

Interviewee: Fred Korth

Interviewer: Paige E. Mulhollan

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M: Let's begin, sir, by identifying you. You're Fred Korth, and your most recent government service was as Secretary of the Navy from early in 1962--January--until October of 1963 in the Kennedy Administration.

K: Actually November 1 of 1963, and January 4 of '62 was when I was sworn in as the Secretary of the Navy.

M: In your career in Texas--your business career--between the time you were with the Truman Administration and when you came back in government service, did you have close personal contact with Mr. Johnson and the Texas Democratic party?

K: I did, indeed. When I left, and I assume that at some point you may perhaps want to go even back further than that--

M: Let's do that now. Do you go back further than that?

K: Oh, yes, indeed. I first met Mr. Johnson when he was secretary for Congressman Richard Kleberg.

M: You go back to the beginning, then.

K: Almost, I think. I was a very good friend particularly of Congressman Kleberg's daughter, Mary Etta, and it was through her that I really became acquainted with Lyndon Johnson at that time. I knew Congressman Kleberg quite well. My association, however, with Lyndon Johnson at that time was only to see him at the office and to have a very casual acquaintance with him. It was not a close association at all. Subsequently, I did keep up with him, of course, and when he himself ran for Congress--succeeding, as I recall, Congressman Buchanan--I saw him on occasions when I came to Washington on infrequent business actually,

although I had a number of friends here and socially came up to visit on occasion. Then my first real close association with him began in 1948, which was the second time, really, that he ran for the Senate. Most people forget the first time.

M: He probably wanted to forget that one at that point, too.

K: That's right. But I was practicing law in Fort Worth at that time in a firm of Wallace and Korth--two of the former members of a firm with which we had been associated--and I was called over one afternoon early in the summer by Amon G. Carter, Sr., whose office at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram was practically across the street from my law office. He called me and said that he and Mr. Sid Richardson would like to see me. I was a good friend of both of theirs. As a matter of fact, Mr. Sid, as I always called Mr. Richardson, was an extremely close friend of mine. I never made a major move in my career without going to talk to Mr. Sid and getting his advice and counsel on what to do.

In any event, I responded to Mr. Carter's call and went to his office at the Star-Telegram, and the two of them were there awaiting me. They indicated to me--well, they did more than indicate--they told me that they wanted me to run Lyndon Johnson's campaign for the Democratic nomination for the United States Senate for Fort Worth and the surrounding area. I demurred somewhat to this because of the fact that I was struggling along practicing law there. I didn't see how I could take out the time that I knew would be necessary for a campaign of the type that I envisioned, certainly, with Coke Stevenson as the principal opponent.

They indicated to me that my response was not a satisfactory one, and that they were insisting that I do it, but they had it clearly understood with me that--as a matter of fact, Mr. Carter said, "Fred, I

just want you to know you're not going to be paid a damned cent for what you do on this--legal fees, or anything else." He said, "However, Sid and I will furnish you all the money you need to run the campaign. You don't have to worry about raising funds for the campaign. All you've got to do is worry about running the campaign." Further, that other friends of the then-Congressman would be helpful to me there, such as Raymond Buck, who was then, is now, a good close friend of President Johnson's.

I entered into that campaign and had a great deal of help from the local people there. It was not an easy campaign, however, because as the results will show in the primary and in the runoff itself, the voters were pretty evenly divided.

M: Eighty-seven votes.

K: That's right. Actually, I had a considerable amount of difficulty with some of the more conservative Democrats of the area, such as Arch Rowan and Rice Tilley and other people. These individuals are two that come to mind who professed to be and I suppose could be classified as Democrats, but were certainly ultra-conservative and were very strong in their support both vocal and financial of Coke Stevenson.

M: That's interesting. The conservative side was Mr. Johnson's difficulty then; later it would become in some respects the other--

K: Exactly. Precisely correct. Labor was pretty well for us there. We put on a vigorous campaign of TV and posters and precinct workers. We got a lot of support out from what was then CONVAIR, which has now become the Fort Worth Division of General Dynamics. I can't tell you precisely what the result in Tarrant County was, but it was close. We came right down to the wire on Johnson and Stevenson.

M: Did Mr. Johnson ever come to Tarrant County?

K: Indeed he did come to Tarrant County on several occasions. The first occasion that he came to our area, actually, I recall, was when I met him out at Weatherford, Texas, which is about thirty-five miles west of Fort Worth. As has been told you I'm sure by others, this was about the first political campaign where the helicopter was used. This means of transportation was of course pleasing to me because the helicopter that was being used was the Bell helicopter which was being manufactured between Fort Worth and Dallas in Tarrant County. I can't think of the name of the pilot. I think it was Mashburn, I believe was his name, who flew Mr. Johnson on many occasions thereafter.

Actually, I had arranged a group through the city of Weatherford and the county--I can't think of the name of the county right now [Parker County]--but the county and city Democratic officials to join with me in getting a good crowd out to the football field at the Weatherford High School to greet Mr. Johnson when he came in. Among those who were there present was the then-Mayor of the city of Weatherford, a young man who has distinguished himself as a Congressman--James Wright--Jim Wright from Fort Worth.

Then the problem was for me to try to get ahead of the helicopter get to the next place, which was Cleburne. As I recall, he landed in Cleburne and had a good crowd there and as well in Alvarado. I believe those were the three stops that were within my area, and then he continued on, of course.

But he did make several trips to Fort Worth. Amon Carter was a strong supporter of his through the editorials which were written in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, although it was sort of a standing joke in the area that if the Star-Telegram was for a candidate, it was almost a kiss of death--that he was going to lose. At the same time I appreciated

the support which the Star-Telegram gave my candidate.

M: I understand that. In Arkansas now it's that way with the Arkansas Gazette.

K: Really?

M: The same proposition, I'm sure.

K: Actually, just thinking about Amon Carter's support here. As I say, his support was just magnificent, not only from the editorial standpoint but he and Sid together on the financial standpoint. They contributed substantial money to the campaign. I really did not want at any point for any funds to run my part of the campaign. I'm certain that in addition to the financial support they gave me, they likewise supported the state campaign. It's an unfortunate situation that a matter of six or seven years later Mr. Carter fell out with Mr. Johnson over what apparently was a misunderstanding. Of course Mr. Johnson can more clearly elaborate and enlighten you on this. But I remember that Mr. Carter was incensed at the fact that Mr. Johnson did not respond to a telephone call that he made from Fort Worth to Washington on what he considered to be an important matter. As I understand it, it was explained to Mr. Carter--and hopefully before he died, he was satisfied that there was no snub intended--that Mr. Johnson never got the word that the call had come in. In any event, that breach was certainly healed after Mr. Carter's death because Mrs. J. Lee Johnson, III, who is the daughter of Mr. Carter, was entertained many times at the White House and was appointed on various committees by President Johnson--as was Amon Carter, Jr., appointed to various committees. I believe one of them was the commission which inspects the minting of coins for the United States. I can't think of the name of it, but it was perfectly appropriate for Amon, Jr., because he is a coin collector himself.

- M: Were you involved in the aftermath of that primary and the infighting involved in certifying Mr. Johnson's nomination?
- K: Yes. I was not actively involved from the legal standpoint. Actually, Raymond Buck, among others, was one of the legal counsel for Mr. Johnson in the hearings which were held before Judge Whitfield Davidson, United States District Judge from the northern district of Texas, who sat in Fort Worth. I attended those hearings in the United States District Court there in Fort Worth. Judge Davidson, it appeared to me, was prejudiced against Mr. Johnson, although I don't think you could say that with any degree of proof insofar as--it appeared to me, is a better way of saying it.
- M: Impression rather than a documented--
- K: Impression, that's right. But he was sharp in some of his remarks to the attorneys with reference to Mr. Johnson's election. I likewise, in Fort Worth that fall, attended the Democratic state convention as a delegate. Of course, this was another hassle which we had with the then-conservative Coke Stevenson forces. At the time that the vote--this was the run-off vote--was being counted, the famous eighty-seven vote victory, I was in constant touch with the Austin headquarters of the campaign seeking to verify, seeking to determine whether any dirty work had gone on at the polls. We did find some errors. Whether they were errors that were made intentionally or not I don't know. We picked up some votes there, and picked some as I recall out in Brownwood, where there was a little hassle about--where the Stevenson forces had stolen some votes from Johnson.

Actually, I suppose one of the great benefits that arises from a very close election such as this is that everyone that's for the successful candidate feels that he personally was responsible for the

election of that candidate. This is not true where there is a landslide victory. I mean, you can say, "Well, I was one of many," but everyone that was a strong supporter could say, "Gosh, I remember now, I picked up ten votes here or twenty votes here." Some, of course, claimed that they solely were responsible for the election of Johnson. There was of course the investigation, the scandal, and so on, which occurred in Precinct 13 in Jim Wells County; the overwhelming vote in Duval County where the vote was, of course, very overwhelming in favor of Johnson.

This was in a county that was strongly controlled by George Parr, whose father was for many years a member of the State Senate, and I knew him there. He was known as the "Duke of Duval." I don't think there was really any dirty work at the polls in Jim Wells or in Duval County either one. I think that there was an overwhelming vote for Johnson, but this was just very tight control on the part of the political boss of the county. In other words, the vote might have been a Thousand-to-ten in favor of Johnson, but those thousand were votes that were cast because of the loyalty to the political boss of the county. I really discount the statements that are made about there being fraud there.

M: Did you ever have any indication from Mr. Johnson as to what his reaction to the charges that were made against him was? Did he ever give an indication as to how he felt about that scandal charges that were being--?

K: No, I can't say that I really had any serious discussions with him on it, although in observing him I know that he resented these charges which were made. Likewise, if it came to a matter of trying to prove vote fraud, I think that we, the Johnson forces, could have proven many cases of vote fraud on the part of Coke Stevenson. But this gets

into a mud-slinging contest. I mean, you prove something, the other guy proves something, and you just keep escalating the thing. Nothing really is accomplished thereby.

M: Then shortly after that, you came up here to work for the national administration. Did Mr. Johnson have anything to do with your decision to do that?

K: Not really with my decision to do it, although certainly without his approval I know that I wouldn't have been permitted to come in. Actually, the way that that arose is this. During World War II when I was with the Army Air Corps in the Air Transport Command, I was serving for a time out in Cincinnati, Ohio, as the Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel of that command out there. My executive officer during the latter part of my service there was a young man from Little Rock, Arkansas, by the name of Frank Pace. Frank, I thought, was a very bright fellow--and he was and he is--and I brought him into my headquarters--he was actually at Wilmington, Delaware, at the time--and asked him to be my executive officer, my number two in command.

After the war was over and we all returned to civilian life, Frank came to Washington, initially became executive assistant to the Post Master General, then was appointed by President Truman as Director of the Budget, and then subsequently as Secretary of the Army. He was appointed as Secretary of the Army just really before the beginning of the Korean war. He asked me in '51 to come up to help him in his legal office of the Secretary of the Army, which was headed by a fellow by the name of Shackelford from Atlanta, Georgia. He asked me to come up for two weeks to help him out. I came up for two weeks and assisted in the matter of some of the dealings with the Congress. He then said, "Go back for a week, and come back for another two weeks if you can. I

sure need your help." If this is ever published anywhere, I just want young men to know that when you're asked to come up to Washington for two weeks, just be determined that you're going to probably be there for two years, which I was. I came back, and the periods of time lengthened and lengthened. Finally I was Deputy Counselor of the Army, and then appointed by President Truman as an Assistant Secretary of the Army.

As I say, Mr. Johnson did not extend the invitation for me to come up, although most assuredly I recognized that if Mr. Johnson had objected to my being an Assistant Secretary of the Army, or even being with Mr. Pace, I would never have been here. Quite naturally I immediately contacted then-Senator Johnson and told him what I had been asked to do, and asked his advice and approval. And he was delighted to have me up there. I had many contacts with him during those two years that I was here to assist the Army in their relations with the Congress and particularly with the Senate.

It was during that period of time actually that then-Senator Johnson was the head of the Preparedness Subcommittee of the Senate. One of the investigations which was being made was of the construction of the North African bases. General Lewis Pick was the Chief of the Corps of Engineers, and they were the responsible agency for the construction of these bases. There was much criticism of the construction and of the waste which had existed. Mr. Johnson, as the head of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee, really had a very thorough investigation. Among those who were associated with him on that, in addition to the Senators, were Don Cook, who was subsequently head of the SEC, now the head of American Light and Power, I think it is--it's a large utility based in New York. As you may recall, Cook was one of those who was

asked to be Secretary of Treasury by President Johnson after his election.

But to get back to the investigation, I had many contacts with Mr. Johnson at that time, with Walter Jenkins, with others on the staff because of my association with the Army. Quite naturally, while we wanted to give Mr. Johnson all the information he desired, we at the same time wanted it presented in the proper light and wanted the Army exonerated if that was appropriate. The contractors were investigated, as well as the Corps of Engineers, and really it's as a result of this investigation that when the Spanish bases were built a couple of years afterwards that the Navy Bureau of Yards and Docks got the job rather than the Corps of Engineers. And since my last association with the Navy, I think the Navy did a fine job in that Spanish base construction.

M: They were even able to do that with pesetas, weren't they, in order to keep from using American dollars at that point?

K: That's right.

M: I recall the incident when the Navy did that. I suppose this is subjective, but what was Mr. Johnson shooting for in the early '50's when you were having contact with him in this investigatory capacity? What were his immediate goals?

K: I don't know what his immediate goals were. I can tell you what I think they were.

M: That's, I think, important.

K: I don't think really that at that time Mr. Johnson had his eye on the Presidency. Perhaps he did, but it was not obvious to me. I think that he in the early '50's was anxious not only to represent the State properly but to have a position of real importance and power in the

Senate, which he did as the Senate Majority Leader. I suppose a man who reaches that important position perhaps has visions of the Presidency, but at that time it was not obvious to me. I don't think it was really obvious to very many people at that time.

M: He wasn't trying to broaden his constituency much beyond Texas at that time?

K: No. In those early stages, I don't think there's any question, he was trying to serve Texas well, trying to get reelected next time; and to get that seniority and that prominence so that he could assume a position of leadership in the Senate, which of course he did.

M: You were back now in Fort Worth then by the time that next election did come. Were you involved again?

K: I was. I was involved again. I was at that time, however, when I went back to Fort Worth after serving as Assistant Secretary of the Army, I went in as executive vice president and as subsequently president of a bank there in Fort Worth, the Continental National Bank. I felt that my political activity could not be as open and as time-consuming as it was previously in 1948, so that I did not actually run the campaign for Mr. Johnson in 1954. The reason is obvious. I mean, I had customers who were Republicans, who were opposed to Johnson as Democrats, and I wanted to keep all the deposits I could.

But at the same time I was able to raise money for him. Hunter McLean and I really ran that campaign at that time, although Hunter was the front man on it. I should have mentioned Hunter in my previous description of the 1948 campaign.

M: He was there too?

K: He was indeed there, and was a stalwart, and has consistently supported Mr. Johnson through every campaign that he has ever been in since '48.

M: What was Mr. Johnson's position, generally speaking, during the 1950's in the rather bitter internecine Democratic fights that started about the time the state elections--

K: You mean, the State politics?

M: Yes, State.

K: Well, as I indicated, in the '48 election Johnson was considered too liberal by many Democrats. He bore that label for the next few years, although he began moving more to the center; and being the fine politician--the expert politician that he is--he began wooing, really, the right wingers who had offered him so much resistance.

This at times to an individual who was loyal to a candidate is a little irritating to the old friends, so to speak. When you see someone who has fought with money and with every force available fought a candidate, the candidate then gets elected, and subsequently the candidate goes back to that guy and pats him on the back and does everything he can for him in order to bring him into the fold. Well, to the dyed-in-the-wool supporter, it's a little peculiar, shall we say.

But, in any event, this is the way politics is handled, and that's the way you increase your strength as you go along. Of course, his support widened and, while I don't have the figures on the '54 election insofar as the margin of victory was concerned, it was a good margin of victory. Coming up to 1960--I mean, as you go to the end of the 1950's, actually more and more people who had supported Coke Stevenson in the early days were beginning to become very strong supporters of Johnson. And as you approached that 1960 period, the people like the Rowans and the Tilleys and so on--they were all out for Johnson for President. But this type of individual is the most

fickle type that I know, really, because as you well know, when Mr. Johnson accepted the Vice Presidential candidacy rather than merely walking off from the convention, these people who had been so strong for Johnson and really had contributed money and support, they just left him immediately. They said he had double-crossed them.

M: By joining the liberal ticket.

K: That's right. It indicates the fickleness of not only the voters, but the strong supporters at times.

M: When during this time did the liberal wing of the Democratic party begin to openly differ with Mr. Johnson? The Frankie Randolph-DOT wing.

K: It's difficult for me to really place a precise date on it. I would say that it was in the middle '50's; but to give you a precise date, I just don't really know. Someone else who was more closely associated with that phase of it could give you a better answer.

M: Those people who eventually opposed Mr. Johnson from the liberal side, were they the ones who had originally supported him back in the older days?

K: I would say definitely.

M: They were? So they were moving away from him at the same time his further enemies were moving toward him?

K: Right.

M: That's an interesting irony, sort of.

K: It is indeed.

M: Decades politics. At the same time all of this was happening, you mentioned your friendship with Mr. Richardson, another young Texan politician was rising at that time--John Connally--in the Richardson group.

K: That's right.

M: Do you have any insight into the early relationship between Johnson and Connally?

K: Well, yes, indeed. I of course remember when John first came up to go with Congressman Johnson. I did not know John too well at that time even though he was born in Wilson County, and I was born in the adjoining county. After he came to Fort Worth to be with Mr. Richardson, I became very close and very intimately acquainted with him and with his family. I had known John after he got out of the University. He's of course younger than I, and we were not in school together. I suppose I first knew John right after the war. Perhaps I'd seen him--I did see him, I'm sure--during the war. But it was right after the war that I really got to know John Connally.

M: Was he a close Johnson lieutenant in the same wing of the party through the '50's pretty well?

K: Oh, yes, indeed he was. Although, you see, he was not in Fort Worth in 1948 on that crucial campaign. He was down in Austin on the State level, that is to say, running the State campaign. Whether he was actually the man who was running it or not, I don't know. But I mean he was in the hierarchy of the campaign headquarters down there. Then he must have come to Fort Worth in the early '50's.

M: And so he was there during the time--

K: He was there indeed during the 1954 campaign. And in 1956, with the complete approval of Sid Richardson and with his financial support, he began the boomlet on Senator Russell as the Democratic nominee, which of course failed, as you know.

M: There wasn't any hint in 1956 of a Johnson boomlet in Texas--for the nomination, I mean?

K: Not that I recall. Now, my memory may be faulty in that regard, but not that I recall. I don't think so, because I think--in other words, Senator Russell and Senator Johnson were such good friends that I know that Johnson would not--I mean, he would have thrown any support that came up for him over to Russell, because Russell was his mentor, and Russell was his good friend. And Russell, I would say, did more for Lyndon Johnson in the Senate than perhaps anyone else--a man of great influence, great wisdom, and one who loved Johnson and who wanted to assist him in any way possible. I just can't believe that there was any support that Johnson stimulated certainly for himself at that time, because he wanted to give everything he could to Russell in the same fashion that Richardson and John Connally did.

M: There was, of course, a considerable boom for Johnson by 1960. Did you get involved in that convention campaign?

K: Indeed I did. As a matter of fact, there were four of us in Fort Worth--Raymond Buck, C. T. McLaughlin, Hunter McLean, and I. I recall quite early long before the convention but after the movement began we got together and we designed an LBJ pin which we had made up by Haltom's Jewelers there, which of course was the hat with the LBJ across it. We had several hundred of them run off in addition to some cuff links. We sent, of course, the cuff links down to the President--to Mr. Johnson. They then took our idea and had some company in Chicago mass produce them because we couldn't very well produce these sterling silver ones in any mass quantity.

M: Haltom's is not exactly a mass production house anyway.

K: That's right. But we really did. We sat up at the Fort Worth Club one day and designed this emblem--the LBJ with the Texas hat emblem on it.

M: Eventually very well known.

K: That's right.

M: Then did you go to Los Angeles?

K: I did not go to Los Angeles. I was not a delegate, and I did not go. But certainly all of us of that group and others there in Fort Worth supported Johnson for the Presidency, made telephone calls around, tried to stimulate support throughout the country.

M: You mentioned awhile ago that there were some more recent supporters who disaffected after he accepted the Vice Presidential nomination. How much of that was there in Texas? Did that pose a real problem in Texas for the following campaign?

K: Well, it did pose a real problem. Of course, Kennedy and Johnson carried the State, and carried it handily, as far as that's concerned. I say "handily"--they carried it well. But this was a major concern to all of us in supporting the national ticket, because nine-tenths of the oilmen left us.

M: They just couldn't take the Kennedy connection.

K: That's right. They left us. There's no question about it. And of course why Johnson did not always have a hundred percent support of the oil people I'm unable to explain, because Johnson and Sam Rayburn did more to keep in the twenty-seven and one-half percent oil depletion allowance than any two men in the entire government. And the oilmen should have gotten down on their knees every night and given thanks for Johnson and Rayburn.

M: And then they left him, though, in '60.

K: Not all, of course, but I'd say seventy-five percent of the oilmen left him. Seventy-five percent of the conservatives who had supported him for the Presidency left him. There was a pretty good exodus, and I mean there were some harsh words used, such as "traitor" and some cuss words of course, too. But I mean it was pretty violent, those who had left him were pretty violent in their criticism.

M: What about the regular Democratic organization? Was Price Daniel Governor then?

K: Price Daniel was Governor.

M: Was the regular organization pretty solid?

K: Yes, but my own impression is that Price Daniel didn't break his back to support the national ticket. Quite true, he was running himself, and he was trying to walk that tight rope to be sure that he got in, number one, and then the others if they came along. I don't criticize him necessarily for taking that position. He was looking for his own survival first.

M: After then Mr. Johnson came as Vice President to Washington, it's generally assumed that he was pretty directly responsible for John Connally's appointment as Secretary of the Navy. Is that accurate?

K: I don't think there's any question about that. I can give you a little sidelight on that. In December of 1960, I had a call from the Secretary of Defense designate, Bob McNamara, from Washington, whom I had not met, telling me that my name was being considered as Secretary of the Army and wanting to know whether I had an interest in that position. I told him that I had really just assumed the office of presidency of this bank, that it was a challenging assignment for me, and that I really did not feel that I could appropriately consider it.

He called me back within a few days and said he felt obliged to call me because the President had made up his mind to appoint John Connally as Secretary of the Navy, and that they didn't think it appropriate that the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of the Army both be from Fort Worth, despite the fact that it was an important city. And I couldn't agree more. That would have been unheard of and untenable, really. So I told him how happy I was that John would be appointed,

and I really was not at that time disappointed at all that I was not selected as Secretary of the Army, because I had told them that I was not really interested.

But to follow on that same theme, that same thought, a year later in December, and I think on precisely the same day, I was in San Angelo, which is out in West Texas, having gone to a social event out there on a Friday; and I was sitting in the kitchen of my hosts, who were Mr. and Mrs. Weldon Jones of San Angelo. This was in the morning perhaps 8 or 9 o'clock. And the telephone rang--rang several times, and no one appeared to be answering it. There wasn't anyone with me in the kitchen, and I answered it. The operator said, "The Secretary of Defense is calling Mr. Korth."

And I said, "This is he." So they put on McNamara. I still had not met McNamara. He said, "Fred, you'll recall that almost a year ago--"

I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, it was precisely a year ago,"

"I call you now asking you whether you would consider being Secretary of the Navy."

I said, "Well, a year has passed, and I do have more interest now than I had before. When do you have to have an answer on this?"

He said, "Well, can you be up here tomorrow at 2 o'clock?"

This was Saturday morning, and I said, "Well, I've got to go to Wichita Falls to a bank opening up there this evening. Yes, I'm sure I can. If I can get a reservation, I'm sure I can."

So I got back to Fort Worth on Saturday evening and left early Sunday morning. Came up to Washington. Actually, McNamara had left to go to NATO, and I talked with Ros Gilpatric, who was the Deputy Secretary of Defense, who I had known during the Truman Administration when

he was Under Secretary of the Air Force. We talked for a matter of an hour or two. I was asked to give a definite answer by Monday afternoon at 1 o'clock.

The reason for the tight timing on this was that John Connally's resignation was going to be announced at 1 o'clock at the White House, and the President wanted to announce an appointment, whether it was mine or not, at exactly the same time so that political pressures wouldn't be built up to appoint some favorite son from some other area, and have the President torn between a decision on several competing candidates, so to speak.

M: Had you known earlier that Connally was going to step down from the position?

K: Yes. There were rumors, although the timing was not really known. These were low-key rumors. It was not generally known. I wouldn't say that at all.

Anyhow, I got back to Fort Worth that evening, talked to my family, talked to the Board of Directors of the bank on Monday morning. I called Jim Wright; I called Vice President Johnson, knowing full well that they probably had touched base with him, although he had not called me on the thing. I called him and asked him--told him what had happened, and he apparently knew about it of course, and asked him what he thought. He said he thought it would be a fine thing for me to do it. So then I called Gilpatric about noon, I suppose it was, and told him I'd take it.

M: They were announced simultaneously, as I recall. The news stories were carried at the same time.

K: They were.

M: Of course, in a nearly two-year tenure as Secretary of the Navy, you

had countless activities and projects that went on of importance. The one that got the most publicity was the TFX episode, and the Senate has already taken twelve or something volumes of testimony, including some from yourself.

K: Right.

M: So far as I know, outside of that you've never told your story. Are there important things that the Senate didn't uncover that you think should be part of the record somewhere?

K: Actually, the TFX investigation was blown up all out of proportion, really. There were, of course, the accusations made by the committee counsel--and I suppose by Senator McClellan--that because of my former association with Continental National Bank, my ownership of some stock in the bank, that this influenced my decision to recommend the giving of the contract to General Dynamics so that I could make more money or get a loan paid back to the bank. Well, of course, there was nothing further from the truth. The loan which the bank that I was formerly associated with participated in with the Chase Manhattan Bank, was about one-percent of that loan in the first place. In the second place, the loan had nothing to do with whether the company got the TFX contract or not because it was supported by and guaranteed by accounts receivable from the United States government on projects then in operation and in existence, and having no connection with TFX. So the fact that if TFX had gone to Boeing, the bank would have been paid on its loan because it was on contracts that had nothing to do with TFX. I mean it's a little farfetched to point the finger at me that I recommended giving the contract to Fort Worth--to General Dynamics--because of my association with the bank. I just think it was unfair to put it in that light. It doesn't bother me at all any more.

McClellan and I are friends. I mean, I've forgotten all about the rancor and so on which existed at the time.

I must say that I rather enjoyed the investigation itself. I enjoyed the opportunity of matching wits with these guys, and I think really came off rather well, if you would read the record, in the exchange.

M: How much exactly does whoever is Secretary of the Navy or the Army or any of the services--how important is that individual in determining which of various competing interests get a contract like that?

K: He can be extremely important. In this instance, if the Secretary of the Air Force and the Secretary of the Navy had left the decision to their respective chiefs, the award would have gone to Boeing. There is no question about that, although in our considered judgment, which was concurred in by McNamara, in our considered judgment, the contract more appropriately should have gone to General Dynamics because they scored higher on the evaluation which the military had given to them.

The reason that General LeMay was opposed to General Dynamics is that he had a long-standing prejudice against General Dynamics, and at one point reputedly said and I think this is accurate--he used a little more direct language than what I will use--he said he wouldn't let them build a chamber pot for him. He had no confidence in their expertise, their engineering ability. So he was prejudiced against them.

George Anderson, the Chief of Naval Operations, was likewise prejudiced in favor of Boeing. This for the reason that he and a civilian by the name of Spangenberg in the Bureau of Naval Weapons were both unalterably opposed to an airplane which was to be a biservice aircraft. They felt that the Navy should build its own airplane. They saw no objection to the Navy building the F-4 airplane and have the Air Force

use it, but they wanted to be the lead dog. They didn't want the Air Force to be the lead dog.

M: Just simply an intraservice feeling that led to their prejudice then.

K: No question about it. And I think really, when you get right down to it, if you read the record--and it's too long to read and I don't want to read it again--but I shall never forget one of the general officers who was called before the committee to testify on why he felt that Boeing made the better proposal. He stated reasons and then one of the Senators asked him whether he had looked at the documentation, and read the documentation, and he said, "No."

He said, "Do you mean to tell me that you have never seen the supporting evidence here?"

He said, "No, sir, I never have." Now here was one of the men that was recommending Boeing. And likewise, another factor which entered into it, Boeing--and this was something that could not then be revealed--Boeing was planning to use a great deal more titanium than the General Dynamics plane was to use, and it could not then be revealed that titanium was in very short supply and had other demands upon it which were well known to Secretary Gene Zuckert of the Air Force.

M: I believe most of that story is told rather fairly in this book by--who is it--Robert Art?

K: Yes, he did a good job.

M: He did a pretty good job. He makes very clear the technical evaluation differentiation between Boeing and General Dynamics.

K: Right. That reminds me. I loaned that book to a friend of mine, and that son-of-a-gun never sent it back to me. I'll make a note of it.

M: Make a note right now, so you'll get it back. I did get a chance to read that although, as you indicate, I didn't quite get around to

reading the multivolume things of the Senate investigation.

One of the points that isn't clear in there that has been charged frequently is regarding the--and it's a broader question really than the TFX, although it applies to that--was it accurate that General Dynamics was in what might be considered financial difficulty at that time that was serious?

K: Certainly they had suffered the largest loss that has ever been suffered by a corporation on their 880 commercial aircraft. Although, really at this time, I think they had taken their lumps on that pretty well. The financial difficulty--it was not, I don't believe you can say, and I would have to look at their financial figures to know this to be true, but as far as my recollection is concerned, I don't believe that they were in financial difficulty. What was really meant here was that unless they got some follow-on contract for the Fort Worth plant, that they would have to materially reduce the employment there and rely solely upon subcontracting with other aircraft manufacturers. They would not have a prime contract in that Fort Worth plant because the B-58 program was phasing out. But I don't think it would have meant financial ruin for the company. It would have meant considerable economic dislocation for Fort Worth, yes!

M: Are procurement decisions--the TFX decision aside--made frequently, or ever, because of industrial considerations?

K: They are indeed. I did not have occasion, as I recall, to make any while I was Secretary of the Navy, although some of my predecessors did and quite frankly admitted that they did--although they did it more on the basis of saying that they wanted to keep the production capability of a plant in operation in order that that capability be available in the event of an emergency. I mean, many shipbuilding awards had been

made on that basis. At Bethlehem-Quincy, which is now a part of General Dynamics, also, up in Quincy, Massachusetts. They have received contracts on the basis that we wanted to keep this industrial potential alive. I did not award any on that basis. As a matter of fact on Quincy particularly I made them come down and meet the price of the low bidder if they wanted the job, and they did.

M: One of the individuals who has been criticized most loudly in the whole TFX thing is, as you mentioned, Roswell Gilpatric. Did he play a major role in deciding the final contract award?

K: He played as major a role as any of the other three participants did, that is to say, McNamara, Zuckert and I. Gilpatric, of course, as a member of his law firm had represented General Dynamics. I don't intimate that there was anything wrong with this previous association. There wasn't.

I had situations where I felt it desirable not to make a decision on a contract, which I bucked up to Gilpatric actually. This was on the selection of a contractor for a VSTOL plane--vertical short take-off and landing plane--in which Bell Aero-Systems was involved of Buffalo, New York. I had been a director of Bell Aerospace Corporation, of which this was a division. I thought it completely inappropriate for me to rule on whether they or Boeing--no, it was Douglas, I suppose it was--was to get a contract here. And I forwarded it up to the Defense Department--Secretary of Defense's office rather--and said, "Because of my former association--" and this was before the TFX hearings came up--I said, "Because of my former association with Bell, I don't think it appropriate that I make a decision here. I would like for someone in the higher echelon to make the decision." They selected Bell, but certainly not at my suggestion. It was on the basis of the recommendations which were made.

M: I suppose there's always a question, like a judge, when do you disqualify yourself--?

K: That's right.

M: And Gilpatric didn't feel that his past association had been that close?

K: He did not, and I don't criticize him for not disqualifying himself.

M: Did Mr. Johnson as Vice President during all of this ever get involved in any way in the TFX business?

K: Certainly we had conversations about it, not to the extent of his directing me to do anything, but certainly we had conversations about it. It was the biggest competition that had ever come along. Stu Symington talked to me about it, Senator Kerr, anybody that thought about it, talked about it.

M: So it would have been unusual if Mr. Johnson hadn't talked about it?

K: Exactly right.

M: Did you see him fairly frequently during those years he was Vice President?

K: I did. I had him on the Sequoia on a number of occasions. The Sequoia was the Secretary of Navy's yacht. I think the President has taken it over.

M: Right.

K: He was on it on a number of occasions. I saw him at many social events. I went up to see him frequently, merely to pay courtesy calls on him. After all, he was a Texan. He was the Vice President of the United States. He was presiding officer of the Senate. He was an astute politician, and I went up to him many times for advice and counsel on how certain situations should be handled. We maintained a very fine and good relationship.

M: He was also an acquaintance of, by that time, fifteen or better years of fairly close contact. Would you say he was unhappy as Vice President,

as the conventional wisdom generally says he was?

K: I would say he was not too happy. I don't know what the gradation should be. He was chafing at the bit somewhat at the restraints which were placed upon him, although certainly anything that President Kennedy asked him to do, he did willingly and well and ably.

I'm reminded, before I forget about it, of a situation. He was the head of the Equal Opportunity Committee, I suppose it was called, or commission--I don't know precisely what the title was--to which at monthly meetings were invited the various Cabinet officers as well as the Secretaries of the military services. I always made a point of going to these meetings personally rather than sending my undersecretary, because I wanted to exhibit my support of the Vice President in the job that he was doing for the President. He did a very fine job in this, and he kept right on top of it. We had a special section which was devoted to this equal opportunity, and every now and then he'd call me up and he'd say, "Now, look, you're falling down in this area." Or if we were doing a good job, he would compliment us. But we kept right on top of this and really worked at this very hard. And as I say, I attended every meeting, I believe, while I was Secretary, missing maybe one or two when I happened to be out of town.

But one which I recall very vividly at which the Vice President was presiding and at which the then-Attorney General Bobby Kennedy was sitting at my left. This was not on the basis of protocol. It was just on the basis of there were two seats on my left when Kennedy came in, and he and Marshall took those two seats. But the Vice President was presiding, and he called on Jim Webb, the head of NASA, to give a report on what he had done in his agency with reference to implement the President's program. Webb made a very fine presentation. After he

finished, the Vice President complimented him very highly on the fine presentation that he had made and on the fine work which had been done in NASA. And after he finished, the Attorney General got up, and I, for the first time, really saw evidence of the sharp differences which existed between the Attorney General and the President. The Attorney General disagreed 100-percent with what the Vice President had said and criticized Jim Webb for failing to do a good job. Really, it was an amazing thing for me to see. Every time after that I observed at those meetings the sharp differences, which maybe I was highlighting more than others would, that existed between the Vice President and the Attorney General.

M: Did he ever give any indications of differences that he was having with President Kennedy--with John Kennedy?

K: Never.

M: None of that.

K: I was never aware of it. So far as I was aware, there was complete loyalty and support of the President by the Vice President.

M: Then you decided to withdraw from the Secretary of the Navy's position in October of 1963--

K: That's right.

M: And your resignation was announced. Were there any circumstances surrounding that that involved Mr. Johnson at all?

K: Not that involved Mr. Johnson. When the committee began pounding away on the conflict of interest situation in letters that my secretary had put on the wrong stationery, which she had--I didn't pay any attention to which stationery she was putting it on.

M: Continental National Bank stationery?

K: No, she put it on Secretary of the Navy stationery rather than--I had

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stationery which was Fred Korth, Room 4-D--whatever it was. I mean, I had it printed up specifically for personal letters. In any event, I had made up my mind really that I was going to stay in government about two years anyhow, and this was approaching that period of time. I just decided to hell with it. I submitted my resignation. I went over and saw the President and got a very nice letter back from him. Bobby Kennedy was in on that. I mean, he was snooping around all the time over at the White House.

The investigation was continuing. There was an indication that they were going to call me back even though I had resigned. I had talked with McNamara about this. I wasn't out of office yet, but I mean I had submitted my resignation. I talked to McNamara about this, and McNamara said, "Well, he really thought that what I ought to do rather than relying upon my house counsel over at the Navy, is to talk with some civilian lawyer in town. He said, I think you ought to talk with Clark Clifford or Abe Fortas."

Well, I know both of them, but I called--I got word, I believe, not directly from the Vice President, because the Vice President did not talk to me at this time. I tried to reach him once or twice, and I couldn't get him. But word was received by me, and I can't remember precisely where I got it from honestly, that I ought to go see Abe.

So I went over to see Abe. He's a good friend of mine and certainly did a marvelous job in talking with me and in assuring me that there was no problem with reference to this; that I certainly was guilty of no wrong-doing. Actually he and I were sitting in the little office that we had been conferring in, not his office, but across the street, when we received the word that President Kennedy had been shot.

M: You weren't in Texas by the time that trip took place?

K: No.

M: I think Mr. Kennedy made a very favorable comment at the Convair plant that very morning.

K: He did.

M: To the employees.

K: He did indeed. After my resignation was effective, I was downtown doing some shopping--hell, I hadn't done any shopping in about two years--and I called back to my house and was informed that the President was trying to reach me. So I called the President, and he said, "Fred, I just want you to know that I'm thinking about you. I'm going to make this trip to Texas--I don't remember the date he said. He said, "I'll get back here on a Tuesday," if that was the date--I don't remember precisely. "I'd like to have lunch with you on Thursday, and let's have a visit, because I want to keep in touch and want to be helpful to you in any way I can."

M: Did you have any close knowledge of the reasons that impelled that trip to Texas that ended up fatally?

K: No, not really. I was not really a part of the conversations which occurred with reference to it, although he informed me as I indicated to you, not only by that telephone call but previously, that he was going and that he was looking forward to it.

M: What about in general terms your relations with Mr. Johnson after he became President? You've been in private practice here since that time.

K: That's right. Certainly he got a hell of a lot busier after he got to be President than when he was Vice President, and I did not see him as frequently. I was, of course, up at the convention in Atlantic City, helping him in whichever fashion I could. I naturally contributed to the campaign. I saw him on many occasions. I've got dozens of pictures around here from the White House where I'd go over for retirements or

parties or so on and so forth. And I kept in close touch with Marvin Watson, prior to that with Walter Jenkins.

Actually, my theory in working with him, even when he was Senator, was, dammit, not to bother him personally any more than I had to. It was not of importance to me that I had talked personally with President, Vice President, or Senator Johnson, just as long as I talked with Marvin Watson or Walter Jenkins or somebody that I knew had constant contact with him. Hell, if I got Marvin Watson's statement that something was going to be done, or Walter Jenkins' statement that something was going to be done, that was as good for me as if Lyndon Johnson had told me that something was going to be done. Because it was going to be done, period. I just felt that there were so many demands on his time, even from the time he was Senator, that an occasional visit with him was all that I needed. The only other kind of contact that I wanted was with someone who had a constant liaison with him.

M: Certainly, there's almost unanimous admiration for Walter Jenkins' role.

K: Absolutely.

M: Did Mr. Johnson ever successfully really replace Walter Jenkins, do you think?

K: No, not really. I don't suppose Walter could ever by anyone have been successfully replaced, because he grew up with Lyndon Johnson. He, sometimes I think, knew Lyndon Johnson better than Lyndon Johnson knew himself. He very rarely misjudged what Johnson's answer to something would be.

M: I sometimes get the idea that many of Mr. Johnson's troubles began with Walter Jenkins' leaving.

K: I don't think there's any question about it. Walter is just a great guy, and my good friend. I don't see him as frequently as I'd like to

but I have the greatest admiration for him. I think he was indeed, if ever a man was, the strong right arm of an individual, Lyndon Johnson.

M: You're in a pretty good position to know, being here in town and in the social life of Washington. How important was the criticism that began shortly after Mr. Johnson became President from the old Kennedy loyalists that was mostly informal and social, I understand, but apparently fairly widespread?

K: You'll have to--

M: Was there sort of a whisper campaign by the old Kennedy--?

K: Oh, sure there was.

M: Can it be important enough to hurt the President in his effectiveness as President?

K: I think so. It can be because, whether consciously or not, if you've got a lot of Kennedy holdovers in the Administration, this conceivably could certainly affect their loyalty to the President--to Johnson.

M: There was apparently quite a lot of this. Did it emanate pretty much from Robert Kennedy, do you think?

K: I would think so. And I would think so because of the instances which I've alluded to earlier. I mean, not because of that, but that is the reason that I have come to that conclusion.

M: I'm out of questions. Have you got any general observations, or any specific comments that you think you haven't made that you should, or would like to make?

K: I can't think of anything, really, other than to say that certainly to my mind President Johnson, as a Congressman, as a Senator, as Vice President, and finally as President of the United States, I think, has made a tremendous contribution to the United States. It's unfortunate that during the last portion of his term as President that, because of

the Vietnamese situation, the great elements of progress which he put into government are minimized and that the Vietnamese war has overshadowed the accomplishments which his Administration and which his public life has been able to contribute to the country. I'm a great admirer of his. I am well aware of many of his shortcomings. He's a man that I personally would never want to work for because of his slave-driving attitude, although I must say that Bob McNamara is certainly a Simon Legree himself. I don't mind working hard. That's not the point. But I just would not want to work for President Johnson. I like to work with President Johnson, but not for him. I'm sure that there are a lot of other things that I could think of to add here, but which do not immediately come to mind.

M: What about Mrs. Johnson's role?

K: Mrs. Johnson, I think, had a most important role throughout Lyndon Johnson's public career. I think she contributed immeasurably. I would put Walter Jenkins and her on a par as far as contribution to Lyndon Johnson's success. She is, of course, in her own right a delightful person. I've known her rather well. I've been with her on occasions. Most recently, just about a year ago, down in Florida at Mrs. Post's where, when she came down for a visit down there and I had many hours of pleasant conversation with her. She has raised a fine family of two girls. She's a smart woman herself. I just think that without her, really, Lyndon Johnson might well not have achieved the success that he has achieved.

M: Do you think she could ever talk back to him as perhaps other employees couldn't?

K: Indeed. I think she can indeed and has indeed, talked back to him. Lyndon Johnson as I say, while he has got the reputation of being a

slave-driver--and he is, because, hell, I've called Walter Jenkins at 9 o'clock at night at the White House or when he was up in the Senate and gotten him, knowing how hard he had to work in order to get the work out. At the same time, he does have the milk of human kindness in him. He is thoughtful of the feelings of others. He does do so many nice things for the people who work for him. And it would be a challenging thing to work for him, but I just don't want to work for him.

M: I think you're in a large number of people who feel that way, as a matter of fact. That's a pretty good climax and summary, Mr. Korth, and we certainly thank you.

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By Fred Korth

to the

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