INTERVIEWEE: CHESTER R. HUNTLEY

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

DATE: May 12, 1969

F: This is an interview with Chet Huntley in his office in New York on May 12, 1969. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

First of all Mr. Huntley, you have one thing in common with Lyndon B. Johnson, that is you both have a western, somewhat ranching background. So I think it would be worthwhile briefly if you would tell us how you came to be in New York from Montana.

H: I was born, as you say, and brought up in Montana and finished school at the University of Washington, found myself in radio about a year before graduation and wanted to specialize in news. [I] gravitated down the West Coast and eventually wound up in Los Angeles, and was there until 1955. I was employed by NBC and the first of the year 1956 they moved me to New York to start some new television news programming.

F: Did you ever know Mr. Johnson while you were in Los Angeles?

H: No, I had no contact with him there at all.

F: Never any even necessity or opportunity to cover anything he did?

H: No, that's right.

F: Then when you moved East in 1956, did you have contact with him in his Senate Majority Leader days?

H: Yes, I met him very early in 1956 when he was Majority Leader.

F: Was it a formal sort of meeting, I mean is it something that you remember, or is it something that you sort of eased into?

H: It was rather informal. I was introduced to him by Senator Clinton

Anderson, and I remember Senator Anderson saying something about Mr. Johnson to his face. Johnson was standing there, and he had on a new tuxedo, one of those grey silk tuxedos with black lapels.

F: What was the occasion, a party?

H: It was a radio/television correspondents dinner. Senator Anderson said something about, "Every damned time you bring one of these rich Texans up here and introduce them to civilization he goes completely hog wild." He said, "Look at the suit Johnson's got on!"

F: Did Johnson take that sort of teasing very well?

H: No, no he didn't. He didn't smile at all!

F: Even though Anderson was his old friend. Did you have any political occasions to work with Mr. Johnson in this period?

H: No. I recall having, oh I would say, two or three telephone conversations with him. I'd just call up and want some information on legislation and what it was about. He was always very helpful, and very gracious.

F: Did he second-guess you on any of your telecasts in those days?

H: No, no. Never said a thing.

F: Did he try to plant news with you?

H: Not when he was Senator Majority Leader.

F: Did you cover then the 1960 campaign, particularly the convention in Los Angeles?

H: Oh yes, yes.

F: Did you have any opinion about him about by then, either as a national news source or as a possible Presidential candidate?

H: Yes, he was running seriously for the nomination. I had talked to any number of people about him and, indeed, had talked to him. I remember

early in the convention I had about ten minutes with him out there in Los Angeles. I got to sort of exploring his background as a "liberal" and I remember him very firmly attesting to that. He said, "I have been a liberal all my life." He pointed out a number of things he had done very early in his Congressional career, stands he had taken, particularly stands in behalf of rights of minority people. I feel, first of all, that those labels don't mean too much anymore, but in any event--

F: They were rather serious labels in those days.

H: Right. And Johnson certainly was not a died-in-the-wool conservative, by any means, and I think the liberal label applied to him in great degree.

F: Did you as the summer of '60 came on, have any idea that he could possibly capture the nomination for the Presidency?

H: No, I didn't. I was convinced that he wouldn't make it.

F: What did you think was the problem?

H: Well, Symington was too strong for one thing. And looking back on it we do indeed now know that Kennedy could have been in some trouble if Wyoming hadn't switched its votes at the last minute. That would have meant a second ballot. We do know that Symington would have picked up a great deal of strength on the second ballot.

What Johnson's problem was, I feel there were just too many strong people in the running, and that the nation didn't know him too well, even though he had been Majority Leader. I think those were rather quiet days during the Eisenhower Administration. He hadn't been out too much making speeches throughout the country. His campaign for the nomination

came rather belatedly. So there were some others that the people knew better, namely Stevenson, and Symington, and certainly Kennedy--

F: Did you get the impression he'd placed too much faith in the power of the Senate?

H: That, and I think he also placed too much faith in the power of his old friend, the House Speaker, Sam Rayburn, and a few of the key Democrats throughout the country--and rather was inclined to overlook the power of just those unknown delegates.

F: Were you surprised at his being chosen by Kennedy as the Vice Presidential running mate?

H: Yes, I was, completely.

F: Where were you during this little period of sort of filling and hauling?

H: I was back and forth between the Roosevelt Hotel and the amphitheater. Of course, the minute it was announced, the minute I found out about it, then the whole thing fit. It was obvious. I just frankly overlooked it. I think a number of newsmen had, too. It was just a classic pattern, this setup, and it was one that the Kennedy people, I think with great political strategy might have been expected to devise, and indeed they did.

F: But as far as you could tell there had been no previous maneuvering in that direction.

H: No.

F: Nothing to give you any lead.

H: No. From all I read and heard there was none. It came on rather suddenly.

F: Did you think that the threatened liberal revolt was serious or do you think Kennedy had the power to override it--against Johnson as a running mate.

H: I think Kennedy had the power to override that, oh yes.

F: That never gave you any great concern.

H: No.

F: Did you see him much as Vice President?

H: Yes, quite frequently.

F: In what role?

H: Well, he was always at the big dinner in Washington, the correspondents dinners. He was around the country a good deal. He was, you know, in charge of the space program. He did a lot of work for the Kennedy Administration, and logged a lot of miles. So we saw a good deal of him as Vice President. He was not completely a happy man, I would add.

F: Was a reasonably good news source, national news source?

H: No, he wasn't.

F: What was the problem?

H: Well, he felt, and I'm sure this was accurate, that Kennedy was the President. He was the Vice President, and if anything was to be said then the White House was the agency to whom we should go.

F: So he tended to be guarded.

H: Very guarded, that's right. He would speak out on the space program and things that fell very specifically within his province--and would speak at some length on those. But those issues and questions were relatively few.

F: When he became President, or to put it another way, when Kennedy was murdered, where were you?

H: I was right here in the building having lunch one floor above the office here, with one of the Vice Presidents in charge of news. The waiter who had the radio turned on out in the kitchen, came in and just started to serve the meat course and whispered in my ear. He said, "There's been

some shooting in Dallas near the President." I told that to Julian Goodman and we both jumped up and ran down here. I ran to the little news studio, which we had set up for emergencies and just walked in. The red light was on and I was on the air. Of course, there was still no news coming in.

F: And you stayed on.

H: Yes, we stayed on.

F: Did you stay here during the next four or five days, during that somewhat ghastly experience?

H: Oh yes.

F: Was it reasonably orderly, or was it total confusion?

H: No, I was very proud of us the way we handled it. We got our facilities in in reasonably good time and until the facilities and lines were in, until we could get organized and get people to where they should be, we used devices such as the telephone, just holding the telephone up to a microphone.

F: How did NBC organize to handle the events of the assassination and just after?

H: We just got engineers out, sound trucks and correspondents--Washington, Dallas, and wherever. Crews were ordered out of Los Angeles to Dallas immediately. They were on their way and arrived there late in the afternoon--in Dallas.

F: Did you alert people in foreign capitals?

H: Oh yes, everybody was on an immediate standby basis.

F: And stood by twenty-four hours a day?

H: That's right.

F: How long did you work?

H: Let's see. I went down to cover the funeral then. That was on a Monday. So I wasn't through until Monday night.

F: Did you see Mr. Johnson at the time of the funeral or during those days?

H: No, not to talk to him.

F: Did you have an opportunity to form any opinion of his general behavior at the time of the funeral or of his take-over of the Presidency?

H: From what I could see on our monitors and through our cameras, there was no question he deported himself, as far as I could see, in a very discreet-way--handled it very carefully--

F: In your case it was secondhand.

H: Yes, I was seeing it through a camera, that's right.

F: Now, as President--did you attend any news conference during his Presidency?

H: Yes, two of his news conferences.

F: What was the occasion? What were the occasions?

H: Oh, nothing specific, just two of his general news conferences.

F: You just happened to be there.

H: Right.

F: Did you have any informal meetings with him?

H: Yes, three informal meetings with him. Two at the White House and one over a dinner table at Senator Scoop Jackson's house.

F: Why?

H: I don't know. I know I was at Jackson's house because the President wanted me there. Now I was one of those newsmen that never did take a hard-and-fast dovish stand and I still support him in great measure on the Viet Nam war issue. I never faulted him completely on that and I

think he appreciated it very much. I had been in Viet Nam shortly prior to that and he wanted to talk to me about it although--I think he asked one question.

F: Did he give you a chance to expatiate at some length--

H: No, none at all.

F: He didn't listen?

H: No.

F: Did you meet him at any other dinners? Were you ever invited to the White House?

H: Yes, for a rather large party at one time. Then the second time just Mr. and Mrs. Johnson and Senator Birch Bayh and his wife and my wife and I, the six of us had an evening--it got very late. I think we finally got out of the White House about two o'clock in the morning.

F: Where was this, upstairs in the family dining room?

H: Right.

F: Just strictly informal?

H: Just very informal, yes. I had a wonderful talk with him that night. I was bold enough to ask him where he thought the phrase "the credibility gap" had started, and we talked about that.

F: Could you tell me what he said?

H: Yes. He said it started with his first budget. He said he had been accused of trying to manipulate the public in that he had warned newsmen prior to submitting his budget that it was going to be the first two hundred billion dollar one. Then when he brought it in a couple billion short of that they accused him of bracing the public for the worst and then coming in slightly short of that. He just swore up and down that

was not his intent at all, that by more pruning and cutting he had managed to save two billion. So that's his version of it.

F: As the years went by in his Presidency, did you ever hear directly or indirectly from him, either praise or complaint how he felt about specific telecasts?

H: I think twice in all the years, indirectly through his press secretary, we got word that he was something less than happy with something that had been said or shown.

F: Do you remember what it was?

H: I'm sure both things had to do with Viet Nam, I can't remember specifically what they were. But he never said anything himself and I think we stayed on rather good terms. I had several nice letters from Mrs. Johnson because I was a great admirer of hers and all she had done for the beautification of the country and her interests in conservation. So we had a little correspondence back and forth.

F: You didn't have much occasion then to see this alleged extreme sensitivity to the press?

H: Yes, I saw some of it in quite another way. Both times that I had private dinners with him, he was vigorous in his denunciations of what he called "the Georgetown Press." He would just tick off the list of those correspondents and newsmen whom he utterly loathed and detested.

F: Did you think there was a "Georgetown Press?"

H: I knew what he meant. But, no, there is no such thing as a "Georgetown Press." But there is a group in Washington that--well it does feed on each other--I think that part of it is true. They borrow from one another. It's a vast dialogue which most of the time I think is healthy. But a

number of these people were rather vigorous in their criticisms of him and he just did not respond to it entirely graciously.

F: Did you yourself receive critical comments or critical gossip, if you prefer, from some of your fellow newsmen for not taking a sufficiently hard line toward Mr. Johnson?

H: No, never any criticism. We argued always, and always do among ourselves, but in polite terms. I very quickly got the reputation of being quite the hawk on the war. I think that's erroneous too. I deny being a hawk on the matter.

F: You look on it as realistic.

H: Yes. I just think it is an unfortunate dilemma. I feel we're big, grown-up boys in this country now and we should be able to endure dilemmas and work ourselves out of them without necessarily taking it all out on the President of the United States, who inherited much of this problem after all. And hindsight is so easy to utilize. Where was this criticism when we first went into Viet Nam?

F: You were in a fairly good position to know Robert Kintner, of course. Can you tell us how you think he came to go on the President's staff?

H: I thoroughly believe Mr. Johnson intended to run for another term and I know Kintner thought he was going to run for another term. As I get it it was one of Kintner's functions to start organizing the party and getting things tidied up in preparation for the campaign.

F: Did you have any first-hand knowledge of the so-called disintegration of the party machinery under Mr. Johnson?

H: Yes, I could see it coming on as the Viet Nam issue began to hot-up. I could see some disaffections setting in. There was no question about it.

F: Anything specific on that?

H: Oh, just Congressmen I knew and some Senators I knew, and of course in all the reading material that came across my desk and still does--evidences of it were there.

F: Did the fact that Kintner had gone with LBJ give any difficulty in the way NBC handled its news?

H: No, none whatsoever. As a matter of fact Kintner was very helpful several times. I'd just put through a call to Bob if I was in search of some information. He was always very helpful and if he didn't have the answer he could certainly tell me where to get it.

F: Kintner himself never tried to move things one way or another?

H: No, never. Bob's too good a newsman to do that--has too much regard I think for journalism.

F: Now, how does NBC establish its policy? Or does it have a policy?

H: You know the Federal Communications Commission keeps demanding that NBC have a policy. I suppose what the FCC is saying it should be nailed on every door here on the fifth floor. Realistically, NBC has more of an absence of policy than anything else. It hires us fellows and it says to us in effect, "You know what this journalism on radio and television is all about allegedly; you know the laws of libel and slander; you are proportedly in search of fundamental truth; now go do it." NBC doesn't threaten to fire you if you make a mistake. If you do make a mistake it will stand behind you all it possibly can. I think it is a very wonderful working relationship.

F: It just demands that you comport yourself as a professional.

H: That's right.

F: Is it technically possible, or at least theoritically possible, for you and say David Brinkley to take diametrically opposite stands on some issue on the same program.

H: Oh yes, yes. We have found ourselves doing that in situations where we have to comment, let's say at a political convention or on election night. We've, you know, aired our differences of opinion on several occ ions.

F: Do you think the major source of the press complaint against Johnson was an anti-Viet Nam stance?

H: No, I don't think that was all of it. Let's put it another way. Johnson did not revere some of these Washington old-hands. He did not issue invitations to come over and talk to him privately. He had, I think, a rather careless habit of just assembling the newsmen who happened to be in the White House on a given afternoon at a given hour. He'd let them have the information rather than carefully set it up and alert everybody so that all the boys in town could be there. He held these impromptu press conferences. Well, that annoyed a good many of the newsmen.

Johnson also felt that fellows like Arthur Krock, I think, were just too old. He had fundamental differences with him and he had no high regard for them and simply ignored them. And that didn't go down very well.

F: Do you think this frequent habit of his of giving some major news break in a sort of casual manner as part of a larger news conference irritated the press.

H: Yes. It irritated a good many of them, particularly those old hands in Washington who feel they have seniority and that they have a certain status. They've been spoiled a little bit over the years I think by Presidents who

have handled them very carefully and solicitously and Johnson just simply didn't do that.

F: You yourself never really fell out of favor with Mr. Johnson then?

H: No, not that I know of.

F: What about David Brinkley? He was more critical than you.

H: I think there were some words exchanged there, not between the President and Brinkley, but I think Mr. Johnson sent some messages down the line.

F: Gave him the opportunity to find out where he stood?

H: Yes.

F: Did LBJ watch TV more frequently, more critically than say President Kennedy?

H: I think the two were about the same. The President had three receivers in that office and he watched all three networks, I think virtually every night as I got it. I think President Kennedy did more or less the same thing.

F: Now one of his staff on his own made I think a month-long survey of the three major telecasts to see whether one tended to handle the news differently than another. Do you think there was much of side taking by the several networks? Do you have a feeling NBC's approach was different from ABC and CBS?

H: I don't think so. It would be impossible for me to detect it, I just couldn't see it. Of course, I don't get an opportunity to see all that ABC and CBS do. I see some of it. I'm not aware of it.

F: Is it your feeling that it's difficult in these days for the press to love any President? Was there a disenchantment with Eisenhower? I've picked up the feeling there was with Kennedy, which of course was rubbed out by his murder.

H: Yes, I would think it is difficult for the press to love a President.

F: Just too much frequency of contact, and too many pressures?

H: Too many pressures. And this government is so big and so unwieldy that no matter who is President of the United States the press is going to see him stubbing his toe, very frequently, and this has to be mentioned. So it's impossible for the press to get in a position of sort of revering a President and saying in effect, "This man is doing just a tremendous job here." It doesn't work that way.

F: Did the rivalry between, particularly Bobby Kennedy and Johnson, affect the newsmen that worked with you?

H: It may have, one or two. Yes, I think one or two of my colleagues began to take sides in the thing. And I think it was something they should not have done.

F: Did you see instances of this on television?

H: Yes. I could catch some inferences--

F: Was it mainly a turn of a phrase?

H: Yes, that's what it would amount to.

F: Does the selection of the particular news--I mean, after all you only have a specific period in which to cover a tremendous amount of material. So selectivity in itself is a form of editorializing.

H: Well, very frequently I could see that in a given piece that someone was doing, all the Kennedy attitudes were very thoroughly aired--or had been very thoroughly aired--while something that Mr. Johnson might have had to say about the subject had been rather glossed over and been dismissed.

F: I would like if you feel like it to have a sort of brief assay of the press secretaries that you would have run into. I am thinking now of Jim

Hagerty, Pierre Salinger, Bill Moyers, George Reedy, George Christian.

H: Salinger, I thought, served Kennedy very well. He was bouncy, on his toes, worked hard, was with it and did very well in handling all the people of the press. I think professionally I would have to say he's the most adept one I've known. On the other hand Bill Moyers, in my opinion, was the most interesting of the whole lot, and one in whom I would put more trust than any of them. Bill, in my opinion, is a very fine, splendid gentleman.

F: Did Moyers seem to have some reasonable independence of operation?

H: Certainly up to the policy-making level. He never indulged in that. Hagerty, I felt frequently was making policy and I thought it was a very unhealthy situation. But certainly Bill never got over that--

F: Hagerty did seem to feel it was necessary to go back to the President to make certain policy statements. He would make them on his own.

H: That's right.

F: He'd make them on his own. Did Johnson or any of his staff ever seek, as far as you know, any professional advice on TV style?

H: Yes, he did. Oh, the matter of his glasses at first was a tremendous concern. I don't know how many specialists he had in to try to get himself a pair of glasses that would look good on television. Then there was a great concern whether he should wear them at all or not. And he fought with the Teleprompter people. This went on for three or four months.

F: What was the basic problem, the appearance they gave him or the shine or what?

H: Well, he just didn't like himself with his glasses on, I guess. You know, it should of been of no great matter, but he made it into quite a state

problem. I can't remember who it was he brought in, he didn't go through any coaching--but he did have some people, "tell me what I'm doing wrong about my television appearances?"

F: As far as you know, did he listen?

H: Probably not. And it was unfortunate that he ever paid any attention to them. If he had just gone ahead and you know acted in his own way--there was really no sense in him getting all involved with that kind of problem.

F: As a fellow Westerner, did you feel that his somewhat southwestern references and figures of speech and so forth hurt him with the eastern press?

H: Yes, I suppose they did. There again I was on Johnson's side. The intellectuals, the academicians of the East, particularly, were so enamored of John Kennedy that they couldn't get over it when he was assassinated. Furthermore they tended to look upon the White House as the Palace of Fine Arts of the United States and they would go there to the big White House parties. The White House was sort of their headquarters during the Kennedy Administration.

Well, when Johnson came into office he served notice, at least by inference if not in actual words, that that era was all done. The White House was yanked back to being a political institution, and very much a political institution. So the academicians and the intellectuals were no longer there dancing until the wee hours of the morning. And they resented it. They resented it very bitterly. They began to attack Johnson very early, and I felt unjustifiably so.

F: Was he explicit in this change of procedure or did it just sort of grow?

H: I think it was rather explicit. He had some unkind words to say, I think within three weeks after he took office, about some intellectuals from New

York and some of the professors and the academicians who had been coming and going in the White House.

F: Now you had an advantage, you sat down with him on occasions personally and informally and man to man--then and you also of course saw him in big groups and you saw him on television--did he tend to alter his style. Is he more effective one way than another?

H: No.

F: Do you think he was self-conscious on TV?

H: Oh, I think he always worried about his appearance and his style. He was being criticized for it. One night at one of the dinners he said "I can't get the Texas twang out of my speech," he said, " I was born and brought up in Texas" and he said, "if they think I'm going to take elocution or diction lessons to get Texas out of my speech, they're crazy!" But it never annoyed me. I felt he was pretty straightforward in his television appearances. He did the best he possibly could. Of course, coming on right after Kennedy with Kennedy's great style and great flare, it was an unfair comparison.

F: In your telecasts nightly, you of course have to reduce a whopping amount of film to a manageable size, how do you do this?

H: We just take out those portions which seem to be most important--

F: Who is we?

H: Film editors and--

F: All right, now then, I'm a correspondent in Saigon or in Paris or somewhere. I load all my film and send it to you. What happens?

H: We look at what we call the rough cut.

F: Who is we?

H: That would be the film editor, at least one film editor--let's say I'm assigned to it to get it on the air that night--then it would be the film editor, myself and very likely one of the what we call film editors on the editorial side--not the mechanical film editors, but the editorial film editors who can also write to film. So the three of us will look at it. And furthermore--

F: Do you do that right up to telecast time.

H: Oh to within--yes, a half hour to forty-five minutes before air time, right. We take out what we think are the fundamental points, the salient points, of what there is on that film. There's certainly no attempt to spare anybody or make anybody look good, or go for angles or whatever--

F: You didn't give instructions for instance in Viet Nam, which is the overriding issue, to your people out there to get certain types of film? They got what they saw?

H: They got what they saw. I was always harping and yelling--and still am--through this many years on this. I feel we should do more constructive pieces and finally I've been having my way somewhat with that, showing more pacification, education and the constructive things that are going on at the same time that destruction is going on.

F: How do you handle the problem that action goes with destruction rather than construction?

H: Destruction is always more dramatic, of course. Sure, it's much more interesting to see a building being blown fifty feet in the air. So that I suppose it will never end. As BBC frequently says, "We're also in the bad news business."

F: In the '64 campaign were you at Atlantic City?

H: Oh, yes.

F: Can you give any insights into how that convention was managed?

H: I've never been one to subscribe to the notion that it was completely a Johnson-rigged one-man show. If it had been Bobby Kennedy would have never gotten on with that marvelous film of his brother, which you know just shook that whole convention to its emotional roots. I thought Johnson was completely gracious. The matter of seating the Mississippi delegation came up and I know Johnson deplored every minute of that debate which went on all week, but nevertheless it went on, and everybody had an opportunity to speak his piece.

Now otherwise, sure, the President came there. It was his night. He was going to accept the nomination and deliver the speech. Now this has been done repeatedly in our history since the time that Franklin D. Roosevelt flew out to Chicago and was the first man ever to attend a convention. So I don't understand why Johnson was so severely criticized for the allegation that he had rigged this whole thing.

F: Did you have the feeling that it would be Humphrey or did you have the feeling that Johnson was playing it truthfully close to the vest?

H: I think he was playing it very close to the vest and as we know now the decision was not made very far in advance of the convention. He was still sort of gravitating back and forth among about three different people.

F: In this sort of a situation where you don't know what's going to happen, or maybe in the case of Johnson's making the convention a Johnson triumph, do you plan one way or another--does that alter your basic--

H: No. We are prepared to play it as it goes. We have a full complement of people there, each one assigned to stay with a certain delegation or a

certain individual or a certain group. And they can keep us pretty well advised as to what is going on.

F: Is there a tendency to put your floor men, leg men, with people toward whom they're sympathetic or do you just assign them to people and let them go?

H: It works both ways. They're frequently assigned. Then other times they come back and tell the producer and director, "Look, I have so and so sitting here and I think I can get something out of him." No, I can't fault them on that. I don't think they go with those people with whom they ideologically agree.

F: It's generally agreed that Johnson received a better press in '64 than Goldwater. Was this because the candidate made a better press or do you think that the press felt that Goldwater was just not their kind of man?

H: I feel that Johnson just used the medium more effectively is all. I could see Barry Goldwater making a mistake almost every day of that campaign, saying something that was destroying him. I think he just has to conclude that he was his own worst enemy. The press didn't do it.

F: Did you make an attempt to show that these were Goldwater mistakes, or did you just throw them out and let the public decide they were?

H: All while the campaign was going on, as we get it in any campaign of course that you're being unfair to one or the other, but the letters--

F: That's about the best compliment you can get.

H: Sure. But the letters were answered and the telephone calls were answered and so Barry Goldwater, I know, heard it repeatedly that it was the things he was doing and saying that were--

F: All right, if I write in, which I didn't, and say you're slanting

this toward Johnson and against Goldwater, are you going to answer that?

H: That's answered, right. If it's a specific thing we deal with it. If it's just a general complaint you're reminded that the length of time during a campaign comes out the same and we have no control over what a candidate says.

F: Do you keep a log on how much time you give a man?

H: A very careful one.

F: So you do try to follow that equal time.

H: Yes. That is filed, as a matter of fact, with the FCC.

F: At what point do you decide that a man is a major candidate, George Wallace, for instance?

H: Well, certainly at the end of the nominating convention, and then any time after he's announced prior to the convention, if he's--

F: Does the FCC decide who is major--in other words if I announced on the anti-tidelands program in 1968 and demanded time, what would I have had to do to qualify.

H: If he has said that he is a candidate, then he's got to be regarded as one. But I believe now there is a certain specified date and I think it's about the end of January--

F: But that's not your decision, that comes from the FCC?

H: Right.

F: And they tell you as of a certain date this man gets the same time as anyone else.

H: You're quite right. It's pretty close to the New Hampshire primary.

F: Now then, in '68 you had of course--you mentioned New Hampshire, you had the New Hampshire primary which surprised everyone. I think probably

both Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Johnson. Was your office prepared for that sort of a McCarthy surge.

H: Oh, yes. We work with Quayle Polling Service very carefully, and Quayle had the figures pretty accurately, oh, twenty-four or thirty-six hours before the election up there. So we were pretty well braced for a big McCarthy vote in that primary.

F: So at that point then McCarthy becomes a man of equal worth as far as you're concerned, from a procedure standpoint?

H: Quite right.

F: Were you prepared for the March 31 announcement?

H: Not at all, absolutely not.

F: Where did it catch you?

H: I was just getting in my car in a parking lot in Miami, Florida. I'd been down there over the weekend doing some work. I just finished my dinner and came out in the parking lot and turned the radio on and heard that and I sat there in the parking lot holding myself together.

F: You didn't believe it, huh?

H: Didn't believe it.

F: Did that make any change then in your immediate newscasts over the next week or so.

H: No, no.

F: You just handle it as it goes?

H: That's quite right.

F: You didn't assign additional people to McCarthy or Robert Kennedy?

H: No, I should say not.

F: At the convention in '68, did you see evidence of the alleged heavy-hand

of Mr. Johnson on the convention?

H: Yes, I did a little bit in that I was quite certain that--

F: I'm not trying to sound like a newsman avoiding libel. I'm just trying to keep from leading the witness.

H: Sure. I don't know who influneced whom, but it was obviously an arrangement between Daley and President Johnson that that convention be held in Chicago. Daley wanted it there, and Mr. Johnson, I guess, was certainly not averse to it, although both had been warned months in advance that Chicago might be a very unlikely place to hold that convention. Because of all the colleges and universities around, it was centrally located and Chicago had kind of a bad reputation anyhow and it might be embarrassing. But I guess, at the insistence of both of them, that's why it was held there. Mr. Johnson I remember he was saying that "Look, Chicago is the ideal place because it's centrally located and there are indeed a lot of problems and we're going to face up to them."

F: Where did he say this?

H: He said that, oh, where did that come from--

F: Did he say it in your presence?

H: Oh no, no. He was quoted as saying it.

F: From a newsman's standpoint would Chicago be one of the superior places?

H: Yes, the facilities are good, hotel and--

F: Outside of the fact you had some strikes.

H: Normally, under normal circumstances Chicago was the ideal place for a convention.

F: So that the newsmen themselves were not annoyed with having to go to Chicago?

H: Oh no, no. We were certainly annoyed beginning about the Sunday before the Convention opened when it became apparent that there was some sort of warfare going on against journalists.

F: Can you give some specific instances of that warfare.

H: I'd just finished dinner that Sunday night before the Convention started and the restaurant happened to be right across the street from Lincoln Park. I came out and got in the car and the police--

F: Is that the Pump Room?

H: No. I've forgotten the name of it. But here came four or five hundred kids running across the street with the police chasing them and the photographer was standing there with ABC marked very clearly on his camera. And I saw the policeman come up and knock the camera out of his hands and club this newsman. So that was the first instance I saw of it. Then it became apparent as we tried to get out of this mess, with the traffic built up and we were stuck there and the police were--

F: Do you think that's lack of discipline, or over-zealous following of orders to keep the place tidy or what?

H: Fundamentally there was no reason in the world why Chicago should not have let the kids use Lincoln Park. They couldn't do any damage to Lincoln Park. They should have let them camp out or do whatever they wanted to. They wouldn't have hurt a thing. So over-zealousness sure, "Chase them out of Lincoln Park." Well, where are they going to chase them to? So the result was the cops chased them out of Lincoln Park and right down Michigan to Grant Park across the street from the hotel. That's how they happened to be there.

Then all the rough stuff on the streets, and there's no question in

my mind that there was some sort of premeditated campaign to keep the press from writing its stories and filming what was going on.

F: Was there any attempt made to keep you from getting your information out either by picture or word?

H: I know of no sabotage, cutting of lines or anything, but cameras were constantly being knocked out of photographers hands and they were being clubbed and pushed around and jostled and ordered--well there was one thing. We were not allowed to film on the street, given orders. We couldn't take a mobile truck, for example, any place we wanted to in the city.

F: Now ordinarily you don't need permits for that sort of coverage.

H: No, during a convention--

F: Then what excuse do you have in this case, as a Chicago city father, for restricting you?

H: There was a telephone strike on, you may remember, and they pleaded that they didn't have facilities. Well, we found out later that the telephone company was thoroughly prepared to give us all the facilities wanted. This was nonsense.

F: The telephone strike was just a coincidence, it wasn't planned?

H: No. That strike had been going on for quite awhile. The supervisory people were prepared to give us all the facilities we needed.

F: So from that standpoint there wasn't any problem.

Are you going to run for office?

H: No. I toyed with it.

F: I'm not trying to put you on the spot.

H: I thought of it at one time when Mike Mansfield said he was going to make this his last term. But since then Mike has said that he's not going to

be through this year and will indeed run again next year.

F: Did Mr. Johnson or his staff contact you following or during the Chicago convention to talk about the press coverage?

H: No, not at all.

F: You never heard anything out of them on that?

H: No.

F: Did you have any evidence that Johnson did in fact sit on his hands or even encourage the Nixon candidacy over the Humphrey candidacy?

H: I have no evidence of that at all.

F: In general, you've got a long distinguished career as a newsman, how would you, try to project, how would you evaluate LBJ as a President?

H: Well, his pride and his sensitivities are tremendous. He does not take criticism graciously. He responds to it very quickly.

I think there was another thing in Johnson's political philosophy, too. I think he was imbued with the idea that government could do somewhat more than it realistically can--that big governmental programs can make profound changes in our society. Possibly he got that notion in the early days of the New Deal when the New Deal programs did make some rather significant changes in rural life in Texas and in parts of the South. I don't think the New Deal programs did make very many profound changes in the industrial north. I have a conviction, that therefore Lyndon Johnson believed that massive government programs could work significant and profound changes and that about all you had to do was to come on in rather massive scale and just bulldoze problems out of the way--that government could do it. I think it was a somewhat overly simplistic approach and he may just have underestimated how deeply rooted some of these problems are,

that they're not going to respond to that bulldozer approach.

F: Some of his opponents claim that one reason for the black militancy is the fact that he was almost obscene in holding out hope which could not be realized. Do you think this was just something that had been building and came to a head during his Administration, or do you think he is guilty of holding out more--

H: This is part of it. I believe the man genuinely and sincerely thought that massive government effort could solve, let's say, the racist problem in America. Now the whole business of poverty really came up about the time that Johnson came into office.

You remember the way this anti-poverty program started. It is a fascinating story. Kennedy saw some evidences of white poverty over in West Virginia when he ran there in that primary. And one of his first acts was to appoint a commission to study Appalachia. Well, lo and behold, when the study came back and the report was made, the Kennedy Administration discovered that poverty in this country is largely black. It isn't white, and not much was done about it in the Kennedy Administration. Then Johnson came into office and had this same study, the same facts and figures, and decided that a massive government program could solve black poverty. Now I think the nation owes him a great debt here, in that Lyndon Johnson did indeed make this country aware of poverty, and we'll never get it out of our systems. We'll be fighting poverty for the next century in one way or another I suspect. But--

F: Do you think his commitment was emotional and not just purely political?

H: That's right. Largely emotional and out of civic concern and genuine civic interest. I don't think it was just a political tool. I think

that's too crass an interpretation to put on it.

F: Let's shift slightly and talk about something else that you have your own emotional commitment to from that beautiful book of yours. Stewart Udall and Lady Bird made this country--what it's been I suppose since Theodore Roosevelt--conservation conscious, but they put it on a plane I think from which there is no retreat now. Did you work with that story yourself?

H: Yes. I never went out on any of the trips with them, but I was adamant here in demanding that we get camera teams to go with them on a number of those trips. We had quite a bit of material on the activities of Secretary Udall and Mrs. Johnson.

F: Did they come to you for assistance at any time?

H: No, no, never. I sort of wrote them fan letters occasionally to encourage them.

F: Do you make film of areas that need conserving or anti-pollution films and so forth available to the government?

H: Oh everything we do is always available to the government, but upon request. We just don't automatically send it to them.

F: As far as you know did either Mrs. Johnson or Secretary Udall utilize any of it?

H: I don't know. It probably wouldn't come through me if they did.

F: Did Mrs. Johnson seem to show any direct appreciation in your efforts?

H: Oh, yes. She wrote me I think on three occasions thanking me for the coverage and the kind words we'd had about it--a project, or a trip she'd made.

F: Did you get the feeling that some members of the first family were watching

you every night?

H: Oh yes. That started with the Kennedy Administration, particularly Mr. Kennedy, Joe Kennedy. Oh, he'd call every other night and say "that was beautiful," or just give us hell about something.

F: Bringing up Joe Kennedy, I have picked up the information somewhere that Joe Kennedy was very interested in Lyndon Johnson as the running mate for his boy. Have you run across that?

H: No. I don't know anything about that. I haven't seen Mr. Kennedy since just before the election in 1960.

F: What sort of verdict do you think that history's going to place--this is guessing, you and I won't ever know whether you guessed right or not--what sort of verdict do you think history's going to place on Mr. Johnson as a President?

H: I think he'll come off rather well. This Viet Nam war will be put in a more proper perspective one of these days, I'm quite certain. It's just a horrible dilemma this country got into. It wasn't Lyndon Johnson's wickedness or callousness or carelessness that did it. It wasn't his pride that did it, a lot of other things. So as soon as the Viet Nam war is put in proper perspective, then Lyndon Johnson comes off I think very well.

F: What about Santo Domingo?

H: About the same thing. Here again I think he was following a little bit of the Kennedy doctrine about the Caribbean. He had to learn, as Kennedy had to learn, that a big nation simply cannot interfere with these little ones and come off unscathed.

F: Did you have any evidence that either the Bay of Pigs or the Missile

Crisis that Johnson as Vice President played any role whatsoever?

H: No. It would be minor from all I've read about it, and heard about it.

F: Back when he was Majority Leader he created the first space committee, which at that time was looked on half-way as a joke. Did--do you think he was just grabbing onto something, or do you think he did have some visions of what lay in space?

H: I think he had some visions. I think he was getting some very good advice from some scientists as to what lay in the future and what the needs of this country might be. That whole thing started back as early as 1944. There were a few scientists there who just kept hacking away at it and I'm quite certain that they had influenced Johnson.

F: Did you ever wish you had been a doctor?

H: No, I lucked out--

F: You don't want to go back and pick that up?

H: No.

F: All right. I think Mr. Huntley that about does it unless there's something you want to read into the record yourself.

H: No, that was relatively easy. But I'll tell you one thing about Lyndon Johnson, he's wonderful to talk cattle to.

F: You have done that.

H: Oh yes. He loves to talk about them.

F: You think he knows what he's talking about?

H: Oh yes, he really does.

F: Do you still keep a herd?-

H: Yes, I have a small herd of purebreds.

F: Where, in Iowa?

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By Chester R. Huntley

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