

INTERVIEWEE: SAM E. KINCH, SR.

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

June 3, 1970

F: This is an interview with Mr. Sam E. Kinch, Sr., in my office in Austin on June 3, 1970. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

Sam, when did you first get to know Lyndon Johnson?

K: I was down here on a leave of absence in '38 and got to know him but not to cover him.

F: Were you working for the Star-Telegram then?

K: I took a leave of absence. I was working for Ernest Thompson in his race for governor.

F: In that famous campaign!

K: And also Judge Critz in the run-offs. But I was with the Star-Telegram at the time.

F: Did you make a regular thing out of taking leave during campaign years?

K: No, I did that in '38; and then I foolishly did it in '46, worked for Grover Sellers, but I think after that the paper kind of decided--

F: That's when Sellers ran against Rainey and Coke Stevenson.

K: Not, it wasn't against Stevenson--Jester.

F: Jester, right.

K: In fact, they were all trying to get Coke to put in a word for them.

F: That's right.

K: He didn't want to do it.

F: You took part in two interesting campaigns.

K: Yes.

F: This is not entirely on our subject--I'm just curious--when did the

Colonel Thompson begin to take Pappy O'Daniel seriously, because I was one, and I'm sure you were one, that thought he was a joke at first.

K: I think everyone did.

F: It's was difficult to find anyone who was voting for him until they all came out to vote.

K: Oh, I don't know. He never would admit that he was scared, but I think he realized about 10 days before that there was trouble in the woods for somebody. It turned out to be trouble for everybody. But he was pretty realistic and he knew something was happening.

F: You came down here in '38, then, and what did you do, just meet Johnson casually? He would have been campaigning for Congress that year, for his first regular term.

K: Yes, I was busy and of course he was and not here too much of the time, but I met him. That's all. I think I had met him when he was running the NYA earlier, but only in a casual sort of way. I was working in Fort Worth at the time.

F: Did you cover the '41 special election for the Senate when he ran against Pappy O'Daniel.

K: Just parts of it.

F: You didn't get to know him particularly well then, either?

K: No. We didn't do as much coverage in that campaign there were so many of them--I believe that's the one--yes.

F: That was the one that Pappy squeaked out at the last minute. It looked as if Johnson had won.

K: I remember when Johnson won, too. I was sitting out in his backyard.

F: This was the '48 one, when he won that squeaker over Coke Stevenson.

And you were out there on Dillman?

K: Yes, as I say, I hadn't covered a whole lot of campaigns. It was just kind of a matter of convenience. They wanted somebody here and somebody out at Stevenson's Ranch. I happened to be here and they sent me over there.

F: When did you come to Austin on a full time basis?

K: To live January of '47.

F: So you had moved into the Congressman's district then by that time.

K: Yes.

F: Had you seen much of him prior to his announcement for the campaign?

K: No, no, honestly I couldn't say I had.

F: So you knew him much about like you did other politicians over the state.

K: Yes, a political figure.

F: Now, how did the Star-Telegram decide in those days whom to support? Was it Amon Carter's decision, or did you do it as a board?

K: They usually had a conference of Mr. Carter and Mr. North, Mr. Record --and sometimes some of the hired hands. Mainly of course they paid more attention to Mr. Carter's opinion, as they naturally would.

F: Did he have pretty strong feelings on Johnson one way or another that you could ascertain?

K: No, I don't think he did at that time. I think later he got to be pretty friendly with him. I don't think he did then though.

F: To a great extent the Star-Telegram is a paper that opens up a whole funnel to the West--

K: It used to. At that time, it did more than it does now. Transportation problems have changed a lot of that.

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F: Did that make any difference in whom you supported? In other words, did you tend to support area candidates, or did you just go for the best man regardless of where he came from?

K: I think they usually just picked out what they thought was the best man. I believe possibly the area thing might have had something to do with it when Preston Smith first ran for Lieutenant Governor. He, of course, had been pretty friendly to Texas Tech and so had Mr. Carter. There wasn't anybody else in that race they particularly liked, so they supported him. Of course, he lost, but I think possibly the geography--

F: He didn't stay lost!

K: No, the geography had something to do with that one I'm sure. Ordinarily it was just like anybody else, they just picked out what they thought was the best man.

F: Byron Utecht was already here when you came?

K: No, Byron had been here for a long time. During the war years they moved him back into Fort Worth because there was very little done here, and they needed man power. Then he all of a sudden resigned in '46--just got up and left one day. For some time they said they weren't going to fill this place. In fact, I sold a house on the basis of that and bought another one. Then about the first of December or the middle of December they said to get ready to move down here in '47.

I knew Byron. I had known him through the years. I went to work for the Star-Telegram in '34 and, of course, up until he left in '46 we had telephone communication. I never did work with him, except--

F: Now didn't he come back to cover the campaign in '48? I picked up that notion somewhere. Who followed the candidates around mainly for the Star-Telegram?

K: In '48?

F: You told me you had gone to the two national conventions.

K: Yes, and covered part of the national campaign that fall. Charlie Boatner covered some. I believe Bob Wear was still with us--I think he covered some.

F: What did you do, just sort of go out in succession, kind of follow a sequence on that?

K: No. As I recall, it was just a matter of trying to keep everything covered at least part way and just a matter of who was available.

F: Do you try to make all these speeches, or just the high-lighting ones? I realize that the whole format is changed now, but in '48 most of it was done by stumping the state.

K: Yes, and the reporters had to take notes, too--the old-fashioned way. We didn't have any tape recorders or things like that. Yes you had to pretty well stay with him naturally to make deadlines. You had to pick you out one he had already made and do your story of it. But then you had to go to every other one to be sure something better did turn up or protect against the next day.

F: Was Johnson always pretty good at laying out his route of travel so that you could plan?

K: As I recall it, he was. Of course twenty-two years is a long time back. As I recall, he was at that time I guess more of a candidate in the term that he was looking for help--he wanted to cooperate--than he got to be later on.

F: I was thinking when General Walker ran for governor here a few years ago, no one ever knew when he was going to make a speech. You couldn't find out from his headquarters! But you didn't encounter that kind of difficulty?

K: No. As I say, the President was pretty cooperative at that time, and he had a pretty good bunch working for him.

F: Would they crank out in those days advance copies of his speeches.

K: They always tried to do that, at least get out a release. They'd try to give you an advanced copy of a speech. Of course, he was just like a whole lot of the candidates, he didn't stick to them sometime, but they would stand behind them--if he said he said it we'd just go ahead.

F: Because the meat might be in his ad-libbing.

K: Of course that's true of all candidates, I suppose.

F: On something like that, would the Star-Telegram pretty studiously try to give equal coverage to Johnson and to Stevenson?

K: Yes.

F: So that you really had two men out at all times?

K: I'm trying to think--yes--and sometimes more. Bob Hicks was in one of those campaigns--I guess it was '41. I believe he was working with the editor on the editorial page by the '48 campaign, but he was in the '41 campaign and covered quite a bit of it. I believe that was the one where O'Daniel put Sam Houston in the Alamo he covered that speech.

F: Did Johnson ever come up to the Star-Telegram office?

K: Yes.

F: What--just glad-handing?

K: He would, of course, naturally go see the executives, but he'd walk through the newsroom and try and meet the people. As I say, of course at that stage he was trying pretty hard. He was kind of like one of those hungry athletes--or Avis, you try harder. But he had run for Congress several times and knew the ropes, knew the way. Of course, in the '48 campaign he knew whatever he had done wrong in '41.

F: What had he done wrong in '41?

K: I don't know that he had done anything. I shouldn't say that, I guess. But if there were any mistakes he knew of them. He kept a watch on all the vote counting machines for one thing.

F: He learned about that. Did you personally ever do any sleuthing around George Parr's empire?

K: Yes. Not at that time. I did it considerable later. I'm trying to think now--John Ben Shepperd was down there trying to find out about Parr's controls when the voters down there claimed they couldn't get votes counted or couldn't get recognized.

F: That was under Shivers?

K: Yes. I think Dawson Duncan and I went down there about eight weeks in a row and just lived in that hotel in Alice. But that wasn't in connection with the Johnson-Coke vote count.

F: Was that a strong-arm operation, or is it just the force of one man, kind of moral force?

K: I think it's just the old padron system. His daddy before him did it. They just looked after all those Mexicans, and he's the boss. If he tells them something, why they know they better do it. I don't think they do too much of the strong arm. The way I heard they voted

was just give them a ballot marked before they go in and they bring out a blank one for the next guy.

F: Oh, I see.

K: I've never been a witness to this.

F: It seems to work. I'll say that.

K: If they don't do that, they've got some awful good counters.

F: Did candidate Johnson ever complain about your coverage to your bosses?

K: No, not as a candidate. He complained later, I believe when he was Vice President--either Senate Majority Leader or Vice President.

F: Why would he have done that?

K: I wrote a column that more or less downgraded his position, I guess, or his effectiveness and the power he had. He called Jack Butler, our editor, and complained about it. Jack wanted me to call him and so I did. He talked for, I guess, 30 or 40 minutes.

F: Actually you didn't cover him though.

K: No, he was in Washington.

F: Okay, you get him elected Senator. Now then, we know the general outlines of the story from there until he gets to be a vice president. Did you cover those conventions in '52 and again in '56 in which you had that fight between the so-called Texas Regulars and Texas Loyalists and whether they were going to go down the line with the ticket if it were Stevenson or whether they were going to bolt?

K: Yes, you're talking about the state convention?

F: Yes.

K: I covered national, too, but I covered the '52 and '56--or were you talking about the '48 and '56?

F: I was thinking about '52 and '56. Those were the ones. In '48 had the States Rights Party. Did that split the Democrats particularly as far as you could tell, or was this just matter of--

K: It just made a split, it didn't particularly disturb things, I don't believe. As you recall, they didn't have any trouble carrying the state. I think they got 70 percent or 65, so they didn't really make a big hole in them, although Thurmond came over here and campaigned. I think four or five of us flew around the state with him and covered about six speeches. But they didn't make much of a show.

F: Now, when you get up to '52 then, this is crucial because the question of whether Texas will go Republican for the first time since the days of Al Smith. What was it like up there in Amarillo?

K: Shivers had pretty good intelligence, pretty good control. He told a number of us on the way over to the convention that morning how it was going to come out, what the vote was going to be, and he wasn't far off either.

F: He had that one sewed up. Could you see an effort following that on Rayburn-Johnson's part to get the control away from Shivers?

K: They started then, and of course they made it in '56, but--

F: What did they do, just work people?

K: Yes, well actually they--Johnson had been more of a moderate I guess and had appealed to a lot of conservatives. Rayburn, of course, had the liberals, and they just kind of formed a coalition there and took away enough votes from Shivers to win it.

F: Was there a feeling at the time of the convention that this coalition wasn't going to hold?

K: In the '56 one?

F: Yes.

K: Yes, it was pretty loosely pasted together.

F: How did they get Frankie Randolph in as national committeewoman over Johnson and Rayburn?

K: That was just part of the stuff they had to do. They had to take it. I believe Mrs. Bentsen was the nominee at that time--and was the choice of the party if I'm not mistaken. Somebody brought up the charge that she or her husband had supported Shivers ticket in '52, although I don't think it was correct. But they did have a lot of friends in that camp, and that was the only way that Rayburn could hold them together--was to take their choice. I don't know that he had one anyway. The liberals were real eager so he was going to let them think they won something--and they did; they put them a national committeewoman.

As I recall, Byron Skelton was still in then. He had started out as a liberal, but I think by that time was some question which camp he was in. And I don't think he and Mrs. Randolph always saw eye to eye.

F: Did you see much of Johnson in his Senate years, back here in Austin?

K: Not a whole lot, periodically--

F: Did he come around the press room any?

K: Yes, he would do that every now and then just on a hand-shaking tour.

F: Visit a few minutes and go on.

K: I remember one time right after he had had his kidney stone operation he came up there and spent about an hour looking around the place.

F: Did the newsmen look on him as pretty good source of news, or is this just something they had to put up with?

K: That's kind of a hard choice to make. He was usually a pretty good source of news. Of course again like a lot of politicians, most of it was self-serving. He'd come look you up if he had something he wanted in print. Sometimes if he didn't want something in print he was pretty hard to find. But he didn't invent that either.

F: He's been accused, in the eastern press at least, of chewing out newspaper men. Did you ever see any evidence of it here in Austin?

K: I can't recall. As I say, he chewed me out on the phone, but I don't--

F: What did he do? Did he just want to know why you'd write that, or where you'd get an idea like that?

K: Yes, I had said something about--oh, I forget. I guess it was a careless choice of words. I said "took the relatively impotent job of vice president," or something like that or whatever it was --maybe it was Majority Leader at that time. He said it wasn't so dern weak, and he rattled off a bunch of things he'd done for Texas.

F: You knew you had one reader anyhow.

K: Yes, I didn't know we circulated up there. No, I don't recall any people that he really chewed out. I heard that he did on the local papers, though. Of course this is getting pretty close to home. I guess he probably kept up with that more than any other--

F: And probably feels like a cousin to that group.

K: Then after he got to be President--I guess even while he was Vice President--he started to try to get this low pitched voice, this even--I guess he went to school or something. But he tried not to lose his temper. Of course he did lose it, but he tried not to show it. He would still complain to people and, what you say, chew them

out but not like he did in the old days.

F: Did you go to Los Angeles?

K: Yes.

F: Did you think Johnson had a chance?

K: No, I didn't.

F: Did you have any inkling he might get the vice presidency?

K: No.

F: How did you get the news?

K: I got the news out at the airport.

F: Were you fixing to come home?

K: Paul Bolton, who worked for Johnson's TV station, he and I were out at the airport catching a plane when we heard it on the radio.

F: What did you do then?

K: Nothing. Boatner, he was covering it, and he was still there, so he covered it.

No, Mr. Rayburn had indicated the night before that he wouldn't --that it would be over his dead body if Johnson took it.

F: Had you seen Rayburn personally?

K: No, but I talked to Ed Jameson who was with our Washington Bureau and he had talked to him.

F: What do you think made him switch?

K: I don't know. You've heard the President tell it as many times as I have. About all you can take is his word, I guess. I suppose it is pretty hard to turn down.

F: Did you see Mr. Johnson at all in the Los Angeles convention?

K: Oh, yes.

F: In scheduled press conferences, or informally?

K: One of those, and I think he came to a couple of the caucus meetings,

delegation meetings. And he was going around to the various delegations to speak, and I think we followed him on a couple of those tours.

F: Was the press allowed in caucus meetings?

K: Yes. They may have had some that were closed, I don't know, but ordinarily speaking they were, yes.

F: So you could pretty well get an idea of who stood where?

K: Yes, you could pretty well tell. In fact, I think very few of them went anywhere unless they thought they had a chance of scoring. They weren't going to waste their time.

F: Now, you get around a great deal. Was the feeling against Johnson as virulent as it seemed for having accepted the vice presidency?

K: It was right at first, it sure was. He got called some pretty sharp names.

F: Did you work on this sort of thing as a newsman, tracing down how various people change in their opinions or how they stand?

K: You mean like Johnson did, or like some of the supporters?

F: Like some of the supporters did.

K: No, I didn't pursue it to that extent, as I say, I was about gone when it happened. But I think things started cooling off fairly soon. He started making speeches. I believe I went out and covered one out by Stonewall when he went to a homecoming or reunion or whatever they have. I think he made his big pitch for understanding of why he had done it. It was a pretty important speech for a little bitty town.

F: Your beat, so to speak, is the State of Texas, and more particularly the Capitol of Texas. What does it do to you to have a vice president of the United States coming from your home working area?

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K: I don't suppose it does a great deal as far as the work here; it's mostly in Washington. Of course having one that lives this close to Austin made a difference. You had to pay more attention to him, and he was here oftener than he would have been anywhere else.

F: Now when he came to Austin--of course, he was Vice President first, and the Vice President doesn't command quite the press attention that the President does--did Washington correspondents follow along with him, or did they pretty well leave it to you local men to supply the news?

K: I don't think very many of them came down here when he was Vice President. On, now and then somebody would want some particular story, and they'd come down.

F: But in effect when he came to this Austin area as Vice President, he was your baby as far as the Star-Telegram was concerned?

K: Yes, and more or less altogether when he was President, too. And, of course, we had two and a half men here. I don't want to say half, one half timer and two full timers. We had to just drop everything else and cover him when he came into town.

F: By the time he was President, of course, you periodically were setting up a real press corps here.

K: Yes.

F: Driskill or somewhere. Is there any kind of a pooling arrangement? In other words, do you find yourself doing more work because of the presence of the outside press than you would ordinarily?

K: No. You just have to go to all of them regardless. In fact, you did do more because you've got some editors who are looking at wire service copy and the wires want to justify their trips so they can

cover everything he puts out in a handout. And to protect yourself you've got to do the same thing, even though you don't consider it newsworthy. So I guess to that extent you do more work.

F: Does the outside press show any interest in working with you for background, fill-in and so forth, or do they come feeling pretty confident in what they know and are more interested in "now" than in "how come?".

K: They were pretty interested in checking with us to get background material that they couldn't have, you know, about local situations--or state. And they were pretty cooperative in helping us--some of them were; some of them weren't. Of course that's true. There were quite a few of them that were very cooperative and also very eager to find out things. They'd come across a story here that might involve Texas politics and they wouldn't have any idea in the world what they were talking about. You know, they wouldn't understand the reason for it.

F: Did the so-called Yarborough-Connally feud intrigue them?

K: The press?

F: Yes.

K: I don't think so. Oh, the fact that they were here in town--they'd ask you about it and stuff like that but they didn't get too excited about that.

F: You wouldn't describe the notion that I've heard expressed that one reason they started having the press quartered in San Antonio some was to get it away from here where the Yarborough-Connally feud was more evident.

K: No, I don't think so. Of course, I've heard a lot of things, one of

which was mice in the rooms at the Driskill. But there was another angle--I think the President got kind of tired of being hounded all the time. He couldn't come to his office over here without everybody flocking around him and covering the building. I think by putting them in San Antonio and him at the Ranch, he could come here anytime he wanted to, and they might find out about it or they might not.

I think it was more a convenience.

F: As far as you could tell, did the press care which city it went to?

K: No, as a matter of fact I think probably they were glad to go there, to San Antonio, because they were getting a little tired of Austin--and it was something new.

I don't know whether you remember it or not, but the President came in here a time or two and picked up his daughter and would go to lunch or something like that. And the first thing you'd know there'd be 50 reporters on top of them, and I just think he got tired of it. He didn't mind seeing them if he had anything to say, but seeing them all the time was a little more than he wanted. And he wanted to come to Austin.

F: Did they make extra travel for you when the press stayed in San Antonio.

K: Yes. We just moved in a hotel over there. And then if we weren't doing that, we'd have to drive to watch him take off at Randolph [AFB].

F: Was there any sort of a formula as to whether news was released here or at the Ranch? In other words, did they try whenever possible to have their news conferences here so that you would save all that extra travel?

K: Yes. Of course, you didn't get very many conferences with him. They

put out all the releases here and even when--

F: But you didn't have to go out to the Ranch to see Bill Moyers or George Reedy or somebody like that?

K: No. Once in awhile they'd have one mainly because the press asked for it--have one out there and get to see the President that way. But 90 percent of the time they were putting everything out here or over in San Antonio at the hotel over there.

F: Did you get the feeling that there was kind of an eastern press establishment that was just by nature anti-Johnson?

K: I've read that so much I guess I don't know whether I had the feeling, or it's just been drummed into me.

F: You and George Romney, you've been brainwashed?

K: No, I think for one thing a lot of them were big Kennedy fans, and they looked on Johnson as something new or different, or maybe not Kennedy. The rest of the Kennedy family wasn't enthusiastic about him, and I think that probably contributed. And maybe there was an anti-Johnson thing. I've heard it said so much that I kind of believe it. I think it was mostly tied to the Kennedy thing, though. I know a lot of them looked on him as--oh it's a bad term I guess, but it's the only one I can think of--crude maybe; maybe not as smooth as you ought to be in the presidency. I know that came up out in Los Angeles even, before he was nominated for vice president.

F: Did you have any intimations around here that he wasn't going to run again?

K: No.

F: This was capitol press corps gossip?

K: Not any gossip around here and I don't think there was in Washington.

F: Have things quieted somewhat around here now since he's no longer President?

K: Yes, it's a good bit different. Of course, I suppose he's still news. I'm not working there anymore, you know, but I suppose when he comes to town there's still some furror about it--not as much. You know he had a press conference here not too long ago and everybody that could went down to his office.

F: Was there some sort of a local accreditation, or could anybody come to a press conference?

K: You had to get accreditation through the Secret Service.

F: When they met in the Driskill, then, I would have had to have made my application in advance and show whom I represent--

K: You were supposed to, yes. Actually as it turned out it didn't always work that way but that was the--they put out one of those things that you hang on your coat for every trip and you were supposed to have one of those to be in that room.

F: Even though you're a local person you still--

K: Still had to get one.

F: As far as you could tell, did he tend to play favorites with newsmen or did he treat them all about equally?

K: They said he put out some leaks at times to friends. During their visits here, I know of several occasions when individual reporters had been taken out to the Ranch and nobody else got there, but what it was for I don't know.

F: Did the press get pretty sore about it?

K: Oh, they couldn't very well get sore because they'd do the same thing if they got the opportunity. But there was a little favortism involved.

- F: You know John Connally as governor didn't always follow Johnson's policy on a national line--did you ever get any first-hand evidence of Connally's sort of disaffection for some of Johnson's policy?
- K: Yes, I don't know that he has publicly, but I think he's made it pretty evident a time or two that he wasn't in agreement. But he never did get out and buck him or anything.
- F: He never did talk to you about it?
- K: I think he has maybe said something a time or two that he didn't agree and [I] didn't know why he did that.
- F: Off the record?
- K: Yes. I was up in Chicago when Connally nominated him, so I don't think Connally ever did stray too far from him, except maybe on theory or principle or something like that. But they never did get very far apart.
- F: How did your job change between the time you first came here in the '40's and when you retired here recently?
- K: I don't know. I guess just like everything else, just bigger government and more of it.
- F: Did it get more complicated, get easier?
- K: A lot more complicated, and a lot more legwork involved.
- F: Despite all the Xerox machines, huh?
- K: Yes. They've put up about five or six buildings down there in that complex since then for one thing.
- F: Are people, higher echelon people, less accessible than they used to be?
- K: To the extent that they're spread out more. You can usually get them on the telephone, and sometimes you want to talk to a fellow face-to-face.

If you do, you've got maybe a walking trip or a riding trip--they're scattered all over town.

F: Did you ever have private interviews with Mr. Johnson at any level?

K: Not an interview, no. When he was here--on one of his first trips here--

F: This was after he's President?

K: Yes. He and Bill Moyers--and I don't know why--they picked me up and took me to the room--

F: In the Federal Building?

K: No, in the Driskill Hotel. He didn't have a place in the Federal Building yet.

Bill was going to put out some releases, some handouts, and he gave me a couple of them. And to that extent I had an exclusive for about four or five or six minutes, I guess. He did some talking at that time but he--but not of an interview type.

F: Did he talk pretty freely?

K: Yes.

F: Did you find in a small group like that that he tended to open up considerably more?

K: Yes, he did. And out there at the Ranch when he got through with his press conference and was off the record, he was real agreeable and friendly and would talk. Of course, it was off the record, and he made it plain that it was. If he didn't, some of his people did. He tended to be pretty human when he got into a small group.

F: You mentioned awhile ago you didn't know whether the eastern press was antagonistic or whether you'd heard it so much you began to believe it. This must happen sometimes with off-the-record information.

You've got the information and you must have a little problem in your own mind in a sense keeping it segregated from public information.

Do you ever inadvertently sort of leak things that you shouldn't?

K: Oh, I don't think anybody does on purpose, although they might. But that's the reason most people would rather not get off the record information. I know I have. I prefer not to have it if I can't--.

But there are little things like what I meant about the President. He's talking about personal things or family things or something like that and you could understand why he would want it off the record. I don't know if there were every any violations.

F: I presume that when Sam Jr. followed in your footsteps--well I know he went with the Dallas News in Washington--that President Johnson was aware he was your boy.

K: Yes, we talked about it out at the Ranch one time at one of these informal press conferences, and I mentioned it to him and Mrs. Johnson about the second generation covering him, and they laughed and joked about it. He knew about it, yes.

F: I haven't talked to Sam [Jr.] yet about this, I don't know much direct experience he had, or whether he got there a little late.

K: He was sort of a back-up man on the White House. He didn't cover too much of the White House.

F: I guess Baskin did most of it.

K: He and Karen Kleinfelter.

F: On the female side particularly.

K: Sam went on some of them. He made some trips but it was just stuff where they'd get word and have just a short time to get to Andrews Air Force Base--about the only time he ever got to go but he did cover

it some.

F: Did you cover the campaign of '60 in Texas?

K: Yes.

F: Did you make any of these teas that Mrs. Johnson and the Kennedy women held?

K: No, I think we had somebody, but I believe we had a girl. I can't remember who it was.

F: You were spared that, huh?

K: Yes. We had Kennedy down here, you know, and I covered him. I believe he made a speech on the Capital grounds.

F: How did that seem to go to you? Did it make any particular problems or incidents for you?

K: No, just work. Then he came back down here, I think, for a little vacation after the election, and I believe he went out here and shot a deer at the Johnson Ranch. There were a lot of bad jokes made about that.

F: How so.

K: [He was] kidnapped there with Lyndon with a rifle.

F: Oh, I see. Where were you on that day that Kennedy was assassinated? Did you make a portion of that trip? Were you in Fort Worth?

K: Yes, I went down to San Antonio and got aboard there.

F: You picked it up there.

K: And covered the speech in Fort Worth--the breakfast speech.

F: Were you in Houston.

K: Yes, we were in Houston--San Antonio, Houston and then Fort Worth. Bob Hilburn was there. He was with our Washington bureau at the time. He and I were covering it and we were in about the second press bus--which is about twelve vehicles back. I know when the actual shooting started

we couldn't even see around the corner. We weren't sure what had happened for awhile.

F: The Fort Worth part, I judge, went off quite well.

K: Yes, real good. Both of them got over good--she did and he did, too.

F: Kennedy tended to stick to schedule fairly well, didn't he?

K: Yes, he tried. He was very good. And he had a long prepared speech that he seemed pretty interested in and it was a good speech. It had some policy on, oh say, airplane production, for instance, which is of interest in Fort Worth. And he said every word of it, too. He was very good about that.

F: How, on something like that--you don't keep the President waiting, so you cover him there in Fort Worth at breakfast and then the next thing is to show up at Love Field and to have a parade--

K: We went out to Carswell and got on the airplanes and flew over. I don't know why they flew those jets 25 miles.

F: They saw to it that the press got off first and landed first so they'd be there ahead of him?

K: Of course you have to cover those speeches ahead of time, and that wasn't any particular problem to me there in Fort Worth. I didn't have to file; I just sent it over--I had a messenger send it over to the office. I think I dictated it as a matter of fact.

F: Over the phone?

K: Yes. We started out with an enormous story, banner headlines and all my coverage of the speech, and the farther it went that day it kept getting shorter. By the end of the afternoon I don't think there was any of it left.

F: I can imagine.

K: They sent about seven reporters and three or four photographers over from Fort Worth as soon as they got word of the shooting.

F: What did you do during that period from the time--you in the bus knew something was happening? You could tell that?

K: Yes. We went on to the Trade Mart there.

F: But still not knowing what had happened.

K: On the way in some crying gal was saying something about they had shot Kennedy and Connally. We went on in and I believe we had been there only a very short time when they made the announcement that there had been a shooting. We had a hard time finding out how to work on something like that. Hilburn went on up to the hospital, and I stayed there. They wanted me to kind of direct some of these people places when they got there from Fort Worth, so I stayed at the Trade Mart for a long time.

F: I presume that the Trade Mart cleaned out pretty fast of everyone who had come to lunch.

K: Oh yes, all except the reporters, and there were quite a few.

F: It had become kind of an unofficial headquarters then?

K: No, but it did for some of us--a lot of us. You see, they had set up all these phones in anticipation of the White House press needing coverage facilities, so it was pretty easy to telephone.

F: It made a good working spot.

K: We had these people come over from Fort Worth and had to give them directions on where to go and stuff like that. They could tell me, for instance, when they arrested Oswald and all that stuff. He was from Fort Worth as you know. They had a file on him. They had a

file on him. They had a pretty good identification and story started before they ever got him in jail, I think.

F: Had you known Ruby?

K: No, had never seen him or heard of him.

F: He was strictly a Dallas character--didn't operate outside?

K: Yes.

F: How long did you stay at the Trade Mart?

K: Oh, I stayed there and did a little story the best I could. They wanted me to do something. I guess I left there about 6 or something like that--6:30, and went up to Love Field and caught an airplane down here. No, I left there--didn't get away from the airport until 10:30. I don't know what time I got away from the Trade Mart. Hilburn went on back to Washington with the press plane whenever it got ready.

F: No great problems getting reservations or seats?

K: No. Just went out to the airport and got on--lucky.

F: Something I've never checked out--I wonder if a lot of people cancelled?

K: I don't know.

F: Out of fearfulness.

K: I don't know. I ran into a fellow I knew from here, and we just visited on the way back.

F: Was there a lot of buzzing on the plane coming back and conversation like that, or did people just act--

K: No, just fairly quiet, as I recall, of course that's been--

F: Nearly seven years.

K: That was kind of a letdown, too, from other events of the day.

F: Now then during the next few days, did you get much in the way of calls

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from Washington, New York sources, wanting background information on Johnson--Johnson country.

K: No, I don't recall that we did. I'm sure there were a lot of them, but they probably had better more established sources than I would have been. I expect a lot of them had a pretty good run down on him anyway. They got a pretty good file when he was running for Vice President--even when he was running for the nomination.

F: Yes.

K: I think a lot of them came down here a couple of times.

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By Sam Kinch, Sr.

to the

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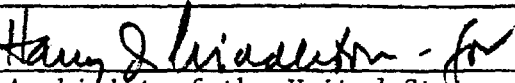
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