

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 16, 1971  
INTERVIEWEE: JAMES LOVELL  
INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB  
PLACE: Captain Lovell's office at the Manned Spacecraft Center,  
NASA, Houston, Texas

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M: To start off with I'd like to know a little bit about your background. Where were you born and when, and where did you go to school?

L: Okay. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on March 25, 1928. My early background in history had been one of mobility. I've moved quite a bit throughout the country, finally settling at a fairly early age in Wisconsin, which I now claim as my home since I went through most of my educational period [there] including two years at the University of Wisconsin. Upon that time, which I was in an aviation program, I left Wisconsin to go into the Navy under a Naval aviation program, but I only spent three months there when I received an appointment to the Naval Academy. I went to the Naval Academy [in] 1948 and graduated in 1952. Since that time I have been, of course, in the Navy and have moved according to the whims of the Navy; receiving some postgraduate education, first of all becoming a Naval aviator and then going on to test pilot at Patuxent

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River and aviation safety school at the University of Southern California, and hence into the space program in October of 1962, where I have been ever since.

M: What inspired you to go into the space program?

L: Well, the Navy in 1958 put out a request for applicants to the program. I responded to that request. This was for what turned out to be the Mercury astronauts, and I did not make it at that time. But subsequently, in 1962 another request was put out, and I was then chosen as the second group.

M: Now, Lyndon Johnson along this period of time was vice president, and as vice president he had something to do with the space committee and the space activities from the political side. Did you have any occasion to meet him in that early period?

L: No, I didn't. In the early stages of the space program my sphere of influence wasn't too great. I never did reach the upper echelons of government, so I never had really a chance to meet the Vice President at the time personally.

M: Yes. When was the first time you happened to meet the President?

L: I'm trying to figure that out now. It was, I believe, perhaps in Gemini VII, during that period that I met the President. I received of course, after the flight of Gemini VII, which was in 1965, a letter, from the President, of congratulations, and I'm just trying to

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remember when the first time was. I'm really not too sure when our first meeting occurred.

M: After that Gemini flight, did he call you on the phone or did he just simply send you a letter? Or did he try to make any contact with you at all?

L: Not our particular flight. If I recall, something occurred. I think that we did get a call from, and it surprised me--I think that Prime Minister Wilson at the time was visiting the country, and he put in a call for us on Gemini VII. It was a long mission, the two week mission in December of 1965.

M: After that, and before the Apollo flight, did you have any contact with the President?

L: Yes. While we were training for Gemini XII the President came down to the Cape with Chancellor Erhard, and we had an opportunity to meet him, to discuss with him some of the Gemini XII programs, and to show the President and the Chancellor around the blockhouse and the site.

M: Did you recall if Johnson said anything expressing his interest in the space program?

L: Yes. At the time what had occurred was it rained that day, and so instead of doing most of our discussion up near the launch pad itself we went into the blockhouse, which was quite crowded. Also, they had quite an entourage with them, Secretary McNamara was along I can recall. While we were there he discussed his interest, of course, to the members of the NASA group that were with him.



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Then we in turn gave a briefing on various aspects of it. The Air Force gave a briefing on the booster, and I gave one on the spacecraft objectives.

M: Did Johnson ever say anything to you about, "I'm interested in the space program," "Keep working, fellow," or something like that? Was he encouraging?

L: He was encouraging. It wasn't a huge outburst at this time. Let's see, this is 1977 and things were getting kind of busy up there in Washington, and he'd come on down and talk about it. I can recall before Apollo VIII we had dinner with him. In fact the whole space committee had dinner at the White House, and he gave us some encouraging remarks there.

M: Well, that was bigger contact then.

L: Oh, yes, it was a much bigger contact we had.

M: You might talk about that a little bit. That was right before Apollo VIII?

L: It was just before the launch of Apollo VIII, and Mrs. Johnson was my dinner partner, as I recall.

M: This is in December, is it not?

L: It was in December; I think it was December 9th, right around that area.

M: And you and the other astronauts and James Webb, is that right?

L: Yes. Webb and a lot of the leading aerospace contractor personnel, you know, were at a meeting at the White House. Not a meeting, but

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it was actually a very nice banquet. If I recall correctly, it was that time that we signed a treaty. We signed something there that's . . . .

M: A space treaty?

L: It was something significant that we put our signatures to. Charles Lindbergh signed it, and I recall the signing of it upstairs in his quarters in the reception room. Then we all went down and had dinner down there.

M: And Mrs. Johnson was your dinner partner?

L: Yes, Mrs. Johnson was my dinner partner. Before that though we actually, after Gemini XII, received the Distinguished Service Medal from President Johnson at the Texas White House. After the press conference here at the Manned Spacecraft Center we flew up to the Ranch and had a meeting with him at that time, and a very, very nice one as a matter of fact. It was sort of [an] informal meeting. We received our medals, that was Buzz Aldrin and myself, and then came back.

M: Did he say anything in particular to you at that time other than congratulations and that sort of thing?

L: No. Not anything that I can recall. He commended us on the work we had done. We gave him a picture of the Texas area and his Ranch. That was the time where we gave him a picture of the Ranch.

M: Oh.

L: We had taken a wide-angle picture of the whole area. It turned out to be pretty good, because it rained the day before and it was

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very clear. His Ranch was on the picture of most of the rest of Texas.

M: (Laughter) Was he pleased with that?

L: Yes, of course he was. We gave him an overlay so that he could just put it over the picture so he could point out the various features if he didn't recognize them or something.

M: Back to this meeting in December of 1968 at the White House. You had dinner and Charles Lindbergh was there. Were there any speeches given or anything of that nature?

L: Yes. The President got up and talked a lot on wishing us luck on the Apollo VIII mission--it was actually a banquet for NASA--and recognizing all the people that were with NASA and in the aerospace industry that supported NASA and the space program. I don't recall who else [was there]. I think that James Webb also . . .

M: Is that when Webb got the Medal of Freedom?

L: Yes. Yes, Webb was honored that night. That's right. Webb was honored that night, and he received the medal. I was just trying to think when Webb was replaced by Dr. Paine. I'm not too sure. I think Dr. Paine was already there.

M: That could very well be. I'm not certain on that.

L: I'm just trying to remember. Because, you see, that was 1968.

M: That was late 1968?

L: Yes, that was close to the new administration. I think that



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Webb had already resigned, but he came back to get the medal.

M: Is there any significance other than honoring Webb that this dinner took place at this point in time, the last part of Johnson's Administration?

L: I think the significance is the fact that Johnson, of course, had been a great supporter of the space program since the days he was chairman of the Space Council and vice president. I think he wanted to honor the people who had worked on the program, who had brought it through the entire Kennedy-Johnson Administrations before he left office.

M: Then after that dinner you returned, what, to the Cape to prepare for your--

L: We left immediately after the dinner, I think. There were some cocktails after the dinner, and we had an airplane to catch, so we left after the dinner, went back to the Cape.

M: Then late in December you had your Apollo VIII shot.

L: Apollo VIII occurred, yes, December 21st. We came back the 27th of December.

M: On your return from Apollo VIII, did the President contact you?

L: Yes, I think the President contacted us and welcomed us.

M: Back to earth?

L: Back to earth. As a matter of fact, he awarded us the Distinguished Service Medal at that time in a White House ceremony which was very nice in I think it was the West Room or East Room. I forget, maybe the East Room. [It was] quite a gathering of people there.

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Frank and Bill and myself were there. Then we gave him a picture of the earth taken from the moon, showed him again his Ranch in a much farther perspective.

M: Did your wives go along on all this?

L: Our wives went along, parents went along. It was quite a gala affair. We had a chance to say a few words to the joint session of Congress. The Supreme Court was there, and it was a great reception.

M: Somewhere in this, on your return from Apollo VIII, I read that Johnson called the wives, too. You didn't know anything about that?

L: No, but I heard about it. He did; he called the wives. Vice President Humphrey was always good at that, too; he'd always come in there and send letters or telegrams or call.

M: Well, now, after this do you have any more contact with Johnson?

L: After that ceremony in Washington which was if I recall correctly late December or early January, I think it was early January, no, we had no more contact. We went back to finish up the post-flight reports, and that was our last contact that I can recall.

M: Were you there at the White House at the time the fire occurred at the Cape?

L: Oh, yes. Yes, I was. Let's see, that was 1967.

M: Was that in 1967?

L: Yes. I was there and President Johnson signed the space treaty at that time. There was about five of us that were representatives



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there at the reception, signed the treaty, and there was a reception after. Then the fire occurred.

M: And you heard about it while at the White House?

L: No, this was strange. If I recall, the signing was about five-thirty. There was a speech and some formalities, then the signing occurred. Then we all moved into a different room. Representatives, of course, from all the countries were there, and I can remember very vividly that we left the White House just about six-thirty. I think at least about half the people had left. It was a before dinner type reception. So we did not hear about it until we got back to our hotel room. Nothing was said at the White House up until the time after we had left, and it was after that time that the news occurred. We got a telephone call at the hotel room after we got back. That was another time I had talked briefly with the President, just a brief time.

M: Then you went to West Point for the funeral. Is that right?

L: Yes. I went to West Point for the funeral because Ed White, of course, was a very good friend of mine in the same group.

M: Mrs. Johnson also went to West Point, but the President was--

L: The President went to Arlington. Mrs. Johnson went to West Point, and then we split up. About two-thirds of the people here I think went to Arlington.

M: Yes. Did Johnson or Mrs. Johnson say anything to you on that occasion about the work you were doing?

L: Mrs. Johnson did not say that to me personally. It was a case of

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just too many people, and the occasion wasn't right for it.

M: Yes. Well, now how did you go about getting on the President's Council for Physical Fitness?

L: This is pretty interesting, the history behind it. I think originally Stan Musial was the consultant to the President for Physical Fitness and Sports during the Johnson Administration when I was there. Bud Wilkinson had it but had resigned. Bud was appointed by President Kennedy when they decided to have one man as the consultant, and Bud resigned to run for public office in Oklahoma. President Johnson then appointed Stan Musial. Stan had the position until he resigned in January, and they were, I guess, in the process of looking for someone else to replace Stan. I heard about it one Sunday. Frank Borman was with Mr. Webb in West Virginia giving a speech, and I guess the President had talked to Mr. Webb concerning that perhaps we ought to look, besides to professional athletes, someplace else as a consultant for physical fitness. So I think Mr. Webb talked to Frank, and Frank either suggested me or Mr. Webb thought about me and told Frank to give me a call.

Anyway, I heard about it first from Borman, who called me on Sunday afternoon and wanted to know whether I would be interested or not. Of course at that time I didn't know too much about it, so I had to look it over and try to determine it. Let's see, this was in early or late spring of 1967, in May as a matter of fact, and I went to Washington one day and talked to Mr. Webb about this

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situation to see what it would be like. Then I had decided to take it, and I talked to President Johnson's various representatives about the job. As a matter of fact, it was Marvin Watson. I went over from Webb's office to Marvin Watson's office and talked briefly to him. I was introduced to President Johnson again, and then we sat down and he wanted to know if I wanted the job. I said, "Yes," I was going to take it.

M: What is the job? I mean, what did you have to do?

L: Okay. Essentially the job is one of consulting, or as consultant to the president on the status of the general fitness of the public, the citizenry of the United States.

M: (Whistles)

L: Yes. It's one which merely tried to emphasize what the conditions are, but more than that tries to promote programs to improve the general physical fitness and well-being of the people. We are a catalyst organization, and I found this all out after I got on board. But as consultant to the President I also had a staff. Actually, the President had a council called the Physical Fitness Council. This was made up of the Cabinet members, with the Vice President as chairman.



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Now, when I first got on board it was made up of Cabinet members with the Secretary of HEW as chairman. That's when I took it over. I was the President's consultant.

At the same time I also worked with the council, and I tried to promote programs that the council would buy, give them to the Secretary of HEW. The council, you know, would then recommend programs, the President would give his blessing to it, and we tried to put them through. The council actually had a staff consisting of four professional and eight clerical help. Now, this was the real meat of this particular operation. The consultant really was a member and was the head of the council's staff. Programs were promulgated either by the consultant or by the consultant's staff and then proposed to the council, and the council would vote either way on it.

This was a program essentially that was inherited by President Johnson [from] President Kennedy, and President Kennedy of course was well known to have quite a feeling for physical fitness. He had changed the job from a committee to a consultant, [and] President Johnson kept that particular aspect on. But there were some inherent flaws in the program, and during my tenure with President Johnson we tried to correct them. First of all, and this

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occurred before the end of Johnson's term, we changed the objectives of the council to physical fitness and sports. First of all, we felt that the only way to get people motivated would be to include sports so they could be actively engaged in something interesting that would keep them physically fit. So we tried to emphasize sports along with that. At the same time, we changed the chairman's position from the secretary of HEW to the vice president, so Vice President Humphrey became chairman of the Physical Fitness and Sports Council.

M: Okay. Why that change?

L: We wanted to give the council a little bit more stature. It was the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. We wanted the vice president as chairman to give it a little bit more weight so that we could try to get the public sector to help us with our programs. [This was] because we were such a small staff and, of course could not put on programs ourselves. We were a catalyst only to try to get the private sector to sponsor programs, to get the state governments to have their own programs, to build up their own councils within their state governments, of which Texas now has one that started a few years ago under Johnson.

M: Can you give me an example of a program that you got going?

L: Sure. One of the most successful programs, and one that was started under Johnson, was the Presidential Physical Fitness Awards Program. This started out in 1965. Essentially, APFR, which is an association, physical fitness and recreation association, teacher



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association, gave us a list of tests that we could perform on school children, and the schools run this. If they passed a certain group of tests, they would be awarded a little presidential physical fitness seal and a certificate signed by the President. In 1965, in our first go around at this physical fitness awards program, we had about ninety-five hundred winners throughout the country in the schools. A continuation of this program of course went on through President Nixon's Administration last year, which I'd say in 1970, [and] we had over two hundred and forty thousand winners. We are predicting well over four hundred thousand winners for this year.

M: Is that because more people are interested, or people are in better condition?

L: Well, it's a combination of things. I think that, number one, the program caught on. More people are interested, so more people are participating, and what it does is it gets more people, you know, thinking about physical fitness. Whether they win one or not they are at least trying to win, and it gives them some impetus to get going in the program. It started back in 1965, and it's been more than doubling every year. In fact, it's been going up at a tremendous rate.

M: Your job as consultant, then, seems to be much more than simply a public relations type thing.

L: It is. I'm more or less a part-time consultant, not a full-time consultant. So my executive director in Washington, who is the



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head of this council staff, is really the full-time man there. But as a part-time consultant, besides lending the public affairs image, which is a big part of what we're doing, of course--we were trying to get the popularity of the space program over in the physical fitness program--the idea is to try to spark programs across the country, to try to talk to the news media.

Again, one of our on going programs that got a lot of emphasis during President Johnson's regime, and still is, is the advertisement. During his tenure we spent about eighty or ninety thousand dollars for advertising. This was merely to get an advertising agency to handle some of their costs. The agency was given to us gratis through the Advertising Council, and they'd plan a summer and a fall advertising campaign for us. We would get on the average during the year somewhere between twenty and twenty-five million dollars worth of free advertising to help promote physical fitness, so it really helps us out. See, that's how we act as a catalyst.

M: Did you have to give speeches and go out and meet people and talk to people?

L: Yes, that was part of my job. I was sort of President Johnson's, in fact the President's, representative in the field of sports and physical fitness, sports later on, physical fitness during most of my stay. I have talked to the American Medical Association; the Jaycees were a great organization to help promote physical fitness; I talked to the 4-H Clubs; and I'd bring people through. Of course, other times that you asked that I met the President

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would be times when I would bring a group of people into the White House that participated in some sporting event that made a good showing on behalf of the country. We had one, a group of people who were on a rowing team that had won over in England. I remember that group that went through, and he saw them briefly.

M: So you would meet some of these people then?

L: Yes.

M: One of the problems I would assume in this is how to measure the physical fitness in the country. I mean, are you assuming they are in poor condition?

L: Yes. Well, no. We're not assuming they are in poor condition. We're trying to establish a base guideline for the type of condition, and how we can improve it so we can measure that success we've had.

M: Yes.

L: It's very difficult.

M: I'm just wondering about your goals and this sort of thing.

L: Yes, that's right. Of course, the goals are intangible, because no matter what you do you never reach a goal. It's one of trying just to improve on what you have. We have other variables that change any type of figures that you might establish. The population keeps increasing all the time. We have some battles that other people do a lot of primary help in. For instance, anti-smoking campaigns are one that, by cutting that down, naturally helps your physical well-being whether you do any exercises or not.



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Of course, that was a little bit out of our area, out of our charter. We are more or less trying to keep people fit through participation in sports or physical fitness activities.

M: Okay. Now, your one program hit for the kids.

L: Yes.

M: The school kids. Did you do something for the adults?

L: That's a good question. When I got on board in 1967 it appeared to me that we should start doing something for the adults. Like most councils and programs and governmental programs, we tried various things, but it's difficult. We are now just starting to get established, we think, a program for the adults through YMCA's and industry and those areas. We are trying to formulate, since I was on board, a position of doing that. We had a hard time doing it. We had a hard time.

M: Is the problem inspiring an adult to indulge into sports?

L: Yes, the problem is one of motivation. With the youth programs, and realize that this council was called Youth Fitness Council and was actually started by Eisenhower back in 1955, the schools are the organization that keeps things going because we have a captive audience. [With] adults we don't have a captive audience, and we must also inspire some motivation. We are trying to, right now, tailor a program something like the Youth Physical Fitness Awards Program, only tailored to adults, and see what we can do.

M: Do you think that'll go?

L: I don't know. I hope so. I hope it gives an incentive. The



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military had that at one time; was inspired by the President's council, as a matter of fact, to have a program every year that they must pass certain physical fitness tests. I haven't kept current on that. I know that it doesn't have the same push as it did back in 1961, 1962 and 1963, something like that. There might be another way of inspiring adult physical fitness through the military [to] get one segment of the population.

M: But you don't know how to do that yet?

L: No, it's hard. We're trying to get industry interested; we're trying to have industry support us. Our budget of course is very small, and our budget merely keeps the council staff operating. As a matter of fact, for seven years I guess, or five years, it had never gone above the three hundred and fifteen thousand dollar level. Just recently it has been upped. Of course, we've had I don't know how many, ten federal pay raises all during that time, so it's finally gone up. We rely a lot on the public sector.

M: I think it's of some interest, at least as far as this tape is concerned, that you are still consultant despite the change in administrations. How come?

L: I think, number one, that in having a person in the space program attached to the physical fitness office means that we're not just interested in professional athletics. In other words, my job is not one of physical fitness or working full-time at physical fitness. I have a different job, but we must keep ourselves physically fit here to do the job. In the same respect I think the government,

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both in the Johnson Administration and now the Nixon Administration, perhaps realizes that same aspect, and so they decided to keep me on. Although as protocol would have it, when the inauguration took place I, with the other appointees, submitted my resignation. But I was reinstated by President Nixon.

A very interesting aspect I might mention here occurred when I first was commissioned by President Johnson. The Constitution has a ruling that a citizen of the United States cannot hold two commissions. Of course, I was really unaware of what my status would be with the government in the physical fitness field when I first came aboard, and since I was a part-time consultant I wasn't up there all the time. But I received a call from one of the White House staff lawyers to come over so they could swear me in and [I could] receive my commission. When I got there they said, "You're very lucky. We reviewed the fact that you are a captain in the Navy and you already hold a presidential commission as a captain in the Navy, and that one of the two would have to go. We were about ready to terminate your commission in the Navy." And I said, "Thank goodness that you worked out something, that we didn't have to do that."

M: What did they work out? Did they tell you?

L: Well, they worked out some arrangement whereby I could in this particular category hold two commissions since they are rather non-controversial and it's a non-paying job. That's another good point; it doesn't pay anything.



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M: Yes. That also raises a question. How much time have you had to put in on this?

L: It varied. When I first got on the program and for about six to eight months, almost a year after that, I put in about 30 per cent of my time. That included weekends.

M: (Whistles).

L: The staff had to be organized. It had sort of slowed down between the demise of Musial, when he left, and before I got aboard. One of the biggest things I had to do was the find an executive director to help run the program, which I didn't have at the time. And then we had to get our programs going again and the things started again. Of course, Apollo VIII came along and fortunately, well fortunately for me, there was a period between Gemini XII and Apollo VIII. It occurred because of the problem that we had with the Apollo fire and the slowdown of the program. But after Apollo VIII, from Apollo VIII through Apollo XIII, I didn't have much time at all. I'd get there when I could, but I was, of course, working on Apollo VIII. I devoted most of my time merely to making contacts and making speeches at important events and let the executive director handle the administrative affairs. I was back up commander of Apollo XI, so I had to work on that. Then after Apollo XIII I started to get working with it again. As of now, we've changed the executive director again and got some new blood, and it's still going.

M: Have you ever had any other contacts with President Johnson?



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- L: Yes. As I sat here thinking, we did. Well, of course after Gemini VII we had a meeting at the Indian Treaty Room at the EOB, whereby the Gemini VI and VII crews were awarded the Harmon Trophy. Vice President Humphrey actually did the awarding there. But that evening, it was the time when the President turns on the Christmas tree lights in Washington, D.C., we were all invited over to that ceremony where we briefly met the President. After Gemini XII I think in October of the next year, if I'm not mistaken, President Johnson then awarded Aldrin and myself another Harmony Trophy. And this occurred in the Rose Garden of the White House. So these were other times that I met the President.
- M: Oh these occasions when you were given awards, did the President just generally say congratulations and shake your hand and things of this nature?
- L: Yes.
- M: He doesn't make any speeches or anything?
- L: He made a speech concerning the award ceremony. There were about three of us there, another person had received another award, but it was rather quite short. My impression was that he was very much interested in the space program, but it had been a long, tiring term for the President. It seemed to me that every once in a while if you talked to him his mind seemed to wander and then come back again to the subject. But it appeared like he was quite tired a lot of times.

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- M: The books written about Johnson seem to indicate that he had a rather deep and abiding interest in the space program. Since you have been in it through much of this period, is that kind of judgment true?
- L: Yes, I think his interest stemmed way back when he was vice president.
- M: He was really sincerely, vitally interested in space?
- L: He was interested, and I think he was a real devotee of the program in the fact that he was vitally interested in seeing that our country keep its position in space. And he knew of some of the intangible benefits, because he had worked closely with it. This is not sometimes generally recognized, that there are intangible benefits to the program other than the actual accomplishment of going to the moon or doing lunar exploration for science's sake. There's a tremendous good will aspect to it. The program and its universal acceptance to promote good will with other countries I think was a vital tool. I think he recognized that, and he wanted to keep this up as part of his overall programs.

But I think he was a very humble man, and I think I can also say this for Jim Webb. Although Webb was not a scientist per se-- and perhaps a lot of what we tried to learn in the moon and in the scientific knowledge was above his head, because he was a manager-- he also had a very keen sense of managing and could appreciate the program for the same intangible benefits. These people really devoted, I think, a lot to the program to make sure it was going



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on. And Johnson never to my knowledge knowingly wanted to be in the limelight, to accept the credit, which I thought was a very redeeming feature. He kept the program going, and he saw that it was properly funded.

M: Yes. Did he express a specific concern over safety?

L: Well, yes, I think he expressed a natural concern over safety. I can't recall any specific incidents concerning that, but the fact that he was an avid follower of the program during the flights, watching it, and wanted to be briefed all the time concerning any problems we had indicated to me concern with safety was pretty high in his mind.

M: In regard to financing the program, did Johnson seem to have enough interest that NASA programs got the proper financing?

L: Yes. I think that I can say that he did have the interest. That question is sort of masked by a lot of situations. You have to look at the times themselves. The times themselves and the position of the space program in the public's eye had a lot to do with helping Johnson maintain that particular aspect. So in that regard, yes, he thought the program was one that was worthwhile and worth maintaining an adequate budget for.

M: Did he express any goals for the program, such as "We'll go to the moon and then to Mars," or something like that?

L: No. I think his goal was to help see that the lunar program kept on a straight and narrow path and was well-funded to make sure that we did the job.



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M: Yes. But he didn't go beyond that?

L: No, not to my knowledge. There were a lot of studies, of course, during that time about post-Apollo activities. I was not involved in them, so I don't know what degree of interest the President expressed along those lines.

M: Now, I've exhausted the questions I have for you. Do you have anything you care to add or anything that should be part of this?

L: Why don't you shut that off again?

(Interruption)

M: Do you have any judgments about the personality of President Johnson?

L: Yes. In my working with him, I think that he was a very sincere and devoted man of the country. I think towards the end of his Administration that I noticed a tremendous tiredness of the activities, and even in such interesting things which I'm sure he was very much interested in [such as] space. Because we would sometimes brief him or talk to him, and he would seem to trail off into some other thought and then come back to it.

M: Yes.

L: I was fortunate enough to go with Vice President Humphrey down to Mexico when Humphrey signed, I think it was the Nuclear Arms or Nuclear Ban Treaty in Mexico City. My job was to go with him to help him inspect the Olympic site, which was quite interesting. But aside from that, we had a reception in the embassy in Mexico City that evening, and it was that evening that President Johnson

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in a television interview or broadcast had stated that he would not run for president again. Of course it was a very dramatic moment at the embassy in Mexico City, because the Vice President was down there, President Ordaz from Mexico was there, and Ambassador Freeman was there.

M: Was Humphrey surprised?

L: I really think he was. He went in to listen to the President on the television, and I noticed at that time he's a tremendous speaker. He can talk off the cuff and do a tremendous job, and he did give a very good speech that night concerning the program that President Johnson had done during his period as president and what he had accomplished.

M: Were you surprised that Johnson chose not to run?

L: Not really. I think that having met him a few times and noticing the tremendous burdens he had maintaining his office that he probably, in my estimation, chose the right approach.

M: While we're on this subject, of course now you may have some judgment, too, about Lady Bird, Mrs. Johnson.

L: First of all, let me say that I think that meeting Mrs. Johnson firsthand is always a much better impression that I get when she appears on television. She's a much warmer person when you talk to her; very friendly, very sincere, very much concerned, and honestly so, about the people she talks to and their jobs and what they do. A small incident occurred at the reception, or at the dinner for NASA, in the White House. The President, of course,



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gave his talk. After it was all over with we all got up, and the idea was to go to an adjoining room for coffee or cocktails or something like that. So we were all supposed to follow the First Lady and the President out, because once we left the room the photographers who were there were going to photograph the President and the First Lady walking out with the group behind them going to the other room. Well, the President got stopped and was talking to a bunch of people, and the First Lady wanted to get things organized, and I ended up walking with her. As I turned around the bend, these guys stopped taking pictures because I wasn't the President.

M: This was in that December of 1968 meeting?

L: Yes, December of 1968, when we had the dinner at the White House.

M: One other thing you might be able to give some judgment on--the relationship of James Webb to the President.

L: I don't know too much about that relationship; I do know that it was a fairly close one. I can only view Webb as an administrator to NASA. He worked closely with the White House, and I think the space program itself benefited from that close relationship and smooth administration to get the job done.

M: Yes. As an administrator of NASA, was he a capable individual?

L: Oh, yes, definitely so. There's no doubt about it. He is a very capable individual in management. Essentially, what you have to do up there--really, that job as administrator in headquarters is one of tying in Congress and the president and the budget to see



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that the program is worthwhile. His main job is to make sure the programs are going on and that, you know, they're funded, and that Congress and the President, both the executive and the legislature, know where the money's going and have a warm feeling for it so that they back the programs.

M: Okay. Now, anything else that comes to mind?

L: I can't really think of anything now. I think we just about talked the whole thing out.

M: Thank you very much.

L: Yes, right.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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