came here that year, as I recall.

B: I know in '64 Mrs. Johnson's train came--

H: The train came through here, but I don't think either Lyndon or Lady Bird came here in '60. As I recall. Do you know for sure

about that?

B: No, sir, I don't think they did. I haven't seen any place that they did. I was just kind of checking.

H: No, I don't think they came down here in '60, as I recall.

B: By the way, did you know Mrs. Johnson by this time?

H: Lady Bird?

B: Yes, sir.

H: Oh, yes, I knew Lady Bird.

B: I gather that she and your wife Henrietta are good friends.

H: Good friends. You see, some of her family came from right across the Alabama River in Autauga County. We're on one side of the river and Autauga County is on the other side.

B: That's right. And she had visited during these years those kinfolk here.

H: She had. She had a kinsman that lived here in Montgomery that she had visited.

B: Some people say that Lyndon Johnson is pretty smart, but that Lady Bird Johnson is pretty smart, too.

H: She's a pretty smart girl, Lady Bird is.

B: In politics and business and everything else?

H: Everything else, yes. Lady Bird is a pretty smart girl, very smart girl.

B: Did you see much of Mr. Johnson while he was Vice President? I ask because you kind of get the impression that during those years he was just unnaturally quiet.

H: I didn't see very much of him while he was Vice President. Of course, he would come in and preside over the Senate.

B: Did he seem different? Did he seem restive and unhappy?

H: No, I can't say that he did.

B: Did it make any difference in the Senate? Did it work any change in atmosphere in the Senate without him as Majority Leader?

H: No. I'd say this about it, he sought to use his influence to help pass certain legislation, and that sort of thing.

B: Can you think of an example of that, sir? What sort of legislation, and what kind of influence?

H: Some particular bill? Some particular legislation?

B: Yes, sir.

H: I don't recall. That has been some years ago now.

B: As I said, it's not fair to ask people to remember that kind of specific details. Any future scholars can look all that up in the Congressional Record without any trouble.

H: That's right.

B: During those years and since, there was an awful lot of writing about the relationship between Mr. Johnson and President Kennedy and the whole Kennedy staff--family and stuff. Were there any signs of unease or ill will in that area?

H: You heard talk about it, but I can't cite you any examples that came to my personal attention.

B: I'm not sure of the exact years here, but later on as senators both Robert Kennedy and then Ted Kennedy were also on your committee, weren't they?

H: All three Kennedys sat on my committee.

B: So you must have known all three Kennedys pretty well.

H: I did. And they all cooperate mighty well.

B: Did you ever hear directly or even indirectly of any of them bad-mouthing Mr. Johnson?

H: Not to my knowledge.

B: I ask because those are the stories that went around at the time.

H: No, I didn't hear any. I did not.

B: What was your reaction to the assassination of President Kennedy, sir? Do you recall?

H: I thought that was a terribly tragic thing.

B: Do you recall where you got the news, under what circumstances? The reason I ask, again, the specific details don't matter, but it's known that during those first few days after the assassination then-President Johnson called a number of people in leadership positions in the Senate, and others. I was wondering if he got in touch with you during those first days.

H: He got in touch with me pretty soon afterwards. I'm not sure just what day it was. You see, that's been some little time ago now.

B: I understand.

H: That was seven years ago last November.

B: It really doesn't seem like that long ago.

H: No, but it was seven years ago last November.

B: It's hard to remember. Do you recall what he said to you, or about what the tone of it was?

H: The tone of it was, I think, that we wanted to go forward. He said Jack had been trying to take us forward, and we wanted to continue to go forward.

B: Did he mention specific legislation like Civil Rights or, say, Medicare?

H: Not that I recall.

B: Did you have any idea that maybe the programs before Congress might be changed, that President Johnson might not have exactly the same kind of ideas as President Kennedy had had about legislative programs?

H: No. I think his idea was to go ahead and carry forward the program.

B: One of the things that was passed almost immediately that first session of Congress after the assassination was another civil rights bill.

H: That was '54. That was the far reaching bill. That was the bill that made George Corliss Wallace. That was the real bill!

B: '64.

H: I mean '64. That was the real bill, yes.

B: Were you by that time just resigned to that sort of legislation?

H: No, I opposed that legislation, along with the other Southern senators. We opposed it.

B: Did you try to talk President Johnson out of it?

H: I didn't.

B: Or into changing it in any way?

H: Dick Russell may have done so, but I didn't. Dick was the head of our team, you see.

B: Do you think that President Johnson put all of his energy behind that '64 bill, again, just for political purposes? Or do you think by that time he really thought such legislation ought to be passed?

H: Undoubtedly, the political purposes played a part. I can't tell you exactly, but knowing Lyndon as I do, I'm sure the political purposes played a part.

B: Did you figure that that was going to give you the kind of domestic trouble you later had? As you said, that's the bill that really sort of created future Governor Wallace and--

H: Sure did.

B: And four years from then you--well, in '62 you had been reelected and had a tougher than usual fight for it, presumably because of the Civil Rights--

H: Sure did. Because of that civil rights bill. Exactly. That was the basis of the whole thing.

B: Did Mr. Johnson make any attempt to win over your group, to explain--?

H: Why he was taking the position he was?

B: Yes, sir.

H: If he did, I don't recall it. I don't think he did. He couldn't do that, I think.

B: You mean, he just figured it wasn't worth trying, that there wasn't any way he could bring you around?

H: I think that's so.

B: You know, he, above all other people, must have understood the political realities of it--the difficulty it would create for people like you at home.

H: Uh-huh.

B: Another thing, at that same session, as I recall, the Education Bill was passed, which was something you had long been interested in. And perhaps most of all the Medicare Bill.

H: Uh-huh.

B: Had you played a part back in the Kennedy Administration in drafting the Medicare plans?

H: I hadn't played much part in the Medicare plans for this reason: Nearly all health legislation came out of my committee, except Medicare--more or less tied in with Social Security--came out of the Finance Committee, you see.

B: Because it was to be financed by Social Security?

H: Uh-huh. It came out of the Finance Committee. It didn't come out of my committee. I passed a lot of health bills, but that one did not come out of my committee.

B: Were you still able then to be able to give any advice on the bill, to do any of the helping in drafting, or trying to get it through Congress?

H: I supported Medicare. I did, I sure did.

B: You know, everybody looks back and remarks on the '64 and '65 sessions of Congress when all that legislation was passed. Was there anything you would liked to have seen passed that didn't get passed in those years? I was thinking, with your long background and support for education and medicine, health services, for example. Did you think, for example, the Medicare Bill went far enough, did you think maybe that it could have gone further in those years and maybe passed?

H: I thought for that particular time it went about as far as you could take it as a practical matter.

B: I'm not sure whether or not it's at all fair to predict whether or not even more extensive legislation could be passed now, since that has been in operation awhile.

H: That has been in operation for some time. You can predict that just as well as I can.

B: I know that during those years in '65, for example, there was a health

bill passed--federal aid to various regional research centers, I think. What I'm getting at is there was a little bill signing ceremony in the White House to which you were invited, and during the ceremony President Johnson apparently spontaneously had some pretty high praise for you and your activities in that.

H: He did.

B: Is that kind of thing rewarding?

H: [laughter].

B: You're absolutely right. There's no answer to that kind of question.

H: If I may--this doesn't have anything to do with Lyndon--in 1966 the Association of American Medical Colleges gave me its Abraham Fletcher Award, which is their highest award. And they cited the fact that I had authored and passed sixty major pieces of health legislation.

B: Yes, sir. When I was doing this research on you on this interview, I just ran out of listing. There are so many of them. It is quite a record to leave behind, plus that's not the only award you've received. You've received just about every possible award in the field. I think.

H: About.

B: Plus having your name on just about every hospital I know about because I don't guess there's any major hopsital that has not in some way or another a Hill-Burton Hospital.

H: Have gotten some money under that program anyway.

B: That bill dates 'way back.

H: It goes back to '46. Harry Truman signed that bill in '46.

B: Back to politics. In the election of '64, as we mentioned awhile back, Mrs. Johnson did campaign in Alabama in that one. The train

came through.

H: Uh-huh.

B: Did you and your wife ride through Alabama with her on the train?

H: No, I'll have to tell you about that. I had a prostate operation just at that time.

B: During that campaign, did the Johnsons ask you for help in Alabama, or for political advice? By that time Governor Wallace was pretty much of a potent force.

H: That's right. And you had Barry Goldwater running for President, and he was playing to the Deep South, you know.

B: He carried Alabama.

H: Yes, he carried Alabama, he sure did.

B: I guess you didn't do any active campaigning during '64 then?

H: The truth of the business is I was in the hopsital in Birmingham a good part of the time, and then even after I came back I had to recuperate. No, I did not.

B: On into the rest of Mr. Johnson's presidency--I've asked you this in another way before--but I guess he never talked to you about civil rights and about Governor Wallace or the demonstrations that were going on?

H: No, he did not.

B: Even in those years when things were going on, such as the Selma to Montgomery March. Did the Justice Department or anyone get in touch with you for help?

H: No, they did not.

B: They must have been in contact with somebody in Alabama.

H: Uh-huh, but they didn't contact me. They did not.

B: Did that strike you as a little unusual, sir?

H: I think it was. They didn't contact me. Yes, I think so. I was the senior senator there. I had been not only the senior senator, I was the senior member of the Congress. I mean, I'd been there longer than anybody, in either the House or Senate.

B: From what I know of Washington protocol, if a federal agency is going to be operating in a state, it is customary at least to inform the senators.

H: It usually is.

B: Did you ever think of talking to Attorney General Kennedy--or Katzenbach or Clark?

H: No. I talked to Bobby Kennedy, but I didn't talk to him directly about legislation. I talked to him about some appointments--federal judges, and things like that.

B: You had known him on your committee while he was in the Senate--

H: That's right.

B: Could you still get along with him when he was Attorney General?

H: Yes, I could get along with him. I'd say that Jack Kennedy made the appointments I wanted him to make.

B: I ask because there's considerable evidence that Bobby Kennedy was an ambitious man, too.

H: Oh, no doubt about that. Bobby was an ambitious man. A very likable man, but ambitious. He was a very likable fellow.

B: Again, you read all these charges about ruthlessness and that sort of thing.

H: Uh-huh.

B: Not true?

H: I would say not. He was a likable fellow, Bobby was, a very likable fellow.

B: If he were ambitious, then his ambition must have run counter to Lyndon Johnson's ambition.

H: Oh, undoubtedly.

B: So did you see any signs of animosity between the two of them toward the last there, on into '67 and '68?

H: I wouldn't say that, but I would say this. Wasn't it after Lyndon became President that Bobby resigned as Attorney General?

B: Yes, sir.

H: Yes. And went to New York and, by golly, got elected senator from New York. That was quite a feat, really.

B: Yes, sir, considering he just kind of picked a new state there.

H: That's right. He'd always lived in Massachusetts, gone to school at Harvard, and all that business.

B: That's right because that's when he would have ended up on your Health and Welfare Committee.

H: That's right.

B: When he was that senator. And in '64 there was all that business about whether or not he might be the vice presidential nominee.

H: Uh-huh.

B: Which, I gather, he pretty much wanted.

H: I think he would have accepted it. I think so.

B: Much like Lyndon Johnson--

H: Like Lyndon accepted it four years earlier.

B: And for I guess, in your opinion, for about the same reasons too.

H: I think so. Bobby was a very likable fellow. You never knew him?

B: No, sir, I never did, except reading about him in the public prints.

H: He was a very likable fellow, very likable.

B: What makes a man likable like that?

H: Just his camaraderie.

B: Forgive me for mentioning this, but the age difference between you and him was not any kind of barrier?

H: No, I'd say not.

B: That's a good talent. I gather Senator Kennedy did have that ability to get along with just everybody, from all kinds in all walks of life.

H: He did really. He was quite a fellow, I'll tell you he was. Bobby was quite a boy.

B: Did you get involved in the politics of the spring of '68 there when Mr. Johnson withdrew from the presidential race and Gene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy got in?

H: No, I did not get involved in that. I did not.

B: You had already by that time decided not to run again.

H: I announced in January '68 that I was not going to run again, you see. So I was out of politics when all that happened.

B: Did you talk with Mr. Johnson before or after your decision there about not running? Did he ever mention to you--?

H: Oh, one day, I think I was at the White House on some other matter, after I'd made the decision, after I'd announced it, and he said he was sorry that I was leaving the Senate.

B: No hint that he might be considering the same kind of thing?

H: No. No hint.

B: Incidentally, sir, if this isn't embarrassing--and if it is just don't answer it at all--did you decide to retire in '68 on the grounds

that you probably would lose if you ran again?

H: No, I decided to retire--I had been up there forty-six years, and I was 74 years old. You see, I'm 76 now. And then another thing too. I don't know whether I want this on the record.

B: If you want it taken off the record, we can.

H: My wife has this damned Parkinson's Disease. I don't know whether you're familiar with that or not.

B: Yes,sir, I have a good friend who has it.

H: It's a hell of a disease.

B: Yes, I can understand that because I have a very good friend who has it. My friend, fortunately, is in remission now. The new drug apparently is--

H: That L-Dopa?

B: Yes. Apparently it has helped her, and the symptoms are no longer quite so obvious. Yes, that's a most understandable reason.

H: How long has she been on that L-Dopa?

B: I believe she has been on it now for almost a year.

H: Well, I'll say this. The first year my wife was on it she got along pretty doggone well--I'd say about the first year and a half. And then it seems to have lost its--

B: Oh really? My friend was warned that it was still experimental and that they might--

H: It is still experimental.

B: That they might have to take her off of it after a year or two, because apparently there are consequences that they don't know anything about.

H: That's it, they don't know.

B: I can understand that. That's a difficult, difficult thing to deal

with.

H: Where does your friend live, if I may ask?

B: In Memphis. Her care is through a doctor in Memphis, who I think is associated with the University of Tennessee Medical School, and he's doing experiments with L-Dopa.

H: They have a Parkinson's Disease Foundation which is there at Columbia University--College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University --and that foundation has set up quite a few of these places at other medical centers to carry on these experiments. They have one at the University of Alabama Medical Center in Birmingham.

B: I think he's working through the University of Tennessee.

H: I imagine he is.

B: Again, you've had something to do with that because there are a lot of those research foundations that are working on federal money that in effect you supplied for them.

H: Well, I'll tell you. When I got to be chairman of the Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee and handled those appropriations, the National Institutes of Health--the different institutes they have--were getting altogether $81,000,000. I raised that $81,000,000 from $81,000,000 to $1,250,000,000.

B: Golly. The mind just can't comprehend those figures really. You know, on that line, the year I lived in Washington doing these interviews just almost full-time--

H: What year were you there?

B: That was Mr. Johnson's last year--'68-'69, over the winter of '68-'69. It was pretty general talk that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare--the administrative department--just didn't work very well;

that it was inefficient, cumbersome. Is that a fair judgment?

H: I think there's a feeling today that there's some of that in existence. But, you see, you've got so darned much stuff in that HEW now.

B: That's true. It gives you the impression of being just kind of a catchall.

H: That's it. They've dumped so much in there.

B: I was wondering if you were generally satisfied with the way all of the programs that you've shepherded through Congress have been administered.

H: I think on the whole those I championed or authored have been administered pretty good.

B: I interviewed a man last summer who, during the Johnson Administration, had something to do with administering them--Boisfeuilett Jones from Atlanta.

H: Oh, yes, over in Atlanta, Georgia.

B: Yes, sir. As I told you, these interviews are confidential--

H: Hell of a nice fellow, Beau.

B: I was just going to say he impressed me as just a very nice guy.

H: A fine fellow. He was there with Jack Kennedy as Assistant Secretary of HEW for Health and Science--an exceptionally fine man. I was awfully sorry when he left up there myself.

B: He's still active in Atlanta.

H: Oh yes, he's out there at--

B: Emory?

H: Emory.

B: Well, I think he has left Emory--

H: He's with Woodward Foundation. They put up a lot of the money for

Emory.

B: I've forgotten the name of the foundation.

H: It's the Woodward Foundation, the Coca-Cola people.

B: That's it. And he's still active in civic affairs and university--

H: Oh, yes, I'm sure he is. He has got a lovely wife, too--Ann.

B: I met him in his office, didn't get to see his wife, but he impressed me very much.

H: Yes, he's a fine man. We called him Beau, his name is Boisfeuilett Jones. I was awfully sorry when Beau left up there.

B: Did you have a say in that kind of appointments? I realize as a senator, appointments dealing with Alabama, he judges and things you mentioned earlier--

H: No, I wouldn't say I had anything to say about Beau. In fact, I really didn't know Beau until he got up to Washington.

B: As a general rule, were you ever consulted about appointments in the Health Administration positions?

H: No. Sometimes I injected myself, but I was not consulted on things.

B: Did you ever inject yourself into the Johnson Administration in that kind of thing?

H: Some, yes.

B: Can you remember a case where you would do that?

H: The case of the head of the National Institutes of Health. Jim Shannon had been the Director for some years. He resigned, or retired. I went down with Mary Lasker--Mrs. Albert Lasker, the queen--to get a good man in that place. And a man from Mississippi got that job--Dr. Marston.

B: Whom did you talk to? You and Mrs. Lasker?

H: Talked to Lyndon Baines Johnson.

B: Was he receptive? You didn't have to--

H: Twist his tail?

B: Twist his arm any, did you?

H: Twisted it just a little bit.

B: What you hear about all the time is Lyndon Johnson twisting other people?

H: Oh, he's the biggest tail twister you ever saw.

B: Did he ever do that to you?

H: I don't recall his doing that to me, but I know he was a big tail twister.

B: How does he put up with being on the receiving end of it?

H: I don't think he enjoyed it.

B: Although, if it's not impertinent, I must say that if anybody could do that, I suspect the combination of you and Mrs. Lasker would be the one.

H: I hope so. But I don't think he enjoyed having his tail twisted. He liked to twist the other fellow's tail.

B: Did you--well, I know you did--you visited the White House several times at dinners and things like that.

H: Oh, yes.

B: Were Mr. and Mrs. Johnson any different on that kind of social occasion?

H: No, I wouldn't say they were.

B: I know during those years--the one I remember is there was a reception for Hugo Black on the thirtieth anniversary of his going on the court.

H: I was there that night.

B: I knew you were because there were a whole bunch of Alabama people there.

H: I was there that night. Lyndon was not there that night.

B: No, sir. I know about that because that's mentioned--you know, Mrs. Johnson's diary has been published--part of it.

H: I've got it. The White House Diary, yes, I've seen it. I have it.

B: There are several delightful references to you and your wife in there, which is where I got my information from.

H: I have it.

B: Were you surprised when Mr. Johnson decided not to run again for the presidency?

H: No, frankly I was not. He was in an awful mean situation when he picked this war in Viet Nam. That's a damned jungle out there as you well know. Then he added this Mideast situation, Israel and the Arabs. Then he had the economic situation here at home. He had a lot of mean things, I'll tell you.

B: Plus, some would say, the political situation--all the jockeying within the party.

H: That's right. He had all these fellows wanting to run.

B: Do you suppose Mrs. Johnson might have influenced him?

H: I imagine Lady Bird was very glad when he decided not to run. I don't know now, she never told me that. But knowing her as I do, I can imagine she would be very satisfied when he decided not to run.

B: A lot of people say that Mr. Johnson is given to excesses in one direction or another, and that it is Mrs. Johnson who kind of keeps him on an even keel.

H: She keeps him cool, that's right. I think that's true.

B: Have you ever seen occasion of her cooling him down?

H: I can't cite an illustration, no, I can't--but knowing her as I do, I think that's true.

B: On the matter of the Viet Nam war, although your committees weren't actively involved in that, you had been a long-time advocate of internationalism, of America's responsibility on the world scene.

H: That's right.

B: You know, it kind of slips by now, but you were the co-author of one of the first resolutions during World War II for setting up--

H: B2-H2. Ball, Burton, Hatch, and Hill. (?)

B: That's the one I was think about.

H: That's the one. B2-H2.

B: I think the senator from my state sometimes gets credit, but he came in a little after that--the Fulbright resolution.

H: Yes, Bill. Uh-huh. He came in after that.

B: I hadn't completed this sentence. That's the resolution that called for the establishment of an international organization, what later became the United Nations.

H: The United Nations, that's right.

B: Do you think the Senate was adequately consulted on what became the Viet Nam war, beginning back in the Kennedy years?

H: I almost hesitate to say because I really don't know. We just seemed to have slid into that thing. You see, it started with Eisenhower when he sent advisers out there--military advisers. That's when we first got into the thing.

B: Yes, and on the assumptions that everybody had in those years, that that was the proper thing to do.

H: The idea was that [that] was the proper thing to do.

B: It's just there was nobody who had any forethought of what that could lead to.

H: What it would lead to, what a morass, jungle, that thing was going to be. It's a hell of a jungle today, as you know.

B: Yes, sir, it's still going on. You get the impression it's just going to be going on just forever and ever.

President Johnson had briefings for senators on the Viet Nam thing. Did you ever participate in any of those?

H: I did.

B: Were there any kinds of discussions, or were they just matters where President Johnson sort of laid the law down?

H: There were some discussions, but Lyndon did most of the talking.

B: Did any senators really criticize him to his face, criticize the policy?

H: I wouldn't say that. They raised some questions, but they were not shooting at him, so to speak. They were not.

B: Can you recall how early senators began to raise questions?

H: I don't know. It has been some several years ago.

B: I was going to say, it's a difficult--

H: --thing to remember--just what date. Several years ago, some several years ago.

B: Who were some of the senators who would raise questions in those meetings? Senator Fulbright, for example, I suppose.

H: Yes, Bill would raise questions, sure he would. I think Dick Russell asked questions too.

B: Oh really?

H: Well, he was chairman of the Armed Services Committee, you see.

B: You mean, Senator Russell got to the point where he questioned the involvement there, and where it would lead to?

H: I wouldn't say he questioned the involvement, but he questioned about how to get out of there.

B: Did you get the impression toward the last there that President Johnson just would not list to criticism on this subject?

H: I wouldn't say that, but I'd say that I don't think he knew how to get out.

B: I guess in all fairness, nobody else did either.

H: Nobody else did either. I don't think--to be fair about it today, I don't think you can just tuck your tail and walk out of there. What would that mean so far as your allies and your friends around the world!

B: That's a question that it brings up.

H: You see, we live in a different world from what you and I were born in. What year were you born?

B: 1933.

H: '33? We live in a different world. You didn't have any atomic bombs then.

B: Yes, sir, I'm aware of that as I still think of myself, except on certain days, as being fairly young. But when I'm teaching school, when I'm teaching people to whom World War II is history--or, gee, now, people to whom the Korean war is something beyond their experience! Yes, sir, I was born the year Franklin Roosevelt became President of the United States.

H: Where were you born?

B: I was born in Houston, but I was reared in Memphis.

H: Born in Houston, reared in Memphis.

B: Yes. And live in Arkansas now. I've never strayed very far outside the South.

H: You live in--?

B: In Little Rock, Arkansas. I know that's confusing. A group of about five of us worked full-time on this project for a year in Washington. All of us are professional historians. Then we all went back to our universities where we teach full-time, and we do this part-time. I'm between terms right now at my university.

H: I see.

B: So we do these interviews on a part-time basis now. We figure in maybe another two or three years we will have finished up the project We figure we'll do about a thousand interviews like this.

Sir, is there anything else about President Johnson that stands out in your mind?

H: LBJ?

B: Would you care to assay an evaluation of him?

H: Well--

B: As a man and as a President?

H: I'll say this about him. He was an active animal.

B: That, above all, you can't quarrel with.

H: No, he was active now. No sirree, LBJ was active! He sure was.

B: Do you think maybe he was too active, that he tried to do too much too fast?

H: I don't know about that. You and I'd have to go over that pretty carefully to pass judgment on that. But he was certainly active.

B: Speaking as a historian, really it's too early to make that kind of

judgment.

H: I think that's true.

B: How about as a man? You have said, for example, that a man like Bobby Kennedy was a likable person. Was Lyndon Johnson a likable person?

H: To say the least of it, he certainly was not unlikable.

B: I mean, was he the kind of man that you could really feel friendly with?

H: Well, frankly, you had the feeling that he was more interested in LBJ.

B: I understand what you mean, and I gather that you had that feeling all the way through from his earliest congressional years.

H: I think that's true.

B: Not just as President of the United States, but all the time.

H: Oh, yes, that was true all the way through.

B: Again, there are those that say that it's Mrs. Johnson that kind of provides the balance wheel there too; that she seems genuinely interested in other people.

H: I think she is.

B: I gather, for example, that she's a good friend of your wife's.

H: She is.

B: From the mentions in her diary, she seems to be.

H: She is a good friend--and she's a sweet, lovely lady.

B: Is Mrs. Johnson given to things like just calling up to chat? Just to say hello?

H: She'd do some--I don't think she did a whole lot of that, because I don't think she had time to do it. She was too busy. She had too much to do.

B: Senator Hill, this may be unfair too, but I can't resist the opportunity.

H: Shoot.

B: You have known and, indeed, served in government under every President since Calvin Coolidge.

H: That's right.

B: How do you rank them in your own mind right now?

H: I'd rank Franklin Roosevelt tops. And then I think I'd rank Harry Truman about next.

B: On account of his activity in foreign affairs?

H: His intestinal fortitude. He had guts.

B: That's right. You think of what he did in foreign affairs, but what he tried in domestic affairs--that took some guts too.

H: That's right, it took guts. He had intestinal fortitude. He had tremendous intestinal fortitude. You know how he started in life? A haberdasher.

B: Clothing in Kansas City.

H: That's right.

B: I guess maybe in Independence.

H: I guess it was in Independence.

B: Now that you're retired--as retired as you get, I know you keep this office here now--do you ever keep in touch with, say, Mr. Truman?

H: Yes, I write him once in awhile, but I realize he hasn't been in very good health lately, and I haven't wanted to impose upon him by having him answer my letter and all that business.

B: Have you been in touch with President Johnson since he left the presidency?

H: No, I have not.

B: I think perhaps this ought to be recorded for history. Would you mind repeating that little story you told me about Calvin Coolidge before we turned the tape on?

H: I told you that we had a fort down here in Baldwin County. Baldwin County and Mobile County are the two southernmost counties in Alabama. They are both right there and form the boundaries from Mobile Bay and go right into the Gulf. We had this old Fort Mims down there, and we had a number of men, women, and children in that old fort. I did know the exact number, but I'm not sure now--it was over 300, about 370-odd as I recall. They had a terrible rain down there, and the rain piled up the mud so deep they couldn't close the gates going into the fort. And these Creek Indians went in there and slaughtered those people. And Andrew Jackson heard about it. He heard that that slaughter had been inspired by two Englishmen. He said, "I'll go down there and get them and hang them to the first tree."

And he came down there. By the time he got there, those two Englishmen had skidooed into Florida, which at that time was Spanish territory. That didn't phase him one bit. He'd said he was going to hang them from the first tree. He went on into Florida and caught them, and hung them from the first tree.

Well, after I was first elected to Congress, a constituent of mine down in Baldwin County went out on the site of old Fort Mims and picked up these two arrowheads, had one made into a lavalier like the ladies used to wear around their necks, and the other one made into a watch fob like we men used to wear in the old days with old vests--with chains across the vests. And he sent them up there to me to present to Mr. Coolidge--the lavalier for Mrs. Collidge, and

the watch fob for Calvin. I sent over to the Library of Congress and got all the information about Fort Mims and the attack and Andrew Jackson so I'd be absolutely accurate about it all.

So I went in there to see Calvin, and I told him the story, told him all that happened, all about Jackson and how he'd gone into Florida and hung these Englishmen, and how this friend of mine had gone out to the site of old Fort Mims and picked up these arrowheads and made them into this lavalier and this watch fob, and asked me to bring them up there and present them to him--for him to have the watch fob and Mrs. Coolidge to have the lavalier. And after I got through telling him all the facts, he says: "Put 'em there," pointing to his desk, "Put 'em there," [mimicking voice], and that's all he had to say!

B: He really was Silent Cal!

H: He was Silent Cal!

B: You just can't escape reminiscing over such an active career. Is Washington really very different now from what it was back in '23? For example, I gather in '23 you, as a young congressman, just went into the President--

H: I think it's different some. I think it is. One thing, of course, the government has become much more involved in many, many more things. That means those in responsibility and those in seats of power have many more duties, many more obligations, many more burdens to carry.

B: Including, I guess, especially United States Senators.

H: That's true too. You see, here, when I first went to Congress, Congress would meet on the first Monday in December, and then we'd take at least ten days, generally about a two weeks vacation, for

Christmas. Then we'd come back, and the first session we'd stay until some time in June when we would adjourn. We stayed until June--the appropriations bills had to be passed by the 1st of July, and we passed them by then in that day and time. Then you came on home in the latter part of June, and you didn't go back until the first Monday in December.

Then the second session, by golly, you went back on the first Monday in December, you had that Christmas recess, and then that Congress died on March 4. So then you left on March 4, and you didn't come back again until the first Monday in December.

B: It does seem now that Congress is always in session.

H: That's it, it's continually in session.

B: You occasionally get a Christmas and a Thanksgiving vacation and maybe the 4th of July.

H: Exactly.

B: If you had to do it over again, is there anything you regret doing, or anything that you didn't get to do that you wanted to in those years?

H: No, I think I did pretty well. I passed a rather historic piece of education legislation, and that was the National Defense Education Act of 1958. That was an act for our universities and colleges and students going to the universities and colleges.

B: As matter of fact, about twenty years from now there are going to be a lot of people reading the transcripts of this interview who got to graduate school and got to be historians because of the National Defense Education Act.

H: I hope so.

B: Yes, sir. Many of my colleagues.

H: We had tried to pass legislation along those lines, but hadn't been able to do it. But, by golly, I was coming back on the boat from a trip to Europe, that sailed out of Liverpool from England, in 1957; and the Russians put Sputnik in the air. I said, "Ah-hah, we'll pass our education bill now. We'll call it the National Defense Education Act." Which we did, and we passed it.

B: That's right. You got Eisenhower's support immediately.

H: Well, we had some scholarships in there that he didn't want.

B: What were those, sir?

H: You see, that has been some years ago now, but we had something in there that he didn't want.

B: You mean some types of--?

H: That's right.

B: Because, in spite of its name, parts of it do have just the most tangential relationship to national defense.

H: That's right. I titled it that way, you see, to pass it. Because they had been trying a long, long time to pass it. They'd had different commissions who had studied it and recommended. But no passage.

B: Is there anything else that stands out that you think ought to be on this kind of record, sir? I've just about run out of questions.

H: I think you've covered the case.

B: Okay, we sure appreciate your time, sir.

H: I think you've covered the case.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Lister Hill

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Lister Hill, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Signed Lister Hill

Date April 27, 1972

Accepted Harry J. Middleton - for
Archivist of the United States

Date February 27, 1975

AMENDMENT TO THE DEED OF GIFT SIGNED APRIL 27, 1972 BY SENATOR LISTER HILL ON HIS FEBRUARY 1, 1971 ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

I wish to have the portion of the interview contained on pages 27 and 28 restricted for Ten years (10).
(period of time)

Signed Lister Hill

Date April 30th. 1975