INTERVIEW I

DATE: February 24, 1989

INTERVIEWEE: HARRY NACHLIN

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Nachlin's home in Pacific Beach, California

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

N: In this instance, I got the word along with Jim Chudars that we were going to Texas, which was quite a surprise to us, you know. It really came out of a clear blue sky, "Go home and pack, and go to Texas." And we did. We flew that helicopter in about three days, and we got to Dallas, and we met Mr. Johnson and all his people.

G: Tell me briefly about the helicopter. What kind was it?

N: Well, it was a Sikorsky S-51 helicopter, which was designed in the late 1940s and it went into production in the early 1950s. It was--mostly it was designed for the air force and the navy. The air force called it an H-5, an H-5F as I recall; the navy called them an HO3S-1, and the navy's idea was to put a rescue hoist on the helicopter and to use it for rescuing pilots who went in the water off of a carrier. It was called Plane Guard, and it was used for plane guard. The air force as well used it for utility around air stations and for rescue, search and rescue. They also had a rescue hoist on them, and, of course, when the Korean War came along, they really went to work. Really, they put it in the air. It had no armament. It had no armor, but it was put in and used a lot for Med-Evac--some observation, but mostly Med-Evac. Also to rescue downed pilots from enemy territory,

and elsewhere.

G: How many people would it carry?

N: It could carry three passengers and a pilot, but more likely, it would carry two and a pilot.

G: Do you have any idea how the arrangement between Lyndon Johnson's campaign and Sikorsky were effected?

N: We only were told that the Johnson people contacted the United Aircraft people in Washington and explained that Mr. Johnson was involved in this campaign, and he had been--he had lost time because he was in the hospital. I think he was up at the Mayo Clinic to have a gall bladder operation as I recall [It was a kidney stone operation.].

G: Right.

N: In any event, he had lost some time, and the primary was bearing down on them, and they needed a way to campaign and make up for lost time, so they hit upon this idea of getting the helicopter. As far as the--who paid for it or anything, I really don't know except that I got a big kick out of Mr. Johnson's campaign speeches because he had--it appeared to me that he had a sectionalized speech that he presented, which he could tailor for the area he was in. In other words, when he was out in the farming areas, he inserted a portion that would relate to those people like rural electrification, price supports, and things of that nature. When he was in the larger cities though, he would speak more to the city folk and the workers and the union people and all of that.

But he started them all off by more or less introducing the helicopter because people came to see this helicopter. He would start off, and he would say, "Because I have been sick,"--I forget exactly the words he used, but he'd lost time, and he needed to

make time, make up for lost time--a hundred-and-five of his friends chipped in five dollars apiece and rented the helicopter. Of course, I got a kick out of that because that wouldn't have paid for the gas and oil, but, you know, it sounded clever, and it got them rolling. Then he'd generally introduce Jim Chudars, who by then had retreated to the shade of the closest tree and would be sitting there, and I'd be somewhere in the back of the crowd if I was there because sometimes I would--I didn't fly in the aircraft. I traveled by car, usually with the man that was--he was an employee of the radio station in Austin and he was an engineer. They wanted him along in case the public address system went bad because it did get a lot of vibration installed in the helicopter, and we didn't know how it would do, and actually, it did real good, but we made that whole trip. In any event--

G: You were there primarily to maintain--

N: Well, I was the crew chief on the helicopter, yes, and every night I would look it over--you know, get it ready, do what they call a pre-flight so we'd be ready to go the next day, and usually, we flew from--it was into dark. I'd be doing it with a flashlight because they started off early in the morning. Mr. Johnson--I don't know how he did it really. He was a campaigner for sure because generally, he'd make a speech on the radio. He'd speak on the radio early in the morning, and we'd kind of wonder, you know; us city slickers would say, "What--who--what's at six o'clock in the morning?" and they'd say, "Well, the farmers are up," you know. So he'd speak--many mornings he'd speak at 6:00 or 6:30, and then about 7:00 or so, he'd be up, and they'd get going. So I couldn't really plan on doing any work in the morning, so I'd do as best I could to get everything

ready the night before by flashlight, if necessary. We operated that way, and I'd do just what I could, and then weekends, they took off fortunately, and I didn't. I went out and worked because it was two days or a full day to do the work, and really it was a good thing that I did it.

After the first week, we went up and--it was either after the first week or the second week, we wound up in Austin, and Jim Chudars said, "Well, why don't you take a day off?" you know, "Take it easy." "No." I said, "Jim, I haven't had a good inspection on this airplane since we left the factory, and this was--and I'm going to do it," and I just went out. I'll never forget, I pulled the oil screen on the engine, and it's a big cap that holds the screen in and the cap is hollowed on the inside, and when I pulled it out, it was full of sand. It was just packed full of sand, and God, I--well, it was obvious if you saw the operation, they were landing in grass fields and dirt fields and football fields, behind high schools and public schools. Of course, when the helicopter gets into the hover, it blows up a big column of dust, an envelope of dust, and it's all sucked into the engine because the engine is breathing the air. So I quick drained the oil and flushed it and drained the filters and then I thought, "I'd better check the gear boxes, too," because they breathe, but they don't breathe like an engine breathes. They just vented really. The warm air can vent off, and when it cools off, it draws air in, but it doesn't draw the volume that an engine does, so there was no trouble with the gearboxes. Well, anyhow, that's about the way we operated.

Another one that I often think could have changed the path of history--we had to leave, you know. We stayed three weeks, and the campaign people were very unhappy.

They wanted us to stay longer, and they--well, the reason we said we had--we had flown the aircraft in to check--we had to do a major inspection on it, and they said, "Well, we can get an extension, you know, we can get it"--and I said, "Well"--of course this came into my bailiwick because I was the mechanic, I had to sign the logbook. I was the aircraft and engine mechanic, and I didn't think I wanted to do that. I didn't think it was wise to do that. Well, we talked to the plant, and the plant said we could fly up to check time, which gave us a few more local flight hours. It was a 240-hour check that was due. I think we had to change the engine. The aircraft had a lot more time on it, but the intervals were broken into 260, 120, 240, and 480. At that time, those were the inspection intervals. So they said, "Fly the aircraft,"--I forget what the hours were, but you know, "at such--and so many hours, it would be into check." They said, "You can ferry it back to the factory without performing the inspection as long as you're not carrying passengers." So that was the agreement and very reluctantly, they agreed, and they got that Bell helicopter.

Well, I don't know if Chudars has ever mentioned it, but that first day flying back, we were flying between Texarkana and Little Rock and the engine quit. Fortunately, it caught again, but we were flying over this big pine forest, and there wasn't any place to land. Well, what had happened was, there was contamination in the fuel system. There was lint. When we started out, we had a problem. We couldn't always get to an airfield to get gas, so they sent the aviation fuel in trucks in fifty-five gallon drums with a hand pump, and before I left, well, one of my bosses gave me a chamois. He said, "Now if you get a chance to get the fuel out of the drums, use the chamois over the funnel." So I did.

This procedure was necessary to trap water from condensation. Well, after about three or four days I noticed the chamois was starting to look moth eaten, you know, and I thought, "God! What's happening here? Where is that stuff going?" I quit using the chamois, you see. I said, "I'd rather get water in there. I can drain the water out." The water isn't going to be a problem--because you drain the tanks everyday in the morning, you always drain a couple of pints of fuel out of each tank. So I stopped used the chamois. And--well, when we couldn't land because of the trees. The engine, as I say, it sputtered. It got awful quiet. Jim's feet and arms were flying all over the cockpit because he was sitting there with his feet up smoking a cigarette just--you have one hand on the controls all the time, but he was, you know, relaxed, and we were about four or five hundred feet up, and it doesn't take long to get down. It got awful quiet. The aircraft started to yaw around, which it would do when you lose power like that--

G: What do you mean by that? Do you mean [inaudible]?

N: No. It's just like--when the aircraft is flying with power, the fuselage wants to turn the opposite direction as the blades just like a fan would. If you held the fan blades, the motor would rotate in the opposite direction.

G: Yes, [inaudible].

N: --but when the power stops, when the engine stops, it reverses because there's no more power, but there's friction in the drive system, and the fuselage wants to follow the blades. So you just get that momentary transition where the aircraft--cause the tail rotor--that's what the tail rotor does. The tail rotor is keeping you going straight. You have pitch on the tail rotor, which is controlled by the rudder pedals

G: I see. I see.

N: At that moment when the engine quits, then the pilot has to reverse the tail rotor, but the aircraft will yaw a little bit, and it did yaw, and it got awful quiet, and it must have still not have stopped. It must have been windmilling, and it caught again because if it had windmilled to a stop, it wouldn't have caught, not without the starter, and there wasn't time for that. So it started again, and "Well, what do we do now?" And I said, "It's running." There wasn't any place to land. "You want to--?" There was a highway a little to the left of our route. I said, "You want to get over by that highway so that if quits again we can maybe land on the highway?"

Well, anyhow, it kept running, and we got into Little Rock, and I pulled all the carburetor fuel screens, and that's when I saw all the lint. What apparently happened, the fuel tanks had baffles in them, but the baffles were horizontal, they were so that as the fuel drained down the lint laid on the baffle. If the baffles were vertical, it all would have gone down in the bottom, but they weren't, they were horizontal. And they had holes in them, of course, but there was a surface area for the lint to stick to, and it accumulated and then gradually it worked in. I had visions of some of the places they took to land in, you know, in some towns they landed in the square right in the center of a town or in the high school football field, and if they were taking [off] out of one of those places and their engine did that, it could have been a disaster.

G: When did you first meet Lyndon Johnson?

N: Well, I think we met the day we got there. We met Lyndon Johnson.

G: In Dallas or--?

N: Yes. We arrived in Dallas, and then we more or less had a meeting and a little briefing, and Jim explained what we could do. We installed the speaker. We installed the equipment in the aircraft. We clamped the speaker to the right-side landing gear strut, and we painted on it, you know. Someone painted "Johnson for Senate" on the tail cone. I didn't paint it. Someone painted in watercolor, and we came up more or less with the plan, which would be that—originally I thought that I might be flying with the aircraft all the time, but there wasn't room because there was Mr. Johnson and an announcer--was it Joe Phipps?--

G: Yes.

N: --and there really wasn't--it wouldn't have been comfortable with three, and it would have made it difficult especially--this was the middle of summer, and as it gets hotter, the aircraft loses efficiency. As it gets hotter, the engine loses power because the air is hot, and you don't get as compact a charge of a fuel mixture into each cylinder.

G: Was it hot aboard the helicopter?

N: Oh, yes. The air was--all you'd get is whatever breeze you got by opening the windows. There was no air conditioning or anything like that, and it was warm. You know, it was the middle of the summer.

G: Noisy?

N: Noisy? Not too bad. We had some soundproofing. You wouldn't hear--it was noisier outside and around the aircraft, but there was--you would hear--the transmission had a distinct whine to it that you could hear all the time.

G: When you were working out the plans in Dallas for what you would do, was there one

person in charge of the campaign that you worked with as sort of a [inaudible]?

N: Well, there were and I can't remember who they were. I really have to say that Lyndon Johnson was in charge of what was going to happen, but, of course, there were several people around. There were several college-age people, who were on summer vacation, and they volunteered to drive, and the way it was organized, they had a couple of sound trucks or cars. They'd drive on ahead and drive through town and announce that "Lyndon Johnson will be arriving in a half an hour or an hour by helicopter," and they tried to have an advance--someone went on in advance and tried to pick out the site that the helicopter could land in. Jim had briefed the people as to how much room he needed to get in and to get out, so that it wouldn't be too dangerous.

Well, a couple of times the decision was wrong, and they arrived--the helicopter arrived, and Jim looked at where he was supposed to land, and he said, "We're not going to land there. It's not big enough." But the crowd was there, and Johnson could see that the people were there, and he'd--"Come on. You've got to land there!" And Jim--I'm getting this later on--would say, "No, we're not going to land there." Well, he'd circle the town, and, of course, the town wasn't very big, and he'd find a field across town or a few blocks away that was adequate, so they'd come back, and Joe Phipps would apologize, over the loud speaker, and he'd say, "Well, our pilot tells us that it wouldn't be very wise to land there. We'd blow the dust all over you, and it'd be too messy, so we'll give you a few minutes, and everybody go to the corner of So-and-So and So-and-So, or out to the high school, or whatever, and they'd circle, and everybody would dash for the new place, and then they'd land there. Johnson was clever enough to capitalize on this, you know,

and as I started to say, he had that little introduction about the "hundred-and-five friends who rented the helicopter," and then he'd introduced Jim Chudars. He'd say, "That's my pilot over there, Jim," he says. "He's the only man in this outfit that talks back to me." That's a true representation of the situation because they didn't--he made the decisions, and you didn't really countermand them.

G: Was there a problem with the crowd getting too close to the aircraft when it was attempting to land?

N: Well, no--it wasn't too bad. The problem was sometimes with the take-off, you know, because when they came in to land, the people were a little bit leery of the machine anyhow, you know, and they'd kind of stand back. But then, he'd speak--if he were speaking from the helicopter because the loud speaker was on the helicopter, everyone would crowd around. Of course, there was a reluctance by the crowd to move back--you know, they'd get in, and they'd get ready to go, and you'd tell people to get back, and this was typical wherever you went, not only on that campaign. I can remember being in other places, and you'd wave people back and they'd go back about five feet. Well, that's not enough so you wave, and they go back again. Well finally they're back far enough to where it's safe to start the engine and get the rotor turning. Of course, then the dust starts to blow and then they get back further.

G: Had he had experience with helicopters before this during World War II, or did he talk about--?

N: No, I don't think so. Actually, World War II--the only helicopters that made it into World War II arrived almost at the end, and they arrived in the China-Burma-India

theater. They did a little flying there, but those were Sikorsky R-4's, which could only carry two people. It wasn't the same helicopter. It was a smaller helicopter. He'd been in the navy, I know, but the navy really didn't have helicopters like that.

G: You mentioned a hundred-and-five friends contributing five dollars. How much do you think it really cost to have that helicopter there for the three weeks including the trip down and back?

N: Well--

G: Your time and Chudars' time.

N: Well, of course, in those days, we really never had good information on operating costs. We didn't know what it cost to operate that thing because the only one who was really operating any number was the government, and it was kind of hard to get a handle on it. Of course, then, these commercial operators did get into it, and they did start to operate, but they had--you know, they were subsidized by the post office. So it's kind of hard to come up with a number. I would have to guess when it was all boiled down, it was maybe between three and four hundred dollars an hour, and, of course, then you start adding in the--that would be fuel and maintenance and depreciation and things like that. Then you'd have to add salaries for the pilot and crew, I suppose, expenses and things like that, but I have no idea who paid for it and how much they paid for it.

G: Did you have any problem with power lines?

N: Well, we really didn't because Jim was proficient enough and a smart enough pilot to size up the situation real quick, and some of the places that it was ticklish were some of the football fields because they had lights around them, you know, but he could generally get

out all right.

G: I have supplied a chronology--[inaudible].

N: Yes. I did look through that.

G: Do you remember any particular stops?

N: I unfortunately can't because they all run together on me, but I do remember the general comments that I would hear from some of the people, and some of them who kind of looked around. I guess I was just in a business suit, and they knew that, "This fellow here, he's not one of the natives," and they'd ask questions about the helicopter. Then if the speech got a little long, they'd say, "Is he going to take off? We want to stay and watch it take off," you see. And I'd say, "Yes, his speech is almost over." I'd had it memorized at one point.

G: He gave the same speech regularly?

N: The same speech with variations, so they'd stay, and they'd watch.

G: Did he talk too long [inaudible], do you think?

N: I think he did a little bit, talk too long, because the people were getting fidgety, and then the other thing that they'd do was after the speech was over, Joe would invite them to come up and shake Mr. Johnson's hand, and people were very reluctant to do this. You know, a few would always come forward, but the majority of the crowd would hold back, so he'd walk out into the crowd and grab hands and shake them. As a matter of fact, he must have shook mine about fifteen or twenty times because he'd be grabbing--he'd be looking at the hands, you see, and then he'd look up, and he'd recognize me, and he'd say, "Oh, how are you today? How's the helicopter doing?" And then he'd go on because he

was counting. He'd come back and say, "Well, I shook sixty hands or sixty-five hands," and they kept tabs of how many hands he shook.

G: [Inaudible].

N: We didn't realize this at first, but later on, we heard them talking, you know, and saying, "Well, this was a good day," or "This wasn't such a good day," as to how many hands he shook. And the other thing that impressed me, and it's my observation, there were some people who didn't want to shake his hand. Now maybe they were Stevenson supporters, and they really--they just--in other words, I felt that these folks figured if they shook his hand, they were telling him they were going to vote for him. And either they weren't, or they hadn't made up their mind and they didn't want this handshake to make their mind up for them, and they just wouldn't come back. They'd kind of--he'd get the old hand, you know, one way or another, he'd get to shake their hand unless they left.

You know, some people would really move to the rear. They wouldn't leave so they wouldn't see the helicopter take off, but they'd get far enough back so they wouldn't get to shake his hand, or they wouldn't *have* to shake his hand. As I thought about it and as I watched it, that happened quite often, and I came to the conclusion that these--that this is the mentality of these folks here, and the ones who come gladly forward, anxiously forward, they're his supporters. There's a vote. Then there were the undecideds, and they were, "Well, okay, if you're going to shake my hand, come on and shake it," and there were the ones who just weren't going to do it. Maybe they voted for him after all was said and done, but I've got an idea that some of them weren't because you could hear the--I'd hear people talking, you know, and they'd say, "Ah, Coke Stevenson's the man

for me," and all that. They felt he was more--too young and too up-and-coming and too much of a hard charger and things like that. There was a little--which was kind--as I say, it's been twenty years later when I read that book, it all came together. I said, "My God! Those are the impressions I got just watching it. How did he dig it out? He must have talked to a lot of people."

G: How large were the crowds generally?

N: Well, there'd be a couple of hundred, I imagine. It would vary. Well, what happened--and I think it's in your narrative here--we were down in the south--around Waco, and they got a very high wind, and they operated in the morning, and then Jim said, "It's just too windy." They were--the direction of the travel was right into the wind, and he couldn't even keep up with the cars. You know, it was a real problem. The helicopter flew about seventy miles an hour, sixty-five, seventy to cruise--so if you were flying into a forty-knot wind, you were making twenty miles an hour, you know. So they reluctantly decided--at lunchtime, they made the decision, "Well, we'll stop flying, and he'll go on by car." And, of course, I stayed with the helicopter. Normally, I would have traveled ahead as I had been doing. I just stayed with Jim, and we got to where our overnight stay was planned, and the next day the weather was all right, and they went on, but the word got to us that the crowds were very poor for the rest of the day and they weren't going to campaign by car. If the helicopter couldn't fly, they weren't going to go.

G: Is that right?

N: Yes. Although we didn't miss another day for any reason. We didn't miss any time on account of maintenance.

G: So really the helicopter was even more than a means of transportation?

N: It was an attraction. Well, it was so new, you know. Helicopters are common now, but this thing must have probably been the first helicopter that anybody ever saw and some of them didn't believe it. Someone would always say, "How'd you get that thing in here? You bring it in last night by truck?" And I'd say, "Oh, no. It flew in here. You just wait awhile, and you'll see it leave. It will fly away."

G: Was Chudars having to fly more hours a day even than he normally did?

N: Oh, he probably did. I noticed a comment in there that he made.

G: Did he complain about it do you think, or--?

N: No. Well, Jim was kind of a funny guy. Jim--he just didn't like--probably a little bit of the pressure would get to him after awhile, and--you usually, you know, at the factory, the kind of flying you did at the factory at that time is ten-, fifteen-minute, twenty-minute flights. Something is wrong, you'd go up and fly it around, and you'd figure [it] out, and then you'd say, "Such-and-such is wrong." Then they'd come back, and we'd have to--either the mechanics or the engineers would figure out what was wrong, make the adjustments or replace something. A lot of time in those days, we would change--the blades weren't smooth. It was a case of putting on a different set of blades, so you'd come back and put on another set of blades and try it again. So the day for the pilots was made up of a lot of waiting around plus a ten-minute flight here or a twenty-minute flight there. There was, as I remember now, of course, when the aircraft first came out of final assembly, we'd check it over and make it ready to fly and fuel it and all that, and there'd be about a twenty- or thirty-minute hover, in which they'd just sit right over the field and

sit there and hover, and they wouldn't go anywhere. Then they'd land, and we'd check the gearboxes and check for chips and things like that and make sure everything was all right. There was a procedure of certain maneuvers they had to do which had to do with making sure that the flight controls were properly rigged--

G: Yes.

N: --so there was--they'd fly, and they'd make right turns and left turns, and then there was one maneuver which was called auto-rotation, which would simulate that the engine stopped, and you could land. You see, you could land the helicopter, but the controls had to be properly rigged so that when you went into what we called low-pitch or stick- or collective-pitch down, the rotor speed had to build up to about 185 rpm--no, it was 212. About 160 to 185 was normal for rotor speed, but what would happen in an auto-rotation, you'd reduced the pitch, and as you'd descend, the rotor builds up rpm, and then you use that energy to pull up and make the the added rotor speed slow the descent and to make it a little bit of a run-on landing. That was something that had to be adjusted and those were the types of flying that the pilots would do in what we called the production hanger. And then there was an experimental site where the pilots would fly--we had some aircraft that were in experimental stages--and then they'd have a lot of instrumentation on the oscilloscopes and this equipment. They'd just go out, and they'd fly a proscribed flight schedule and come back, you know, we'd--they might come back, and they'd fly, say, at one gross weight, and then they'd increase the gross weight, and they'd go out and fly again and do things like that.

G: Did LBJ ever simply greet people from the air without stopping? Say if there were

farmers en route or people where he couldn't stop, but he could still--

N: Well, I saw that mentioned as I looked through it, and it just didn't sound right to me because you couldn't hear that thing. You could if you just happened to get in the right position windwise so that if the helicopter was ahead of you because the speaker was kind of pointing back. If the helicopter was ahead of you, and the wind was blowing, say, from the side or something like that, but you couldn't hear that thing too well. I had to kind of question that, that he was--

G: How about flying over his own town to--in Austin. Were you ever aware of him doing that?

N: Well, that might have happened. We were only in Austin twice as I recall. We were there that one weekend that I'd say we were there. I think it was the second weekend, and then that--the next week is the week we went out as far as Lubbock, San Angelo and Lubbock. I guess we came back to Austin, and that's where we were given a little farewell party. We were invited over to--and I told you I had this watch--(laughter)--oh, I'm hooked up. I can get it later--and we had a nice evening, and the girls--one of the oldest girl gave Jim and me a watch--I could never remember how old they were--

G: I think there was about four.

N: --but apparently there were four, so she gave us each a watch, and we met Mrs. Johnson--I think that might have been the first time we met Mrs. Johnson although we may have seen her. And then as a matter of fact, I didn't recall, but in the logbook [it says] that we went to West, and I don't even recall that, and then we went to Dallas. All I remember--the thing that probably crowded everything out was that incident I told you

about when the engine quit on us, which happened the first day after we left.

G: What was LBJ's mood during the time he was campaigning?

N: He was always, it seemed to me, he was always upbeat. But he had a sense--I think he had a sense for the crowds, and if the crowds weren't real friendly or real big, it was depressing to him, I'm pretty sure. And he was a tough customer, you know. He was a tough taskmaster.

G: Give me an example.

N: Well, one example--the examples are--the staff was instructed to have--some fresh shirts and a clean hat so that he could change at noontime and start over again. Somehow or other, I think they sent the hats to be cleaned, and they didn't get back and he didn't have a fresh hat, and he gave somebody hell. He didn't have a damn fresh hat for him. It had to be right. That's the one that stands out, because I don't think I was exposed to it, but Jim was, and he remembered. He told me about it. And of course this business of what he always said, where Jim is the only one that ever talked back to him. You know, suggestions would be made, "Let's not do this, let's do that," or something, but LBJ made up his mind, "This is the way it's going to be," and that's the way it was going to be. Jim would say, "No, we can't land there because it's not safe," so LBJ couldn't override that. He tried a few times, and Jim said, "No. We're not going to land there. It's not safe," and as I say, he made a little thing out of it that he could use in his speech.

G: How about--where would he stay overnight during these [inaudible]?

N: Well, we generally did--our route was planned to be in a larger town like Marshall or Lufkin, or the county seat at the end of the day.

G: Yes.

N: It's down near the Louisiana border. Well, Austin, Dallas. One week we spent--I think the one--the first week we came back we spent in Dallas and then--so--

G: When you stayed in Marshall would you stay in a hotel?

N: In a hotel, yes. We'd all stay in a hotel, and he'd usually--they'd have--even at noon time, they'd plan it for one of the larger county seats or whatever so that he could give a speech to the--maybe the Lions clubs or somebody at lunchtime. He'd have a commitment at lunchtime. He'd have lunch and give a speech.

G: He'd leave the helicopter and [inaudible].

N: Yes. Yes. Well, we'd be pretty close to town. That would give us a chance to refuel, get lunch ourselves, and usually, as I say, the driver and myself, we'd have our lunch, and I'd make sure the helicopter was refueled, and everything was all set. Then, depending on how far the next leg was, if there wasn't going to be a case of having to go too fast to get ahead, we'd wait until he was airborne. Then I'd know there was no last minute maintenance problem, and they're on their way, and we'd just go, and we could probably go just as fast as the helicopter could go. If it was a long leg, we'd sometimes just stop after they got there. You know, I'd go and talk to Jim, and the radio engineer would check out the sound system, and we'd make sure that everything was all right, and we'd just get in the car and get to the next stop. That happened a few times, I--a long leg, and then, as I say, it was planned so that we'd be at a larger town.

I think you can see that from the log here, and he'd stay in the hotel. We'd all stay in the hotel, and usually they had reservations for all of us. What do you see, like one

day we wound up in Paris, Texas, and then we would up--we went to Marshall the first day, and then we made a lot of stops, and then we went to Texarkana and remained over night at Texarkana the next day. Then we went to Paris, Texas, and we went to Sherman, and then we came back to Dallas, and, of course, they'd--then if you'd go here--I think there was another sheet here that I saw that showed all the stops made in one day, but this is the one I had. Here we go--so, yes, here. I think it's in this--well, here it is. It shows that here we made nine stops that day and seven one day and nine, eight. Those were like--they'd make two or three in the morning and have lunch and then make three or four in the afternoon. Of course, it was summer and the days were long. You know, you could go up until seven or eight o'clock. We used to get a kick out of it. Of course, I had the funds and the credit card to refuel the aircraft, and many times, the truck would come, and they'd refuel us and I'd say, "Well, who do I pay?" "Oh, it's all taken care of." Or else we'd come down in the morning and check on our hotel, "No, it's all taken care of." So--

G: What does that mean? Does that mean [inaudible]?

N: It means somebody had--some supporters, either the local folk or someone--volunteered to pay the bill. It's possibly a campaign contribution. Another form of a campaign contribution, as I recall, is the cars. You know, there were about three or four cars, and they were donated by various dealers.

G: Really? Were they new cars?

N: Yes. There were--in fact, one morning we were following one of the other cars. One of the young guys who was going to be the drummer as it were, he passed us, and I had

ridden with this fellow a few times. He went eighty miles an hour, full-bore all the time. He passed us, and he wasn't a few hundred feet or maybe a few hundred yards ahead, and I saw this puff under the car. At the time I didn't know what it was, but he rolled to a stop, and we stopped to see what was wrong. Well, he had--he'd left--the car was supposed to have an oil change and grease the night before, and they forgot to put the oil in. They drained the oil and didn't fill it, and it was out of oil. Burned up the engine. Well, you know, it belonged to a dealer. They came and got the car, gave him another car, and off he went. These fellows really--they were volunteers, and they worked hard, and if they made a mistake, Johnson was all over them like a wet shirt.

G: What happened?

N: Well, I can't remember specifically as clearly as I can about the hat situation except that the talk would be that maybe they didn't get into the town fast enough and get enough people mustered, you know. Sometimes there wasn't enough time. There wasn't a long enough lag, and the helicopter got there too soon.

G: You think they were afraid of him?

N: Oh, yes. Yes. They were. They were afraid of him. I don't think Joe Phipps was--I think there were a couple of people who weren't afraid because they knew what to expect, and they knew how to handle the situation, but he was a tough customer. He was charming, of course, you know, and could be, but--

G: Were his audiences largely white, or would blacks come as well?

N: I would say they were largely white. There were probably a few around, but there again, it would depend. East Texas was the only place you really had much of a mix. Once you

got out to West Texas, there weren't--in fact I'd asked about that and they said, "Well, there aren't very many Negroes in West Texas."

G: How about in East Texas where you did have a lot of blacks. Did they come to hear him speak, and did he--?

N: Well, I don't recall that he spoke to them, but I don't recall that he didn't. That's ambiguous in that regard.

G: Did he ever throw his hat to the audience?

N: I can't remember that. It doesn't stick with me that he did, he may have.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

G: We're saying that he was gregarious--

N: He was gregarious enough, yes, when his speech was over to get out and shake their hands, and say, "I'm Lyndon Johnson, and I want to be your senator, and I hope you'll vote for me," and some of the people would come up. They were his supporters. The first blush of activity was the people who certainly were for him. And then it would tend to taper out and he'd have to wander further away from the aircraft, into a larger circle. That would give the time to the people who just didn't want to shake his hands too readily--and this varied with the way the timetable was going as well. But the campaign was disappointed, I know, when we had to leave because they were getting ready to go into San Antonio and down into the Big Bend country, and that Bell didn't have too much of a range, so it was probably a little harder for them to do it with the Bell helicopter.

G: The Bell was not as strong?

N: It was a smaller helicopter.

G: I thought it would go farther than the Sikorsky.

N: Oh, I don't know. I don't think so. They might have been the same, but you could only get two people in it, you see. You couldn't carry the announcer.

G: Just the pilot.

N: Just the pilot, Joe [Joseph] Mashman and one passenger. I knew Joe. He was a great guy.

G: Was it difficult to get the fuel to the helicopter? Were there ever occasions where you couldn't find--

N: No, that was pretty well done. We never really had a hold up. The truck was there. Whoever was doing that--it was someone at Humble Oil.

G: Really?

N: Yes because they were usually Humble Oil trucks, and--

G: Was it aviation fuel?

N: Oh, yes. It was aviation fuel. It had to be aviation fuel; you couldn't use automotive fuel. It was too low on octane.

G: Well, how could the truck stay ahead of the [helicopter]?

N: Well, they knew our route. We knew how far we could go. We knew that after say an hour-and-a-half or two hours of flying we had to have fuel, and the schedule was laid out in advance, at least a day in advance, so we could look at the map, and we could say, "Well, we can land at an airport here. We can get fuel at the airport this day." But most of the time, even if there would be a little delay because I have never been able to go into an airport when we were on cross-countries, and get in and get out in less than an hour.

By the time you got the fuel, and you paid for it, and you checked with the tower, and you got a weather report, and all of that business. So really by having the truck waiting for us and come to us, we eliminated all of that, and we did save time because while the speaking was going on--well, we couldn't really--we'd have to wait until the crowds went away. But we didn't hold that much. You see, we only held one hundred gallons of fuel, and we never used it all up so we'd only take on maybe a hundred or--oh, wait, we had two fifty gallon tanks--a hundred gallons of fuel, and it never got down that low, so it didn't take too long to refuel.

G: Was it the same truck?

N: Oh, no.

G: It was different trucks that were in the area [inaudible].

N: Different trucks. That's right. The dealer in the area would be advised to have aviation fuel. And, of course, the drums of aviation fuel had a different color scheme on them, so that they wouldn't make a mistake and give you automotive fuel, and usually they were fresh. But, as I say, for a while I drained them through that chamois until that almost turned out to be a disaster. We didn't have any trouble until we were in route to Connecticut. As I say, that was really--well, the whole thing, I think, was really pretty well organized because the stops were laid out, and they were always--except for that day when the winds went against us we made all our stops, and I can't remember really any occasions when we had any kind of real problem.

There may have been political problems that we didn't get in on. In other words, there might have been things that Mr. Johnson reacted to by talking to the people who

were his supporters or who he thought were his supporters or he expected certain things to happen or certain people to be there who didn't show up. I can't really comment because I don't know. Those things may have happened, but I wasn't in that link, so I--I was too busy chasing that plane. Some of what I'd get is maybe during the evening the fellow I was riding with would pick up little bits of information, but he wasn't a political person either. He was an engineer for the radio station, so--

G: Did LBJ think he was going to win that election?

N: Well, I think he was running scared, but I don't--I really have no way of knowing at this date whether he did or not. I think he felt that he was a bit of an underdog, but I didn't know how much of this was--because, as I say, he hadn't had a chance to campaign, to start early enough.

G: Was he healthy? He had been sick, had been hospitalized?

N: He must have been healthy because he put in an awfully long day. In fact, I wondered how he did it, and I have since thought about it and decided that nobody becomes president of these United States by accident or by being talked into it. You have got to want to be president, and you have got to want to win, and you have got to want to work, and, as I say, Johnson was up on the radio at six or six-thirty. He'd make two or three speeches in the morning at different stops. He'd fresh up, have lunch. Maybe it was a Lion's club or the veterans and he'd speak to them. Then he'd take off until three or four in the afternoon, and then he might have another radio appearance that evening or a personal appearance, and he just went. And I never heard him say, "I'm tired. Let's slow down," or anything like that. He was charged up, and he was pulling the rest of it in his

wake as it were.

G: Did they ever have strategy sessions at night at the hotel?

N: Well, we never would be exposed to that because we'd sort of--Jim and I, we'd get the helicopter put to bed, and we'd go dragging in and have supper and get to bed.

G: Were there ever hecklers in the audience?

N: There were hecklers--I heard hecklers, but not loud like you get these days--who would say, "Well, he can't do that." Some of them would say that he's operating with his wife's money--it's his wife that's carrying him. His wife's folks are wealthy and he married in to get her financial help--and has enough money to do this. You'd hear those comments of that nature as you sat in the back of the audience. No one was shouting it, but you could hear them. Not saying it to me but saying it to each other. More than once this happened. And that was another thing that I had never gotten around to following up on until I read that book and found out that Mrs. Johnson's folks were in the general dry goods business or something like that. Apparently she was a rather sharp businesslady herself from what they thought.

G: Did you form an impression of her during the time that you were down there?

N: No, because we really didn't see her. Everything of her was what I heard; it was all hearsay. She didn't--I don't think she traveled with us. We probably met her at the big stops, and then at her house. She had those two little girls to worry about, I guess.

G: Anything--

(Interruption)

N: The big thing for me personally having been exposed to this campaign--and the first time

that ever happened to me--and to have watched him and watch him and formed an impression of him. Then of course he went on into the Senate and you were always hearing about him as the majority leader of the Senate. Then when he got selected as vice president, which was a bit of a shock at the time--no one was expecting Kennedy to pick Lyndon Johnson. But the big reaction for me was, as I think I've mentioned, when President Kennedy was killed and Johnson became president and everybody wondered, "How is this man going to do? Where did he come from?" I myself wasn't worried. I thought, "He'll handle that job." And he did, too, really.

G: Anything else on the decision to return to Connecticut after you had flown the 240 or--

N: Really that was the only thing that was on my mind, was that the aircraft should be checked. It was hard flying. As I said before, we were operating out of unpaved areas and there was a lot of dust ingested. As a matter of fact, the engine went in for overhaul. It was removed and it went in for overhaul. I was told later on that all the cylinders had to be replaced because they were all scored from the sand.

This other thing--we had that momentary gas, engine failure. Well, of course, we couldn't do very much. Every time I landed I'd drain about a half a gallon of gas and just let it run on the ground out of the filters and out of the carburetor. We were near the Sikorsky airport and it did one more cough and sputter, but kept on running. Jim just flew over the fence, landed, and taxied the rest of the way. We went through our inspection and again I drained the tanks completely, filled them and drained them. But for weeks I was still getting lint in the carburetors, in the screens, so we finally ended up taking the tanks out. And it was a job to take the tanks out of those things because they

were buried inside the fuselage. You had to kind of brace it on each end and take some structural members out to get the tanks out. But you had to get them out to where we could kind of turn them on their side while we rinsed them so that the stuff would run out. So I never regretted not letting myself get talked into continuing. A failure of the engine during from one of the smaller fields could have been tragic.

G: Did you argue with him personally about this?

N: Well, not myself, I didn't. But Chudars may have. But I don't know that we talked directly to Johnson. I can't remember that. We may have the night at his home, but when they explained how important it was and I said, "I realize that it's important"--in fact, that's how we got to stay another week, you see, by getting the factory to tell us that we could fly--I was figuring we needed ten or twelve hours to fly back to Connecticut. And they said, "No, you don't have to. We were allowed to fly right into check. You can do that on ferry permit just as long as you're not carrying a passenger. So you just fly right up until you'd be in the check, you used up all your time." I can't remember now. On the military you could add 10 per cent if you had to. I don't remember now if you could do that on the FAA [Federal Aeronautics Administration], on the commercial business, though.

G: Do you think that Lyndon Johnson's position as a congressman enabled him to get the use of the aircraft from Sikorsky?

N: That was a thought we had.

G: He was on the Naval Appropriations Committee.

N: Well, we thought that. This was just Jim and myself talking about it and saying, "Well,

what would you do if you were the head of United Aircraft and somebody in his position asked you to use this machine? How could you refuse?"

G: Did you ever have any evidence--?

N: No. It was pretty well up the ladder. We were--Sikorsky at that time was probably the smallest division of United Aircraft and I'm sure that this is a decision that was made at United Aircraft, not at Sikorsky Aircraft. So we wondered but we never bothered--no one would tell us I imagine.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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