INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 29, 1970

INTERVIEWEE: PALMER HOYT

INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB

PLACE: Mr. Hoyt's office at the Denver Post Building in Denver, Colorado

Tape 1 of 1

M: This is an interview with Mr. Palmer Hoyt, the editor and publisher of the Denver Post.

I might start off by mentioning that Mr. Mort Stern is also in the room--that is M-O-R-T S-T-E-R-N, who has written a dissertation about Mr. Hoyt and the Post which gives a great deal of background information about this man. The title of the dissertation is Palmer Hoyt and the Denver Post. It is an unpublished, at least at the present, dissertation at the University of Denver, and it came out in August, 1969. So anybody listening to this tape, if they need background information on Mr. Hoyt, might well draw it from that source. I might also say that if you have a question you want to ask in the process of the interview, just throw it in and this can all come out in the transcript, and it will make it a better interview.

S: Fine. Okay.

M: We might start off by getting straight to the point and asking Mr. Hoyt, when did you first meet Lyndon Johnson?

H: I first met Lyndon Johnson when he came to Washington as a young congressman. I have forgotten just what year that was, but it was quite a while ago.

M: That was in the 1930s.

H: Late thirties.

M: Do you remember anything about when you first met him? What he was like, what he looked like, what he acted like?

H: I first met him with Abe Fortas, Bill Douglas, Tommy the Cork, and other friends of LBJ's. He was a very vigorous young man.

M: Did you know Sam Rayburn before you knew--

H: No. I met Sam Rayburn through Lyndon Johnson and the others I've mentioned.

M: Did you just meet him socially or casually?

H: Well, at first it is a little hard to remember, but when the war came along. . . . After the war, I knew him better. He was a commander in the navy, as you know.

He sometimes has blamed me for getting him into national politics. In fact, he said that out here when he was visiting Denver a couple of years ago. He blamed me for all his troubles, but that was true to this extent. The city of Portland, Oregon had been attempting to get the battleship Oregon to put in the harbor as a museum piece, but Mr. Roosevelt wanted it melted up for scrap, which they did but didn't use the scrap. But we did get the mast complex and assembly, the main mast, and it was placed in the Portland City Park. I got Lyndon Johnson to make the speech and they got him on national network, Mutual. NBC and CBS, not having any crystal balls, didn't know how important he was going to become. So he came to Portland and made the dedication speech, presented the mast and whatever else went with it to the city, from the national standpoint.

M: He was the representative of the government, then.

H: Yes. Well, at least he made the speech.

M: And how does this tie in with his blaming you?

H: Well, that made him a national figure in that he was on his first nationwide broadcast in a major way, you see. I think there was a slight exaggeration that was typical of LBJ.

M: Did you work with him some during the war?

H: Not so much during the war, but in 1943 I was appointed by Mr. Roosevelt as domestic director of the Office of War Information, succeeding Gardner Mike Coles. Incidentally, Lyndon Johnson and these other men had a great deal to do, I am sure, with my being appointed. When I arrived in Washington in late June, about the twentieth of June, I found out that I was a bureaucrat without any bureau. The Congress, in its ever-loving wisdom, had eliminated the appropriation for the domestic division of O.W.I. because they were angry because of a field survey, which was that the representatives were interposing themselves between news sources and the government. They were real angry about it, especially John Taber of New York and Clarence Brown of Ohio, Wigglesworth of Pennsylvania [Massachusetts?], and so on.

So, Lyndon Johnson helped me. That's when I really got acquainted with Sam Rayburn. And they helped me get the appropriation back, although we accepted about a third of what had been asked. Actually, from ten million it went to three-and-a-half million plus separation pay. But Lyndon Johnson was a great help in the House and with Sam Rayburn.

M: Have you had the opportunity to see Johnson operate as a politician in

the House? How he worked, for example.

H: In the House, I can only say that he was very influential. When John Carroll went back as a young Democratic representative from Denver, I talked to both Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson about doing something for this young man who seemed very bright. And I think the record will show that because of their activities he had more first year appointments than any other congressman in history. So I would say he was fairly active. But, of course, in those days in the House with Sam Rayburn there, any activities of LBJ's were, I suppose, naturally subordinated to the master.

M: Well, the story is Sam Rayburn sort of helped Lyndon Johnson along sort of as a protege.

H: He did, indeed. I'm well aware of that, yes. I would say that Lyndon couldn't have gone to school with a better teacher. Sam Rayburn had to be one of the great masters in handling members of the House in a political way and a practical way. For example, I had asked Mr. Rayburn, and he had agreed to summon the principal opponents of O.W.I. to his office so I could talk to them. He decided at the last minute that was improper and unethical, since they were all Republicans and he was a Democrat. What he did, however, was get me an appointment with the Conference Committee of the House when they went in on the budget with the Senate, before they went in, through Clarence Cannon, and he said this was absolutely without precedent and I had five minutes. Well. luckily, John Taber of New York, as soon as I was presented to this Conference Committee, said, "Mr. Hoyt, what do you think of the O.P.A.?" I was interrupted, of course. Instead of five minutes I got forty-five minutes,

and came out with the money. But that was due to Clarence Cannon and Sam Rayburn.

M: Have you had opportunity to see Johnson operate in the Senate?

H: Oh, yes. I wasn't, not being in Washington much at the time, but I was well aware that he probably was the greatest Senate minority leader--he was the minority leader, wasn't he?

M: Yes, he was minority leader at first and then majority leader.

H: Yes. In either or both capacities, I'm sure his performance was unequalled. I have referred to him often as the great arm twister in history.

M: Why do you say that?

H: Well, because he never used improper methods, I mean, to influence men, but he was always sold on his cause, and he knew every senator and what their ambition and aims were. He also remembered what he had done for them and what they might ask him to do in the future. He had great personal contact with the senators and great sense of evaluation, which made it possible for him, for example, to pass the tax cut bill, because he was close to Harry Byrd.

M: The people that write about Lyndon Johnson often talk about what they call the "Johnson treatment," which is a technique of persuading someone to do something. Have you ever been subject to the "Johnson treatment?"

H: Well, he asked me to do many things, some of which I did, but I would say that, in my opinion, the "Johnson treatment" really consisted of great personal appeal. In other words, he put everything on a personal,

man-to-man basis. It was Johnson and Hoyt, it wasn't anything else. He could bring in the good of the country, too, but it was always a personal thing, and there is no question but what he had tremendous influence, and very far-reaching influence.

M: Can you give me any kind of personal example of when he talked to you and made an appeal to you?

H: Well, I remember once. It was after he had been president, of course, for some little time. He called me--he called many people--and said, "Ep, I want you to come down and help me." And I said, "Mr. President, I will do anything for you, but if you mean go to work for you, no. I wouldn't work for you." I said, "You are one of my dearest friends, but I wouldn't work for you for a million dollars a year, and I couldn't do any good for you. I would do much more by not working for you." He said, "What do you mean you wouldn't work for me?" "Well, you are pretty rough on your hired hands, and I'm getting too old for that, but anything I can do at anytime, I am willing to do."

I spent quite a little time with him, as a result, during the 1964 campaign. He asked me to come to the White House many times, and I think actually more to have an old friend to yak with than probably anything else.

M: What kind of job did he want you to take?

H: I have no idea. But I didn't go into that.

M: We will go back a little bit then. You had contact, then, with either Congressman Johnson or Senator Johnson through the years.

H: Right.

M: Did this mean that when you went to Washington you would look him up?

H: Oh, sure.

M: And was there correspondence back and forth?

H: Well. . .

M: What was the nature of the relationship?

H: Well, more phone calls and personal contacts, because you know we live in the age of the non-letter-writing thing, and most of my contacts with him were on the phone.

S: Ep, you told me at times about the unexpected visits to the White House, where you'd come on over--

H: Yes.

S: Wasn't there one that was either late at night or turned out to be an all-night [session]?

H: What I did with LBJ, as I have done with several other presidents, I wrote him a letter congratulating him when he went into office, and I quoted Oliver Wendell Holmes, what I think is one of the solid remarks of history, "It is more than passing strange that so many brilliant minds overlook the obvious."

Well, when he passed the tax cut bill, I wrote him and said I withdrew that, because he had done the obvious thing in getting Harry Byrd on his side, you see.

But I didn't attempt to see him. He was a busy man, after all. We were more personal friendship than anything else. But he asked me to come over to lunch one day and I did. I had a golf game, and lunch consisted of a bottle of Coca-Cola. I went out to play golf and when I

got back to the Statler Hilton, I had a huge thick stack of messages to call the White House. He had been trying to get me. So I called him and--I had gone out to dinner with some friends, it was eleven--he said, "Well, come over and have dinner tonight."

M: This was eleven at night?

H: Yes. So I did, about eleven. They were just getting around to eating. He insisted that I come over and stay at the White House. I believe that was the first time.

M: So then you had dinner and spent the night in the White House?

H: We talked, and about two in the morning I said, "Mr. President, you may not be tired, but I am and I want to go to bed, so if you will summon one of your minions. . ." I didn't know were I was sleeping, so the President, in red pajamas, butled me up to my room.

I want to say in this connection I doubt if we ever had a president that worked any harder than Lyndon Baines Johnson. He read, contrary to popular belief, a tremendous amount of material and was, I think, very well informed in the affairs of government, as much as any one man can be.

M: On this occasion, you went to the White House for dinner and then to bed, what did you talk about? What does he talk about?

H: Well, we talked about his problems. He was always asking questions on whether I thought he was doing the right thing, and whatever was current at the time, he would talk about. Actually, that particular night, as on subsequent nights, he was going through his "night reading," as he called it, and occasionally he would hand me some letter to read or something. Of course, if there were any political speeches, he had

three television sets in his bedroom.

M: Did he do this just to be sociable with an old friend, or did he do this to gather information?

H: Well, I think that it was not to be sociable to an old friend. I think he knew my background and knew my newspaper background and political background, and he was anxious to get opinions, you know. Johnson is not the easiest man to talk to because he has got a lot to say, too, but when he is interested in something and you are presenting a case, his silences can be deafening. He pays tremendous attention.

M: So he did pay attention to what you were saying?

H: Yes.

M: Was there any particular question or kind of question that he would ask you?

H: I would have to go back and figure out the times I spent with him.

M: In the early period it would seem to me there were questions of his relationships with the press. That may have been a recurring theme.

H: It was.

M: I think you told me that he was very much concerned that he wasn't getting through to them or--

H: Well, I can tell you one thing that I talked to him a lot about. I used to tell him about Roosevelt. He was a great admirer of Roosevelt's and he also went to school with Mr. Roosevelt as well as Sam Rayburn, in politics. And I told him many times about Roosevelt's procedures, the fireside chats, and suggested to him many, many times that, everything else being equal, the people would rather believe the president

than some of his critics, but that he was derelict in not getting to the people.

As a matter of fact, I cited a case of Roosevelt when the banks were closed in 1933. I was then managing editor of the Oregonian, or city editor, I've forgotten which, but anyway I went out to lunch and when I came back up Alder Street--in those days everybody didn't have a radio set and the dealers would put one out on the street for World Series games and big speeches--Roosevelt was making a big speech, and he was giving the malefactors of great wealth hell in his own superior way. And two older men who were not well clothed were on the outskirts--I'd walked around Alder Street to get by--and one of them said to the other one, "Roosevelt and I are onto those sons of bitches on Wall Street." Well, that is quite simpatico. Here's a rich man in a well-appointed office three thousand miles away, and there are two guys that get the message. LBJ said, "I have fireside chats," and I said, "Oh, no." This is like 1964 and after he was elected in 1965.

Actually, to divert a little bit, Johnson was really tremendous at a press conference. But he had a tic, and I wrote him and circulated a letter to members of his staff about how he should [not] go on television without glasses. He had a tendency to appear, with those contact lenses, bug-eyed. But with glasses he was great. But he had some thing, he didn't like that. I pointed out to him that February 16, 1964 was his last electronic press conference until the fourth of February, 1965, or it might have been the fifth. But he'd had no electronic press conferences. He had done real good, he was in the Treaty Room of the

state house. He was tremendous. He was well informed on government affairs, well informed on his own purposes and so on.

M: What happened to him when he went on television?

H: Well, that's what I am talking about. You know, television press conferences. He was always great when he was at ease, but I thought he was a lot more effective with glasses because he was more natural. When he was natural, he came up with some pretty good answers. Well, those were the kind of things we talked about.

M: Is there any truth in the idea of a credibility gap under Lyndon Johnson? You read about it. But you read about it under other presidents, too.

H: Well, I think there has always been a credibility gap no matter who the president is, and I think probably because of LBJ's way of handling the press; he would have these small groups in and talk to them.

M: Did he play favorites?

H: Well, I guess you would have to call it that. Certainly he gave more attention to those he felt were sympathetic to his position. History shows that he broke with many writers and correspondents.

M: Would he call you on the phone frequently?

H: Yes, quite often, yes.

M: He would ask you about a particular appointment or question? What would he ask you, now?

H: Well, some of the questions were about procedures and Vietnam, of course, and many of them were--you see, Lyndon Johnson is a great man, but he's a very sensitive man and his feelings were often hurt by pieces in the paper, as he called them. I suppose he would ask me about some

of those things.

M: Did you campaign for Lyndon Johnson at all?

H: Well, we supported him very strongly in the paper. I never campaign for anybody, but we did; the most effective campaigning was in our columns. He was out here, for example, and we covered him very thoroughly.

M: Did you happen to go to any of the nominating conventions?

H: No.

M: The one in 1960?

H: No.

M: Were you surprised when Lyndon Johnson took a vice presidential position in 1960?

H: Well, I really wasn't surprised because I felt that Jack Kennedy was a pretty smart politician, and he wanted LBJ over the willing candidates for a very particular reason. That was because LBJ was a southerner and because he also worked himself into a position where he was solid on civil rights and was so appreciated as being an advocate of civil rights, I think, that I thought it was a logical thing for Kennedy to do. I can't say that I was surprised, although I know a lot of people were. What I <u>was</u> surprised about was that Sam Rayburn let him do this, because Sam was against it originally and felt that [with] Lyndon's position as the Senate leader, whether it would be minority or majority, depending on how the election came out, that he was one of the most powerful men in the world, which he certainly was. That was the only surprise that I would have, I think.

M: Did you have any contact with President Johnson shortly after the Kennedy assassination? Did he contact you at all?

H: No. I wrote him a letter; he answered it. I figured that he had enough problems, so I figured that if he wanted to see me he could handle it a hell of a lot easier than I could see him.

M: And then the 1964 campaign, did you have any contact with him then?

H: Oh, yes. That's when I spent several days at the White House in one stretch. I had no intention of doing that, of course. In fact, I called my wife and said, "Help! Help! I am a prisoner in the White House."

You see, one of the things to remember, I am a little older than Lyndon, so I could maybe talk to him a little more directly and firmly than somebody his own age or younger. And I also think that he felt my motives were honest and sincere, that I had nothing to gain. I didn't want any appointment and I didn't want anybody appointed either. And you might say, "How come you got appointed to the United States Information Agency Commission?" Well, that came about in this way. He called me up one night in the middle of the night and said he wanted me to go on this commission. I said, "Look, we made a deal that you would not offer me any appointments, and I would not accept any. What about this?" He said, "I know about that but do this as a personal favor to me." So I said, "All right." And the reason that I said all right was I figured that if I took this I would not have to accept appointment on one of those [other] commissions. Having served on

several under Truman and Eisenhower, I didn't want any part of it, because they always tell you there is no work, but you wind up practically moving to Washington.

M: There is one story that might make an interesting anecdote. That's the story about "you are going to lose your consensus." I have a dim recollection it was something you were trying to persuade him to do, and he wanted to do it another way. Remember that was the punch line that. . .?

H: I think I know what you are talking about. I'm not sure. Well, I probably said that several times.

M: Maybe it was the press conferences that were televised.

H: I think so, because he was always pulling out these polls, you know.

M: Yes.

H: Especially when they were running his way. He would confound his critics and enemies by. . .I think probably, Mort, that was--I have felt deeply, and feel now that any president in this electronic age has got to go to the sovereign, the people, you see. And Johnson really had an awful lot of people who wanted to believe him, you know. And they did believe him, I think, insofar and when he went directly to them, you see.

M: Were you surprised when Lyndon Johnson chose not to run again in 1968?

H: Well, yes, in a way I was, I really was. But, as a matter of fact, he called practically everybody in the United States and he put in a call for me that afternoon he made his decision. I called back, and by that time I got one of his aides, and it was all over, I guess, I didn't

know quite what it was going to be. But I think if he had got to me, I probably would have advised him to follow the course that he did follow because I think it was well-motivated and, at least in theory, it had some possibility of working out, you know. But I don't know. Of course, the division in the party and the anti-Johnson build-up, which I think he sensed more than knew, because it really hadn't developed to that point yet.

M: Do you think he could have won in 1968?

H: Well, that's a pretty tough question. I would say yes, he probably could have. But that would be subject to whether or not he was strong enough to do what Humphrey couldn't do, and that is pull away from the McCarthy bloc and the Kennedy bloc. He would have been a pretty strong candidate.

M: Did you go on then to support Humphrey?

H: Yes.

M: Did Lyndon Johnson solicit this support for Humphrey?

H: No. Well, I'm a great admirer of Humphrey's. I think he's got a brilliant mind and I think he was entitled to a chance at it. No, as a matter of fact, I don't think--I think LBJ sensed that maybe it was time for a change. While he certainly supported Humphrey, I never felt that he started--well, I could be wrong, but I don't know of any president, with the possible exception of George Washington and his vice president, John Adams, that was ever anxious to have his vice president succeed him. For very logical reasons. Suppose Humphrey had been elected and had stopped the war. What would that have made his boss

look like, you see? I don't think that was a conscious thought, but as near as I can tell from reading history, I think the only reason that George Washington seems to have supported John Adams was that he hated Thomas Jefferson so much. That's my theory, anyway.

M: You mentioned being appointed to this commission on information.

H: It's the United States Information Agency Advisory Commission.

M: Yes. You were appointed to that in 1965?

H: Right, April.

M: Yes. Did you have any more contact with the White House in that capacity?

H: Not really, but I continued to have contacts. Actually, LBJ was pretty sold on the necessity of a U.S. Information Agency. Leonard Marks, who was pretty close to Johnson, was director of the agency. The suggestion for my appointment may have come from Marks, or it came from Richard Evans Smith, who was general counsel, who is from Denver, I don't know.

M: Was this necessary to have Senate support for this appointment?

H: Yes.

M: So did you go before a Senate committee?

H: No, I was passed through.

M: I see.

H: Confirmed. I think perhaps it may have been in the boss' mind that I would carry a little clout with the Senate, and he may have had in mind me testifying at some point.

M: Did he appoint you to any other committees or commissions?

H: No, because I had a firm deal with him that I would absolutely not. As I say, the only reason I really accepted this was because it was down my line, information. I had been interested in it since it was created in 1942.

M: The USIA?

H: Yes.

M: And the commission, I think, was 1948, when that Public Law--

H: 402.

M: Yes.

H: That's right, 1948.

M: You did make a couple of trips to Vietnam.

H: Yes.

M: At his request, wasn't it?

H: Right. I went to Saigon in 1965 to spend some time over there. He had asked me to go.

M: What was the purpose of that?

H: Well, number one, as a member of the commission, to familiarize myself with what was going on and see what the USIA was doing over there. Number two, I think at the time I went, I went over with Frank Stanton, the chairman, and I think he felt that I might be called before the Senate as a witness.

M: Weren't they having problems at the time with the press corps in Saigon?

H: They were indeed, due to the activities of your friend Arthur Sylvester, who was PR man for Defense. So that was one thing. But, incidentally, I was asked to go over shortly after I was appointed, and I told the

President I wouldn't go until he cleared up a situation, which was this: Barry Zorthian, who was in charge of J.U.S.P.O., the Joint United States operation, was also a minister, and was also head of the USIA over there--USIS as they call it overseas--was at once the head propagandist for the US in this war, but he was also the chief censor. Well, actually it didn't mean anything to me, because there wasn't any censorship at that time. However, I felt very deeply that some third country correspondent could point out this very interesting fact, that this is quite a war, in a strange country where their propagandist and their censor were one and the same. So I told the President that I wouldn't go until that was cleaned up, which he could do with a wave of the hand. So it went on all summer. He called me two or three times and asked if I was ready to go, and I said when you get this division on Barry Zorthian, I'll be glad to go. But I can't defend it, even though it is meaningless." Because at that time there was no censorship. Finally at one point he said, "Well, write me a letter." So I wrote him a two-page letter about it. Then a couple of weeks went by. He called me and said, "When are you going to Saigon?" I said, "When are you going to wave your hand and throw up this censorship-propaganda thing?" "Well," he said, "What's that?" And I said, "Look, you know about it. I wrote you a long letter." "Didn't get the letter."

Now this is typical of Johnson's sense of humor. I'll tell you what happened. "Well," he said, "We get fifty thousand pieces of mail a day," or week or whatever it was. "How did you address it?" And I said, "As I always do: Honorable L.B. Johnson, President of the United

States, The White House, Washington, D. C., Night Reading--I always put on the bottom." "Well," he said, "Nobody knows who you are. You get new mail clerks. Why, if I'd write you a letter, they wouldn't know who I was. I said, "Look, Mr. President, come off it. This is getting a little thick." So I said, "I'll send you the letter with supporting documents and a copy of it, and I'll send it in care of Jack Valenti. Then you'll get it." So I called Jack. He said, "Oh, hell, he has had that on his desk for two weeks." "Well," I said, "Get him to read it."

He did. Anyway, he did fix that, and I did go.

M: Well, you went to Vietnam then?

H: Yes.

M: What did you do there?

H: I was there about nine days. We, of course, got the V.I.P. treatment, which you have got to have. That's good, because you get things you wouldn't get otherwise. It's no good unless you go the other route, too. So I had some friends over there, notably Colonel John Paul Vann and some others, and I got them to come in. I couldn't visit all these places; it was impossible. So I got them to come to Saigon Sunday morning, the Sunday I left. They gave me their nitty-gritty, which is pretty good. There were three of them that had been over there a long, long time, and they could all speak Vietnamese. John Paul Vann--

M: V-A-N-N?

H: Yes.

M: He is now one of the top ranking civilians--

H: He is number one of four. He had a district and a military man in charge.

M: Didn't you also meet with correspondents there?

H: Yes. Stanton and I did. In fact, we met with--the correspondents were very angry and we met with Bill--what's his name? He is over in Beirut now, head of the Tribune bureau over there, Chicago Tribune.

M: Could you tell me what you found about Vietnam then?

H: Well, you know, people write all the answers after going someplace for twenty-four hours. I found out about a lot of things that I told the boss about. Well, I will give you an illustration. The last night we were there Barry Zorthian had a cocktail party in honor of us, Stanton and I, and at one point I was seated between two good-looking Vietnamese secretaries with our outfit, J.U.S.P.O.; they were college graduates and spoke perfect English. I asked one and then the other, and then I re-asked this question: "How do you think the war is going?" And each time I would ask them, they would shrug their shoulders and say, "Well, it's your war." That would give you pause to think. There was also a clerk at the Astor Hotel who was a college graduate, Vietnamese, so I tried that out on him. The same answer: "It's your war."

M: Did you relay this back to the President?

H: I sure did. I had felt--well, one of the things I should say is that I am no authority on Vietnam, but in this four or five months that I was waiting, four months, Marks rounded up all kinds of articles and I read a number of books, even two by the communist, Berjet (?) and our

friend, Bernard Fall, Two Vietnams. I read up on Indochina and found some very interesting things. The Indochinese are different from almost anybody. They are very anti-foreigner, you know, whoever it may be. They're gentle folks, but at the same time they place a tremendous value on franchise; it goes back a thousand or more years, probably an older tradition among the voting franchise than the Anglo Saxons. However, it is all directed toward the village, the hamlet, the town, the province; and what's all this stuff about a national government. David King, who was a very brilliant congressman from Utah who lectured at the University of Saigon, also got all this over to the President. And he spoke French brilliantly. He said he got along very well with his students, but the one thing they couldn't understand was how he could be loyal to the state of Utah and to the United States government. He said that was a poser; he said they just couldn't understand that. Well, and in the history of Indochina, you see, with bad regents, bad kings, bad emperors, bad dictators, you can understand it.

M: Did you got to Vietnam twice?

H: No.

M: Just once?

H: Well, later I was going to Vietnam when I was on the trip to the Orient, and I didn't go finally, because really a short visit such as I made is obviously inadequate. And yet unless you really go and stay there with a planned program, you can really get more from distant correspondence if you have enough background to know what the problem is, you see. Like graft. Like I wanted to get some throat gargle of some kind, this

Micrin. I had a little thought that I was going to have a sore throat and I went to the post exchange. I couldn't get it there, but I got it on the street. The same price, probably.

M: Weren't you instrumental or did it ever work to get the President to hear John Vann, to give him any time?

H: Well, I spent several weeks. First, I wanted to have John Vann talk to the advisory commission, because I considered him then, I consider him now, probably the greatest American authority on Vietnam. I got LBJ to promise that he would give [the time]. It took Vann just about an hour to tell his story to the end. Having heard it many times, I knew [what] it would take him. The President promised him that time. Well, unfortunately, Komer was over there and Walt Rostow was in the White House, and they headed us off. I think it was tragic that the President didn't talk to him, to get the feel, you see, because here is a fellow that was over there--how many years?--eight or nine years.

M: Eight or nine, yes. He'd been out in the boondocks.

H: Traveled all over in a jeep with a carbine at the risk of his life. He was advisor to province chiefs. Spoke Vietnamese well. And he devoted his whole life to this thing. He was still under contract to the Martin Company. He is a brilliant engineer.

M: You were there in 1965.

H: Yes.

M: That's the time that the war began to accelerate. Was the President seeking information? Was that one of the reasons you were sent--to make that decision whether to accelerate or not?

H: No, I wouldn't put it that way, because he had already made up his mind pretty much, I think, A). B), I think that at the time I went that he felt that there would be Senate hearings and so on. He knew that I was supportive of the war to the extent that we were in it and felt we had to get out of it with honor and some regularity, you know.

M: What time of year was it?

H: September.

M: September. Do you think Johnson did the right thing?

H: Well, you see, that's. . . I think he did the right thing according to his own beliefs and bearing in mind that he wasn't the one that got it started. It goes back to John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower, and then to Jack Kennedy and Cardinal Spellman. I think Johnson really felt deeply that it was our obligation to give freedom a chance, democracy a chance, whatever, self-determination a chance. And he was deeply dedicated to the idea. With that in mind, with the advice that he got and with his real belief that the United States had to continue to be a leader in the world and in the hope for peace, according to his lights and advice, I think he did the right thing. But these things when you look back are always different. And even if LBJ were talking to somebody completely off the record, I think he would be perhaps the first to admit his advice was not always of the soundest.

M: Did you ever happen to visit the LBJ Ranch?

H: No.

M: Since you did have some social contact, do you have any impression of Mrs. Johnson?

H: Oh, yes. I think she is great. Probably the greatest presidential aid, wife, whatever, that he had in the White House. She was utterly dedicated, and was very popular, as you know. She cut a good figure; I mean she was popular all over the country. And I am sure she was of the greatest help to the President.

M: Another general question. You often read, or I have often read, about the White House handling of the news. Since you are a man of the press, is this a problem?

H: It certainly is. You might then ask me what is the answer. The only answer I know is to be forthright. The danger with the presidential dealing with the press is always this credibility gap, you see. In other words, it is always there because they feel they're not coming clean with them, you see. That is a problem that they have all faced.

M: You have been close enough to Lyndon Johnson to appreciate his position. Is there some news that ought to be withheld?

H: I don't think any news ever ought to be withheld if it is, A), in the possession of the enemy already, or, B), if it is inevitable that it will be known. On the other hand, I would say, C), that certainly we make enough of our procedures, plans and so on known to the world and to the enemy without going out of our way to do it.

Let me put it this way. I think that certainly some information should be withheld. But I don't think you ought to ever let the public know that you are doing it, you know, because I think the greatest shock to the world in this field in history was when Eisenhower admitted that this was a spy plane, because nobody ever admitted about spies. Nobody!

The British, when they had the greatest spy network in the world, when we'd ask them about it when they were the top dogs, they'd say, "Oh, no, just some fellows over there, a little business sort of thing, you know." That's the way we carried on, and I'm sure in my own mind that one of the things that unseated Khrushchev was Ike's honesty. There's no way to admit to a spy plane, give them meterological details or something. I don't think the public really wants to know about these things, I have a feeling. Once it is raised they do, sure.

Well, that's a question, of course, to submit to a lot of philosophical debate. And you see this thing didn't do Johnson any good, this Arthur Sylvester saying that it is all right for a government to lie to the people, and then repeating it. Incidentally, I told the President that this was causing him harm when I was over at the White House for some news thing, something,I don't remember what. Well, he said McNamara was right outside of the door, call him and you tell him this. And I did, in spades. But McNamara was loyal to Sylvester, the President was loyal to McNamara. Of course, this was real bad, a prominent official, in fact the guy in charge of the news out of the Pentagon, saying it is all right for the government to lie to the people.

M: What do you think about Lyndon Johnson's press agents?

H: Well, of course, the best one he had was the last one, George Christian, who was close to him. He was a big guy physically who really knew the score, and I think he did very well. But if you take the case of George Reedy. Poor George didn't have--I told the President many times that you couldn't criticize Reedy. In fact, I went over there one time, I

think he was going to fire Reedy, and I said, "How would you like to have Kennedy's man?"

M: Pierre Salinger.

H: Salinger back. "Oh," he said, "that so-and-so. For forty days, he was all right. Then he took over and made all of my decisions."

Well, actually, I think Pierre was there about ninety days, and for forty days the President was throwing him some raw meat, you see, so he could feed the wolves. Then he quit doing it.

But, you see, I went through some thirty-six of Reedy's press briefings at the request of Mr. Johnson. And even the simplest question, "Is Lady Bird going to the hospital?" he'd say, "Well, I'll have to find out about that." Well, you know, that stuff. But Christian, who knew about all this, I think did a very good job. Of course, it is always difficult. Now Jim Hagerty under Eisenhower had complete freedom, and I wouldn't go as far to say that he made many presidential decisions, but the President always stood behind what he said. But I would put it this way, that the President [Johnson] was always pretty much his own secretary of information, or press agent. Don't forget that Mr. Johnson is a very dominant and dominating type of person.

M: We might talk about his personality a little bit. It is said that Johnson had a rather earthy sense of humor. Is this true?

H: Well, I would say so, yes.

M: Was it ever offensive to you?

H: Not to me, because the only time I was ever exposed to it was when I was either alone with him or just one or two other men. No, it wasn't,

because I felt that LBJ was what he was, what he was, what he was. I thought he was a great man and I didn't think--I never heard him in public, myself, go beyond the limits. Although the time he showed his scars and some of the things, he was widely criticized. I don't know that if I were counselling a president, I'd recommend that type of procedure. But that was Johnson.

M: He also had a reputation of having a rather hot, quick temper. Do you have any insight on that?

H: Well, I am sure that's true. I really never had any occasion in my, over the long years, many contacts with him, I never saw that temper. In other words, he never got mad at me. We understood each other. I'm sure that he, at times, did show evidences of such a temper, but that was part of the man, that was part of his greatness, that he was himself. One thing that he couldn't understand, this man really worked hard at being president, and I think--

M: You mean physically, physical hours?

H: Physically, mentally, everything, he did indeed. No one has ever worked harder in my judgment. And he couldn't understand why people didn't understand that and why they wouldn't let him alone and let him run the country.

M: Was he an intelligent man?

H: Who, LBJ? Extremely intelligent. I doubt if anyone ever had a more complete knowledge of all the intricacies of government than LBJ, because, first, he had a background for it. He knew the procedural elements in the legislative side. He was well aware of our formal

government and its problems. He was well aware of the mounting bureaucracy and the dangers. He was well aware of the budget. And he really read and worked.

M: Did he wield the power of the presidency as he should?

H: Well, of course, that's always a matter of opinion. Let me put it this way: I think if LBJ had been forced to retire right after I believe it was the second rights bill and the tax cutting bill and after he had passed all those series of, you know--

M: Poverty programs.

H: Well, everything. Social, behavorial, and other fields. [If he had retired then] he might well have gone down in history as the greatest president of them all, and certainly the most effective. But the unfortunate part of it--and of course, Johnson was completely dedicated to social reform, there's no question about it, and I think effective in bringing it about--he had this albatross of the Vietnamese War around his neck.

M: A question I am curious about. In Who's Who, you're listed as a Republican.

H: Yes.

M: Is that correct?

H: That is correct.

M: And yet Lyndon Johnson--

H: I always vote Democratic.

M: Lyndon Johnson was a Democrat. Yet you two got along well. Does that mean that the political line is very thin there?

H: Well, let's put it another way. I think he was aware that I was a Republican. I used to remind him of it sometimes. But he was also aware that our mutual friends were pretty much all Democrats. Of course, Lyndon Johnson respected the two party system very much, as much as any president, I believe. It never was anything between us. You see, one of the reasons, which he also knew, was the reason that Roosevelt appointed me to this job at O.W.I. was that I was a Republican.

M: Do you suppose that was a consideration in 1965 when you were appointed?

H: Well, I think they had to have a Republican on there--I believe. I can't remember whose place I took. But, yes.

M: Yes.

H: Well, there was an opening, and he felt I filled the bill, you know. But Johnson was very careful in his handling of Republicans. He got that from Roosevelt, you know. Roosevelt was a real slicker in that field. Remember his appointments like Knox and Stimson I think was a Republican.

M: Do you think he used you a little bit in that capacity?

H: Well, I think he felt that he would have somebody on the commission that he could trust, and that the USIA was important. And I think he had faith in me and [felt] that I wouldn't sell him down the river. Well, this isn't that big a job anyway, you know, not really.

M: Have you had any contact with Lyndon Johnson since his retirement?

H: No. I've written him a couple of notes, but not really because, as a matter of fact, I'm derelict in that regard and I expect to remedy it.

But he has been always very friendly over the years. But we have problems here that have taken my attention, you know how it is.

M: I have exhausted the questions I had. Do you have anything else that you want to add or any comments you wish to make?

H: No. Mort, do you think of anything?

S: No.

M: Well, do you think we have covered your relationship?

H: I think so. Maybe when we get the transcript, I can add some things.

M: Very good. Well, I wish to thank you for your time and for the interview.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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