

INTERVIEW IV

DATE: February 27, 1984
INTERVIEWEE: J. WILLIS HURST
INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette
PLACE: Dr. Hurst's office, Atlanta, Georgia

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start with Senegal first.

H: Okay.

G: Let me ask you first to describe the circumstances under which you were asked to go along on the trip.

H: Well, as you know, when a vice president or a president travels, they often take with them a number of people. Staff people may go, maybe several, four or five. You may need advance people who have helped plan the trip that are also in the plane. There would be a number of Secret Service. Some of the trips would involve thirty people maybe, or more, and if Vice President Johnson was going to several countries and meeting with leaders in each country, he obviously had to keep the entire crew mobile. If you were in one country one day and going to be over in another country the next day for an official visit with the leader, then you can't say you'll be two hours late or three hours late. So they needed a physician on board for multiple reasons.

Walter Jenkins called me, as I recall, and said that they'd like for me to go to Senegal with them. It was an anniversary of the birth of that country, and they wanted to send an American representative to the celebration. Vice President Johnson was to be our country's representative. I was obviously chosen because of my previous relationship with President Johnson when he had his heart attack in 1955, and [because we] had retained that friendship and doctor-patient relationship during the remainder of his period

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when he was majority leader. So when he became vice president, they asked me if I would go with them, the first trip being the trip to Senegal.

As I recall it, we went through San Juan, Puerto Rico, then over to Senegal. Then I believe we were supposed to go to Israel, but the trip was cancelled because something was going on there. Then we went over to Paris, and Vice President Johnson met with [Charles] de Gaulle. Then, as I recall, we were at the airport in Germany. We then went to Ireland and to Labrador, so that in one trip we had gone from Africa to the frozen northern country.

The doctor's job on a trip like that was to keep the entire party mobile. I was chosen because of my relationship with Vice President Johnson back when he was majority leader. So that was the first trip.

G: What did you do in Senegal?

H: I recall Bill Moyers and I actually slept in a ship in harbor, and that was my first meeting of Bill Moyers. He was a major aide to Vice President Johnson at that time. Of course, Vice President Johnson met with the leader, whose last name was Leopold Sedar, who was, as I recall it, a poet before he became a politician. But it was to participate in the celebration of the birth of that country. Vice President Johnson, of course, spent most of his time with the leader of that country. The celebration included many things. The one that stands out is a track meet or sports event in which the finest of Senegalese athletes participated. They are really fine athletes. That went on one entire afternoon. I recall sitting in the bleachers with Vice President Johnson at that time. They had magnificent sports events, track, things of that sort.

G: What was he like in his person-to-person diplomacy with foreigners on this trip?

H: Of course he was, in my judgment, absolutely superb in person-to-person discussions with anybody, and that included foreign leaders and foreign people. On their own soil he

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could stop and talk with them. I don't recall him doing so on this particular trip, but in other trips where he'd stop in the countryside, even through someone had to translate the language, he would commonly point out that "people in our country want what you want. We want good food, we want shelter, we want our children to go to school, we want good clothes, we want freedom." They would all brighten up. You could tell that he could relate well to almost anyone.

I also was asked by him while I was there to survey a village out from Dakar. As I recall, the village name was Kayar, and the purpose of that was to see if it would be a good site for the Peace Corps. At that point Bill Moyers was assistant director, I believe, and Sargent Shriver was director. So I did survey this village and wrote a report for him, thinking that it had advantages and disadvantages, and I listed those.

G: Was this primarily for medical needs?

H: That's right. I looked at it regarding the status of sanitation and things of this sort.

Also at that celebration, they brought in the art work of the Senegalese people, and you saw them creating it in front of your eyes. Using relatively crude iron tools they were able to make magnificent wooden sculptures. They had native dancing. In fact, Bill Moyers and I had our pictures made with a couple of natives dancing there. As far as I know the purpose there [was] representing this country in what was an important birthday of the country.

We left there, and as I say, I believe we were to let down in Israel but plans were changed. We went to Geneva, Switzerland, and then to Paris, where he did meet with de Gaulle. In most instances--I think the only exception to what I'm about to say was in Senegal, where Bill Moyers and I slept on a French ship in the harbor because the town was just not big enough. Dakar was not big enough to have facilities for all the people that came. But other than that I was usually placed, as the physician for the group, within a room or two down from Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. So as I recall, that was true in Paris. He met with de Gaulle, and I recall Horace Busby was on that particular trip. Buzz had

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assisted the Vice President in many ways, and I distinctly remember Vice President Johnson saying to Buzz, "I've never been prouder of you," because of some help he'd given as an aide to him.

I think the rest of that trip was merely coming home. Certainly the landing in Ireland was just part of the hopscotching across the ocean. The Labrador [stop], I have a feeling, though I don't know our purpose there, I suspect it was on the way to a degree, but also where he was visiting a relatively isolated outpost of the air force or something of that sort. I certainly remember it was cold and iced over.

G: He often made it a practice of buying art in these various countries that he visited. Did he buy any art on this [trip]?

H: I don't recall it there in Senegal. I do recall him looking at it, I believe, in Paris. I think he did. I certainly remember it on some of the other trips.

G: When he would go on these trips, particularly this one, did he need any special medicine or pills or anything like that?

H: Oh, no. He was very vigorous. Of course, *Air Force One* had a bedroom for him and, as I recall, Mrs. Johnson, and he did rest in the plane. But he was a man, as I'm sure everybody that knew him realized, that could go for hours and hours and hours. He could work after about four hours' sleep, and then take some cat naps along. But he worked very, very hard.

I do recall on the trip home an interesting point. As I recall it, a congressman, I think by the name of [John J.] Rooney, maybe from New York--

G: That's right. Brooklyn, I think.

H: --was on the trip. Now, the reason President Johnson had asked him, at least as I

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perceived it, was that Congressman Rooney had been a bit critical of trips made by public officials. He had made some comments that got in the press or something of that sort. So Vice President Johnson just took him with him. And on the way back, Vice President Johnson got the attention of the entire party and said some very nice things about Mr. Rooney. Of course it had been a very hard working trip, and Congressman Rooney had seen how hard Johnson worked, and it was not one minute of enjoyment in the sense of frivolity. Enjoyment maybe in the sense of accomplishment, but Rooney saw hard-working people, the staff and everybody. So I recall Congressman Rooney saying how marvelous it had been to be on the trip and he wished his mother could know that he had been associated with Vice President Johnson. I think that he was pretty well convinced that what he had seen was hard-working people and that they were trying to put the best foot forward for the country they represented. And that was very moving, with, as I recall, tears appearing in the Congressman's eyes at the time.

Now the next--

G: Let me ask you one other thing on this. Anything else on LBJ's meeting with de Gaulle? Did he talk about de Gaulle? Were you there when they met? Did he feel that he'd accomplished what he wanted to do?

H: I think he felt pretty good about it. I think he was obviously, as they would say nowadays, up for his visit. I mean he was psychologically charged and ready, with his brain working quite well. Of course, I don't know the details of discussion at all, but I think that he seemed to feel that it went pretty well. And I judged that, too, because of his complimentary remarks to Horace Busby.

G: Oh, I see. Okay.

H: The next trip was to Greece, then to Cyprus, then to Turkey, then to Iran and Lebanon on that particular trip. There I do recall his anticipation of what would take place in each

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country. And of course, each member of the party was furnished with written material about the country. I presume the advance people who planned the trip had collected recent information, especially about what they anticipated the reaction would be to the Vice President, but stating simple but useful information, as [to] the size of the country, how many people were in the country, et cetera, a lot about the occupations and so forth. All of that, to me, of course was extremely interesting and something I could never have done otherwise.

But I do recall that he would be going along in a caravan, and again, my car would usually be one car back. Now I think that was planned very carefully, because should there be violence, then at least the physician was in the closest possible spot. By then I'd become friends with all the Secret Service people, Rufus Youngblood and all of them, and respected them enormously. They were extremely capable people.

But he would stop the car unexpectedly; no planning. If he saw a little group of people, he'd get out and meet them, shake their hand and try to converse with them, and again, try to explain to people that--

G: Would there be someone from the State Department to--?

H: Yes, oh, yes. As I recall [William J.] Crockett was the member of the State Department that was along.

G: Excuse me, you were saying try to explain to people--

H: He would try to explain to people what our country was, and always with the idea that our wants must not be very different from their wants, because he was talking about reasonable food, education for your children, good place to live, the wants that he thought were shared around the world.

G: Did he bring mementos or gifts to hand out to any of these people?

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H: Well, of course he gave little mementos to everybody. I do not recall him giving it to the group of natives maybe on the side of the road. He would always carry a gift to the head of state, of course. He participated, I think, in the choice of the gift, or at least it was discussed with him. It was not something that was done unilaterally by an aide. He was involved with it.

G: He went from Lebanon to Iran, is that correct?

H: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to recall what you can about his discussions with the Shah when he was there.

H: Right. Well, let me tell a couple of stories there. The first one is sort of an interesting one to me, and that is in Beirut. I believe we stayed in the Phoenicia Hotel. It was about time for dinner, and he said to us, "Go on upstairs and I'll be up in a little while." So we went up, and of course they had, as you would expect, an elaborate feast planned. He came up later. Paul Glynn, I believe, had a can of Campbell soup in a paper sack. He gave the can to the chef. He liked soup and didn't always take to the different tastes of different countries. So Paul Glynn gave the soup to the chef, and the chef heated it. The Campbell soup was served in a great big silver bowl, you know, and it was fabulous! Johnson was almost oblivious to such things as that. I mean, why not? That's what he liked, you know, and that's what he wanted to eat.

He, of course, met with the leaders of all these countries, and they would have state dinners, all of them. He was always kind enough to have me come, along with many others. Again, my room would often be not too far from his. He and Mrs. Johnson would ask me to come have breakfast with them and things of this sort.

Over in Iran, I've thought about that a lot. Rufus Youngblood was the head Secret

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Service [man] on the trip with us, most of the trips-- all of them, I guess--[with] Jerry Kivett, who lives nearby here now. But Rufus and I roomed together in the winter palace, which is in Teheran. The summer palace is out some distance. And we did go out to a social gathering there. At that time there was a lot of talk--from my vantage point I heard the good things that the Shah had done. Whereas everybody recognizes that there's still poverty, there's still problems, but I detected no intense hostility at that point in time. Of course my vantage point wasn't the same as others. I do recall that outside our window in that winter palace, which is in the city, guards walked up and down. I do recall that it was the only car I got into with the Secret Service, which would be one car behind his usually, in which there were machine guns on the floor of the car. I inquired a few times, "What's this about?" but it's all. . . .

I recall something else. George Reedy was with us, I believe, and became ill in a hotel in the middle of the city. He had gastrointestinal problems. So I somehow got there, I've forgotten how now, and decided what to do. I got him on the plane, because we were leaving, you see, in a few hours. That's the point, you've got to keep the people mobile. Even with gastrointestinal difficulties and so forth, they've got to move.

He [LBJ], of course, never had health problems on that trip. There was one trip, that I'll come to, when he did.

G: Anything on his personal relationship with the Shah? Did you have a chance to observe them together?

H: I vaguely remember at the social gathering, the Shah I'm sure was there, but I have hesitated to say absolutely. I mean, I'm sure he was, and I just have a mental picture of a green hill, of a lot of people, but I'm pretty sure that [included] the Shah and his new wife, and Mrs. Johnson.

We, of course, learned a lot about the problems that have existed in Cyprus and Turkey. In Turkey I distinctly remember how they teach soldiers how to read and write. Apparently some of them can join the army and not be skilled at reading and writing. We

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spent quite a lot of time looking at that. I'm not sure he was with us at that particular time, because sometimes I would go off with Mrs. Johnson to see some things, and at other times be with him. But they had developed a technique of identifying 90 per cent of the words used by the average Turkish citizen. They collected words used in barbershops and other shops. Then they developed a way of quickly teaching those words. From that the illiterate person could grow, and I was pretty impressed with that.

Again, I remember a dinner with one of the heads of state. A funny thing happened to me there, the only time it happened. We would go until we would almost drop, you know, and he would still be vigorous. I recall I had on my tuxedo, and was getting ready for the dinner and sat down, and in a little while Rufus was waking me up and said, "The party has left," you know. He came back after me. I had dozed off there while they all left me, but he came back after me, and I had to slip in.

G: I have a note that LBJ got sunburned in Iran.

H: Which trip?

G: On this one, 1962.

H: Was that in--?

G: August. It was in August.

H: Was that the Senegal one?

G: No, this is Middle East.

H: Let's see. I do recall--

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G: Maybe I'm on the wrong [trip].

H: I do recall him being sunburned on one trip. I don't know whether this is it or not.

In Senegal, back to that, he would get out with the natives in their little ships--it's a fishing village we were visiting out from Senegal. He would get out and deal with it. They were using Johnson motors, and I recall some comment made about the similarity of the name.

But over in Iran, the temperature was very hot and the crowds were wildly enthusiastic. The way they obtain water is to dig a well. It's dug by human beings. They use little boys about ten or eleven years of age. A little boy, who was down in a well, was chanting "John-son, John-son, John-son."

G: Really? Did he suggest improvements that some of these countries might make to modernize more?

H: Did I? Back in Kayar, out from Senegal--the one I was looking at for the Peace Corps--I guess I'd have to say I learned a lot, because people had tried to modernize their sanitation, their bathrooms and all of this, you see. And the experience to date had been that they would do that for a little while, then they'd quit doing that. It taught me the very slow pace of changing, in cultures of that sort, even something like sanitation.

Now I think the next trip, if I may move on, involved Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland. Again, he was meeting with the heads of states and was kind enough to invite me to dinner with them. I would make short trips when he was with the head of state and Mrs. Johnson was being involved. So I recall going to some of the art museums. We visited, as I recall it, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, [and] Delft, Holland. As usual, everyone received him and Mrs. Johnson with enormous enthusiasm.

I hate to jump back again to Senegal but each thing brings up something in my memory. I recall in the open court of the Embassy there that Mrs. Johnson gave a talk, a short talk. The Aga Khan's son was there, as I recall, for some reason. There was a

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balcony. They were up on a balcony with a number of people; the rest of us were down below. And if I'm not mistaken, that may well have been the first public speech of Mrs. Johnson. In the early days of his political life, she did not go to the stump herself so much, and I think her comments in Senegal, in Dakar in the Embassy, may well have been the first one.

Also in the various cities or countries, if there was an embassy there we went to it. He would call all the staff down and tell them how much the people of the United States appreciated them and the work they did there at the embassy, to the point, as only he could do it, and he meant it. He was a patriarch and devoted person to this country, and he could make other people feel it, and he would have those people that worked in the embassy in tears, feeling that they were doing something extremely worthwhile for this country.

G: Any recollections of Cyprus?

H: Yes, we went to Cyprus.

G: Do you recall any specifics there?

H: I recall he had me discuss with the Minister of Health some of their problems. I do not recall any other particular event.

In Geneva I do recall something that I think should be recorded, which came just after we left from Senegal. I don't recall the details, but I was told that my room was bugged.

G: Oh, really?

H: That's all I know about it. In Paris we were to go out to dinner, and we went to Maxim's first. I can't tell you why, but we all of a sudden, following him, he decided he didn't

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want to eat at Maxim's. So we went somewhere else. Then when we were there--

G: Why do you think he didn't want to go?

H: I don't know.

G: Where did he go instead?

H: And I can't recall the next restaurant, but this is quite important. It certainly was at the time. I noticed, after we were an hour and a half into the meal or something like that, that people were sort of leaving, and the next thing I know there's no one there but the Johnson party. Then we were instructed that there'd been some threat, I don't know whether it was a bomb threat or what it was. It was at a time when Algiers was in the news a lot, and I think it was related somehow to that. We were instructed to stand and gather around him. We left there sort of in a ball of people with him in the middle going out.

G: I'll be darned.

H: I don't know the details.

G: And this was at the second restaurant?

H: Yes.

Now through all of these trips that I've mentioned so far, he really had no particular health problem. The final trip I'll mention, he did.

Now, I must backtrack a bit. Our first trip to Italy occurred when we went to Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iran. I arrived in Washington the night before. I spent the night at The Elms. He wanted to take the Pope something that he'd like, so he

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decided to take maps. He had some relationship--I think he was on the board of *National Geographic* and so he was able to get the maps quickly. I met Pope John, our entire party did, and the Pope had something to say to each of us. He looked at the members of the staff that were ladies on the trip, and looked at Johnson and said, "I see you travel with angels." Everybody recognized his intense sense of humor. Then to me, when I was introduced as the physician, he simply said something like "Well, a physician must serve," which is true. When he was shown the maps, he began to look for Johnson City on the map, USA and Texas, Johnson City, so he knew exactly the background of Johnson.

G: Did the Pope have a good rapport with him?

H: Oh, yes.

G: Did they get along well?

H: Oh, yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

The second trip to Italy was when Pope John XXIII died. Johnson was to represent the United States. Johnson really was sick on that trip. My diagnosis was kidney stone, which turned out to be correct. The Pope's funeral lasted quite a long time, and you'd get up and down quite a lot, and he really was hurting badly with kidney colic *all* during this time. We only went to Rome on that trip. Then on the way back he was still hurting, so I radioed in to the hospital and talked with some physicians, got the message to them or talked to them. I've forgotten now whether it was direct or indirect, but I got the message to Dr. [R. O.] Canada, who was chief of medicine out at the Bethesda Naval Hospital at that time. Johnson later went in to have a pyelogram to study his kidney.

But basically during the trips he had no heart trouble. The only health problem he had was that of the kidney colic.

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G: Was there any medication that you could give him to mitigate the pain of it?

H: Yes. Of course now I should have said earlier that in preparing for a trip when you've got a lot of people and you don't know what's going to come up, that I had made a good list of all the kinds of equipment, all the kinds of drugs, everything that I would need in any isolated part of the world. So I had medication that would relieve his pain that he needed throughout that trip. As I recall, the pain started either on the way over or just after we got there.

G: Did that affect his mood, how he felt physically?

H: Well, obviously he was in great pain, and it did. At the same time, he really could tolerate his health problems, I'd have to say, in general better than most people think he could. I mean, he went through the activities, which was in itself not relieving it by any means, and this went on for hours really.

G: Were there any trips that he didn't want to go on?

H: I don't recall it. I don't recall it. I think I made all of his trips with him except two. There was a Scandinavian trip that I just could not make, and because of the kidney colic bit I recommended they take someone with him that was expert in that. Then there was a trip around the world that I did not make. But I think, in all, we probably visited fifteen to twenty countries. I'll have to add them up to see. He was tireless and well received as far as I could see. There was nothing in the paper ever other than welcome.

G: Well, I know you have an [appointment].

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview IV

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